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(By Public Information Office)

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IN THE NEWS TODAY:➤ **UN/ Agencies**

- Darfur malnutrition worsens despite aid - UN report (ST)
- NEWS FEATURE: UN: Sudan obstructs peace force deployment to Darfur (New York dpa)

➤ **GoNU (CPA, DPA, ESPA)**

- Al Bashir gives important speech Monday (AlRai AlAam)
- Sudan swears in new cabinet as crisis ends (Reuters)
- South Sudanese rejoin national government (AFP)
- Kiir urges stopping escalation at north-south border (AlSahafa)
- Three movements from eastern Sudan join SPLM (AlSahafa)
- Umma Party calls for independent investigation on Kordofan events (AlAyam)
- Miseriya gather in Al-Meram fearing attack by SPLA (AlIntibaha)
- Armed group destroys Kordofan-Bahr Al-Ghazal bridge (AlSudani)
- Republican decrees appointing presidential advisors, ministers and state ministers in the Government of National Unity issued (SUNA)
- Ministers of SPLM to take oath of office Thursday (SUNA)
- Chad sentences French Zoe's Ark to hard labour (ST)
- SBA Sends Ten Senior Advocates to Defend S. Abducted Children in N'djamena (SMC)
- N Darfur State Commits to Rehabilitate Service Facilities to Receive IDPS (SMC)
- Konare says political talks only will bring peace to Darfur (Pana Press)
- SPLM Amum is appointed as Sudan's cabinet affairs minister (ST)

- SPLM ministerial reshuffle, a step towards active role in Sudan cabinet (ST)
- Akol Did Not Observe SPLM Policies at Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Dr Mansour (SMC)
- Political and Ministry leadership of Hybrid Troops Remain African/Gen martin (SMC)

➤ **GoSS**

- Aleu calls for judicial probe on Garang's death (Sudan Vision)

➤ **Darfur**

- Chad sentences French Zoe's Ark to hard labour (ST)
- SBA Sends Ten Senior Advocates to Defend S. Abducted Children in N'djamena (SMC)
- N Darfur State Commits to Rehabilitate Service Facilities to Receive IDPS (SMC)
- Konare says political talks only will bring peace to Darfur (Pana Press)

Highlights

UN/ Agencies

Darfur malnutrition worsens despite aid - UN report (ST)

By Jeffrey Gettleman, December 27, 2007 (NAIROBI, Kenya) — Child malnutrition rates have increased sharply in Darfur, even though it is home to the world's largest aid operation, according to a new United Nations report.

The report showed that 16.1 percent of children affected by the conflict in Darfur, a vast, turbulent region in western Sudan, are acutely malnourished, compared with 12.9 percent last year. For the first time since 2004, the malnutrition rate, a gauge of the population's overall distress, has crossed what United Nations officials consider to be the emergency threshold.

“This is a big deal,” said Jean Rigal, the head of a branch of Doctors Without Borders in Sudan. “The system is not working as expected.”

Dr. Rigal said he was not exactly sure why child malnutrition rates were rising. But he cited more insecurity, restricted access for relief workers and a fresh round of displacements because of tribal fighting.

“There are many hypotheses,” he said.

“The United Nations has been sounding the alarm about the deterioration of the nutritional situation in Darfur for months,” said Stephanie Bunker, a spokeswoman for the United Nations’ humanitarian operations.

She said that attacks on aid workers were up 150 percent and that “civilians continue to be displaced as a result of attacks from all sides, with almost 290,000 displaced in Darfur this year alone. Many camps for the displaced can no longer absorb new arrivals and tensions are rising.”

Sudanese officials said the United Nations was exaggerating the problems, and that life in Darfur had actually gotten better recently.

(New York Times)

NEWS FEATURE: UN: Sudan obstructs peace force deployment to Darfur

(New York dpa), JT Nguyen dpa, Source: Dpa English Date: December 26, 2007

New York (dpa) _ On the eve of taking over difficult duties in **Darfur**, the United Nations said that Khartoum was obstructing the deployment of a UN-African Union joint peacekeeping force that would contribute to peace in **Sudan's** troubled region. The UN-African Union Mission in **Darfur**, known by its acronym UNAMID, will take over Monday from an African force to try its utmost to protect civilians, facilitate humanitarian aid operations and create an environment for peace to take root.

