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TAM PRESS CONFERENCE

Below is a near verbatim transcript of the press conference by the joint United Nations, AU Technical Assessment Mission led by Commissioner Said Djinnit of the Peace and Security Council of the AU and the United Nations Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Jean-Marie Guehenno, on 22nd June, 2006 at UNMIS headquarters in Khartoum.

Spokesperson Radhia: Welcome to this press briefing hosting Mr. Said Djinnit, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security and Mr. Jean-Marie Guehenno the Undersecretary-General for peacekeeping operations at the UN.

You are aware that they were on a mission in Sudan on the Darfur issue. Without further ado, I would like to give the floor first of all to Mr. Said Djinnit and then Mr. Jean-Marie Guehenno.

So Mr. Said Djinnit, the floor is yours.

Commissioner Djinnit: Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have just concluded our visit to Khartoum and Darfur as part of the joint UN, African Union assessment mission as a follow up to the visit of Lakhdar Brahimi and Mr. Annabi and pursuit to the decisions of our respective policy organs – the UN Security Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union.

You are aware of the Terms of Reference of the mission. We had the first round of consultations in Khartoum when we arrived where we met a series of high ranking government officials and others, NGOs, civil society groups, international community and we proceeded to Darfur and we organized ourselves in a number of groups: four technical teams which visited and had extensive visits to the Darfur regions comprising a number of areas from the security, military, human rights, humanitarian, civil affairs – and all that is required for an assessment at the technical level - and there was a major group led by Mr. Guehenno and myself at the political level and visited el-Fasher, Nyala and Geneina where we met, again, with various groups, government officials, civil society groups, IDP representatives,

human rights, NGOs, tribal and community leaders and of course we had been extensively briefed by the African Union mission on the ground and the UNMIS officials at all levels. We visited N'Djamena where we had discussions with President Debe as well as with other officials, NGOs and other stakeholders there. Upon our return, we had a number of discussions and meetings with senior officials within the government – initially with a meeting co-chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Interior and attended by all other senior officials from government as well as with other ministers, defence, the Minister at Cabinet and of course we have been received by President Bashir.

During all our discussions, we exchanged our views with the officials here in Khartoum and shared our impressions on the evolving situation in Darfur particularly and especially in light of the signing of the DPA that was signed by the Government of Sudan and the Minni Minnawi group but not signed unfortunately by two other groups while other factions from these groups who have not signed have joined the DPA but others also are joining the non-DPA camp.

We have been able to share our impressions on the political dimensions there in the light of those opposed to the DPA and those who are signed the DPA particularly the concerns within the IDP camps and civil society groups and on the concern of these communities with respect to protection and some of their demands in terms of compensation. We have also listened to government officials who informed us of the efforts being made to implement the DPA to improve the situation and we also shared our impression on the security situation also in some areas where the situation has improved but there are areas where the situation has not improved with inter-factional fighting and also with the situation on the humanitarian ground.

We of course informed our interlocutors of the plans of our respective organisations in terms of their continued role in Darfur, as far as the African Union is concerned, and our plans to enhance AMIS as required by the Peace and Security Council and as contained in the first Terms of Reference that the first aspect of our mission is the strengthening of AMIS. And we informed our interlocutors about the need for enhancing significantly the troop level, the tasks, the mandate of the AMIS to be able to perform effectively and the need for considerable support and of course we agreed together with our colleagues that there is a need, during the transition for a more robust mandate by the African mission but also a more robust support by the United Nations to the African Mission in Sudan at all levels so that it can enhance its effectiveness.

My colleague Mr. Guehenno has briefed our interlocutors about the plans of the United Nations in terms of a future role for a peacekeeping operation in Darfur and we, of course, discussed the issue of the transition and I, on my side, seized the opportunity to explain the circumstances in which the African Union had to take that position for a transition and my colleague Guehenno has made a lot of effort to try to alleviate and to at least provide some explanations but Mr. Guehenno will say himself in terms of the involvement and the future of a peacekeeping operation in Darfur if it is accepted by the government of Sudan and the other stakeholders. And of course you are aware of the position of the government of Sudan with respect to the transition which has been reiterated by the officials and particularly the President [*of Sudan*] to the delegation.

USG Guehenno: I have little to add to what Commissioner Said Djinnit just said.

These were very intensive two weeks of engagement. I think we met hundreds of interlocutors; we had hundreds of meetings, if one looks at all the sub-teams deployed. So the amount of knowledge and information that was gathered on the situation in Darfur, I think, is quite substantial and should help pave the way for the future.

It is on the basis of all this information that was gathered that we drew the conclusions that were presented to you by Said Djinnit.

Essentially, based on the conviction that the situation that exists in Darfur today provides a window of opportunity, the achievement of the Darfur Peace Agreement has raised hope; has created hope. As we were reminded by Mr. Said Djinnit, there has been some improvement in some areas while at the same time in other areas there has been a deterioration. A lot will depend on what happens in the next 6 to 12 months.

It is quite possible that this window might close if there is not the right support, the right engagement by the international community.

And it is on that basis that we came to the government of Sudan with very flexible and, I think, very creative ideas. The notion that United Nations actually deploying support elements, support staff to strengthen AMIS would be something that will be unprecedented in the way we propose to do it.

The proposals for the United Nations peace operation are also very innovative, very flexible, because we see the main challenge of the situation in Darfur where we were told repeatedly by representatives of IDPs representing hundreds and thousands of people that they wanted the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation. So we did our best to develop plans that would respond to the plans of all. And in Darfur, we engaged with all interlocutors, tribal leaders as well as representatives of signatories and representatives of non-signatories of the agreement [*the Darfur Peace Agreement*] to make sure that we were really reaching out to everybody with the same message which is that the United Nations doesn't take sides; the United Nations only has one side which is the side of peace. And that if there was a deployment in Darfur it would not be a deployment siding with anybody but a deployment to consolidate the achievement of the DPA.

These are the ideas that we presented to the authorities in the government of Sudan and the response we had was not the one that we would have liked to hear.

We strongly believe that the plight of the people of Darfur is such, and we saw it with our own eyes, that we can not give up and that it is essential to continue to engage.

I could see from my discussions how many misunderstandings there are on the nature of a United Nations peacekeeping operation. I had to dispel such misunderstanding stressing that the United Nations has no agenda but the agenda of the UN Charter and the peace and stability of Darfur and Sudan as a whole. I had to clarify that the UN is not in the business of colonizing any country but has actually helped, in its history, to overcome colonialism and when I look at the composition of our troops – and today around the world we have more than 70,000 troops – and if I include the civilian personnel, we are close to a 100,000 people deployed around the world. When I look at the men and women who staff those missions, I must say that the vast majority of them come from developing nations; nations that have often had to overcome themselves colonialism.

The spirit in which the United Nations works is a spirit of help; is really dedication to peace and nothing else. Actually, if one was selfishly looking at the burden of peacekeeping, one would rather not have to address so many challenges because they are many and they are heavy.

When one sees again the situation in Darfur, there is a sense of solidarity. The African Union has done a lot and is doing a lot. It has been a huge challenge for the African Union and it could be quite a huge challenge for the United Nations. Our position was that it was really the responsibility of the rest of the world to come and support and show solidarity to the African Union hence the proposal for a United Nations peacekeeping operation which would not mean that the world replaces Africa. The African states are key members of the United Nations – actually they are the biggest regional group in the United Nations. It means the rest of the world coming in support of the African Union; in support of Africa, as we do actually in Sudan when we deployed in southern Sudan, as we did in other countries in Africa where we worked very closely with the African Union and continue to work very closely. I just have to think of the common achievement that we had in Burundi and the work we are doing today in Cote d'Ivoire.

I think I will stop there because you probably would have many questions for both of us.

Spokesperson Radhia: Thank you, USG Guehenno; thank you Mr. Said Djinnit.

The floor will be open for questions. Please bear in mind that this press conference has a time limit. I think that we have to adjourn this press conference at 7 in the evening so please be as straight to the point as you can with your questions.

Q & A

Q: Through the discussions of the Technical Assessment Mission, have you clearly reach agreement that there is need to deploy international troops to Darfur?

USG Guehenno: I think we clearly so that there is a precarious situation in Darfur. As I said, there is a window of opportunity that has opened. One must not waste time, hence the need to have rapid strengthening of AMIS; hence the need to prepare for a transition to a United Nations operation because of the scope of the tasks envisaged in Darfur. That is what our team were working on.

Obviously, the decision rests with the African Union Peace and Security Council and the African Union summit, with the United Nations Security Council and, obviously, with the Government of National Unity because a peacekeeping operation can work only if it has the full cooperation of the government.

We have looked at the technical requirements. The political decisions are with the entities that I mentioned.

Q: There is a need for United Nations forces to be deployed there, as we have all been informed. The government is reluctant and there is suffering going on. I just want to know when the forces are going to be deployed there and how long do the people have to suffer until the United Nations and the government come to an agreement?

I have heard today that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Africa has said that the Sudan is complaining because the United Nations has consulted with everybody in Darfur except Khartoum and that is what has made Khartoum angry – because they have not been consulted on this right from the start and were left until the last moment and that seems to be the thing that is hindering the acceptance of the government of Sudan. I want your reactions to that.

USG Guehenno: I think it is rare either for Commissioner Djinnit or for myself to be away from our headquarters for such long periods of time. We have had extensive consultations in Darfur as well as in Khartoum.

I was bit disappointed to hear public announcements even before we had started the last round of discussion where we would present our detailed proposals.

I think is no reason not to continue engagement. I think it is essential to continue that engagement; it is essential to build trust and obviously there were lots of misunderstandings so we need to continue to explain what we are doing; what we could do to provide help.

I was pleased to see that the Government of Sudan recognizes the great contribution made by the United Nations in the humanitarian dimension in Darfur and the huge effort that is being undertaken. I think on the peacekeeping side it is essential that we continue that engagement but certainly that engagement has been very intensive.

And in Darfur, we met of course with the three *Walis* [*state governors*] of Darfur, we met with directors of police, we met with a number of senior tribal leaders who had been identified by the authorities to make sure that we certainly would have all viewpoints.

Commissioner Djinnit: I just want to add that really we spent a considerable time to try to understand the situation on the ground and to see what our respective organizations can do to help. I think the core position of the United Nations and the African Union has been that these organisations are for peace working with the Sudanese parties.

We have done considerable work in terms of explaining, clearing misunderstandings – and I must admit that my colleague Guehenno has done a lot of work towards that and there is clearly more work to be done both in terms of clearing misunderstandings and explaining and, as you know, this mission is part of a process and that process continues so that a final decision is taken as far as the deployment of a peacekeeping operation is concerned. That will depend on the decision of the Government of Sudan and the other stakeholders.

Q: What is your reaction to the statement of Bashir last Monday that he would not allow United Nations troops to deploy to Darfur considering it to be a kind of re-colonization? What is the reaction of the representatives of the international community to this particular statement which for us in the media field is called a “major statement”?

Do you think there is hope that one day the government of Sudan will allow United Nations troops to deploy to Darfur? If yes or no, how do you justify your answer?

USG Guehenno: We heard that statement and we had a long and I would say cordial discussion with the President. We did our best to dispel any misunderstanding explaining exactly what United Nations peacekeeping is about. I hope that these explanations would have been convincing but it is not for me to answer that question.

I can only repeat that the United Nations is an organization of states which works with member-states on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter. So our role, really, is to engage states to see how we can jointly make an effort to support the people.

The immense tragedy of Darfur remains a challenge to, I think, all efforts and should bring us together rather than polarize us.

I know that the government of Sudan, the United Nations, and the African Union can only have one common goal, one common concern which is to put an end to a conflict that has displaced millions of people; that has killed hundreds of thousand and has come on top of huge poverty.

That is our common goal; that is what we have to work to resolve. Whether there would be a United Nations peacekeeping operation some day, that is a question I can not answer. I think we need to keep engaging because I don't think we can be satisfied with the situation in Darfur.

Q: President Bashir, or his government rather, has decided that there will be no role for the United Nations in Darfur be it under a Chapter VII or Chapter VI mandate or any other chapter for that matter. The DPA too does not provide for any role for the United Nations in Darfur unlike the CPA. The President [*Bashir*] has also proposed a 16,00-strong Sudanese force composed of the SAF and the SPLA to carry out the role of peacekeeping in Darfur under a United Nations monitoring. What are your views on that?

USG Guehenno: I am not aware that I was asked to supervise 16,000 troops provided by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) so I can not comment on something that I was not asked.

Q: You said that you discussed with the some ministers to dispel misunderstandings concerning the deployment. Are these ministers concerned about the nature or the mandate or – what are their concerns?

Commissioner Djinnit: I think that the position that the government has presented to us at the highest level was that the government of Sudan is opposed to any transition from the African Union to the United Nations and would rather prefer that the United Nations provide support for the strengthening of AMIS – that is their position.

In the course of discussions, a number of elements have been raised including the Chapter VII reference in the Security Council decision and other aspects that the position is that expressed by the officials is opposition to the principle of a transition.

Q: The African Union was highly praised by the government and yesterday African Union Commissioner Konare held a series of meetings in South and North Darfur in which local officials highly praised the role the African Union has played in that area. Why doesn't the African Union continue the job in Darfur in the case of availability of support and thus confine the United Nations role to humanitarian work in the [IDP] camps? The question is to Mr. Said Djinnit.

Commissioner Djinnit: I think you have provided in your question part of the answer. You said, "Provided there is support". The key question is the support which is required for the mission.

You know that peacekeeping operations are a very complex exercise and our colleagues from the United Nations are finding it extremely difficult as Mr. Guehenno was talking about their experiences at the United Nations. This is the first ever peacekeeping operation for the African Union. It undertook it because of its commitment and also partly because of the belief in peace in the world.

You said that the whole thing will depend on the kind of support that the African Union will get but also from the capacity the African Union can mobilise from within to be able to run such a large-scale peacekeeping operation. At the end of the day this is a decision the African Union leaders – and we have a meeting of the Peace and Security Council and the summit – to take note of the position of the government of Sudan. There will be definitely some consultations. They will assess the situation in the light of what the African Union can do, what is the most likely support the African Union can get and it is for the leaders to take the right decisions.

Q: In light of the differences in positions between the government and the United Nations and maybe the African Union, on the issue of the transition, everybody is wondering what the scenario will be like in Darfur in the next six months. As an assessment mission, you visited the region and saw the situation on the ground. What is your outlook on the possible scenario the region will witness in the next six months?

USG Guehenno: This is a very difficult question obviously because the more we looked at the situation in Darfur in depth, the more complex it appears.

What I would say in answer to your question is that the risk of fragmentation, of a new cycle of violence, especially after the rainy season is quite real. Whether that risk would materialise or not – of course I would not be very arrogant to assert an exact scenario - I think the risk is very real. In terms of crude planning, when there is a risk of major violence or of another cycle of violence for people who have already suffered immensely, everything must be done to avoid that risk.

Commissioner Djinnit: If I may add something, just to say that our hope has always been that things would improve and the situation would stabilize. That was the hope of the African Union since the beginning of its engagement and we believe that the DPA is indeed providing the opportunity for that peace but, of course, for every opportunity there are also challenges. And the challenges are there and they should not be underestimated. Thus the need for the African Union to take all appropriate steps to strengthen its presence and that is the reason for other considerations in terms of planning ahead for a future peacekeeping operation.

Q: On mentioning the DPA, does the African Union still see the DPA is a step towards the realisation of a true peace in Darfur? There are reports that even Minni Minnawi can not move beyond the confines of the African Union base.

Commissioner Djinnit: I think it is obvious that from the perspective of the African Union, the African Union with the support of the United Nations and all the partners, have been working for almost two years seeking for that agreement and now that we have that agreement, we believe that this is the framework for a lasting peace for Darfur. We regret that two rebel groups have not been able to join in the process. We have been talking earlier about the challenges before us but the African Union still believes that it gives a golden opportunity for bringing peace and is a window of opportunity for peace and we are committed to work with the parties and all those who are joining the DPA – as you know that there are some groups from the non-signatory factions have joined the DPA – through signing a Declaration of Commitment to the DPA. We are willing to work with them for the implementation of the DPA.

You have referred to the fact that Mr. Minni Minnawi is not moving from his base. He has been actually the chairman of the commission. When we went to see him he was not in el-Fasher, he was somewhere else. Of course I can not respond for Mr. Minni Minnawi but Mr. Minni Minnawi is expected to – at some point at an appropriate time; his advance team is already here in Khartoum for the implementation – and he is expected at some point to join the implementation team to provide the leadership for the implementation of the DPA.

Q: Should the government continue to reject a transition, what will the United Nations do? Will it resort to a Chapter VII deployment?

USG Guehenno: I think this Chapter VII has taken a sort of symbolic resonance that really has to be brought to reality. There is not one United Nations peacekeeping operation in Africa that is deployed without the consent of the host country. Many of those peacekeeping operations actually have Chapter VII provisions. I would mention actually the mission currently deployed in southern Sudan. The protection of civilians is under Chapter VII. So there are huge misunderstandings of what this Chapter VII really means.

So long as the government of Sudan is not prepared to accept a peacekeeping operation in Sudan, there is] no peacekeeping operation in Sudan – just as simple as that.

So let us try not to go into polemics but rather to see how we can work together to bring an end to the suffering of the people of Darfur. If we don't do that, I think history will be very hard on those who would not have done everything to bring an end to that suffering.

Commissioner Djinnit: I just want to add something. I am pleased to say that I am in a better position to address the issue because in the African Union we have no Chapter VI and Chapter II.

Q: The joint technical assessment mission carried out visits to Darfur and saw the situation on the ground. What is its impression in light of the popular rejection to the deployment of United Nations troops? And should this rejection continue, will the issue of bringing in United Nations troops be a goal in itself regardless of its repercussions on, say the security situation, in light of the Al-Qaeda threats? We have also learnt that Al-Qaeda intends to open

a battlefield in Darfur. So should this rejection continue, would United Nations forces come in by force?

Commissioner Djinnit: As far as I am concerned, I think both Mr. Guehenno and I have been conveying the same message that the only and sole role and the reason d'être of the African Union and the United Nations is to work for peace in Sudan.

USG Guehenno: I endorse every word Mr. Djinnit has said. We are not there to add to conflict; we are there for peace, to work with the people of goodwill and the government of Sudan for peace.

Spokesperson Radhia; And I think the issue of Chapter VII has been answered to by USG Guehenno as well as Commissioner Djinnit.

Thank you very much and I thank our hosts and the interpreters and we will see you at the next opportunity.

Thank you very much.