But on its first day at work, the joint force will have just over 9,000 military personnel instead of the authorized strength of 20,000 troops, more than 6,000 police and an additional significant civilian component.

Once fully deployed, which will take months, UNAMID will be the largest peacekeeping operation in the world.

The UN is not alone in blaming the **Sudanese** government for setting up the hybrid force to fail in **Darfur**. A group of 35 non-governmental organizations had warned that Khartoum was actively obstructing the deployment of the force.

But the UN has shown impatience in dealing with Khartoum. It said the UN Security Council received an agreement as far back as June from **Sudanese** President Omar al-Bashir to accept UNAMID "without preconditions."

"And yet the deployment of UNAMID is still facing government obstruction with respect to the force composition and bureaucratic impediments imposed by the **Sudanese** authorities," the UN said in a background document.

It said the impediments threatened the deployment and detract the hybrid force from its "potential effectiveness."

"The persistence of these impediments cannot be attributed to a lack of consultation," the document said.

The UN has criticized Khartoum for being selective in accepting nationalities of military personnel and deciding which countries should provide the much-needed logistical and transport facilities.

Khartoum had given its preference to African personnel only but has had to accept non-African forces. It has rejected troops from Nepal, Nordic engineers and an infantry battalion from Thailand.

GoNU (CPA, DPA, ESPA)

Al Bashir gives important speech Monday (AlRai AlAam)

President al Bashir will give an important speech on Monday at the Green Square in Khartoum. Al Bashir will be addressing the celebration of the 52nd Anniversary of the Sudan Independence Day.

Sudan swears in new cabinet as crisis ends

Thu Dec 27, 2007 6:45am EST, By Opheera McDoom, KHARTOUM (Reuters) - Sixteen ministers from Sudan's former southern rebels took the oath of office before President Omar Hassan al-Bashir on Thursday, rejoining the national government and formally ending a crippling political crisis.

The former southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) walked out of the coalition government in October complaining its northern partners did not want to implement the 2005 peace deal which ended Sudan's north-south civil war -- Africa's longest.

"In the coming period they will discuss the implementation of what has been decided and that includes implementation of the peace deal and rebuilding side by side all the war-torn areas," presidential spokesman Mahjoub Fadul told reporters after the ceremony.

"This signals the end of the crisis between the partners."

The ministers immediately began their first cabinet meeting.

The new ministers included Deng Alor who was appointed foreign minister replacing Lam Akol. Alor is from the oil-rich and still disputed Abyei region.

Sudanese newspapers had speculated for weeks over Akol's status, with many saying he had been too close to the northern National Congress Party, alienating some fellow SPLM members.

SPLM Deputy Secretary-General Yasir Arman, a northerner, was kept out of the new government. Attempts to have him appointed presidential advisor had been one of the sticking points between the sides, with some NCP members saying he was a hardliner.

SPLM officials said Arman excused himself from the post, preferring to focus on his parliamentary position.

The SPLM and NCP agreed on most outstanding issues except the status of the Abyei region. Northern troops are to withdraw from south Sudan and its oil fields by the end of the year and the census will begin in April with full funding approved.

"The presidency will deal with the Abyei issue ... working with the commission of Abyei and the border commission," Fadul added.

Sudan's north-south war claimed 2 million lives and drove more than 4 million from their homes. But difficulties implementing the agreement to end the war and continued tensions have been overshadowed by international attention on a newer conflict in Sudan's western Darfur region.

South Sudanese rejoin national government

Agence France-Presse, 27 December 2007, Former south Sudanese rebels rejoined the national government on Thursday, two months after walking out because of disputes over the implementation of a peace deal that ended two decades of war.

The move came after Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir signed decrees authorising a reshuffle of cabinet posts to members of the former rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement, an official said.

Sixteen posts go to the SPLM -- seven ministers and six ministers of state and three presidential advisers who are due to be sworn in on Thursday.

The SPLM led by First Vice President Salva Kiir quit the cabinet in October, complaining that the north was failing to implement the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Africa's longest-running civil war.

Relations between Khartoum and the south had been increasingly unstable and a first round of talks aimed at resolving the crisis broke down on November 11. But the two sides announced on December 12 that an agreement had been reached that would pave the way for the return of the southerners to the cabinet.

It provides for a six-year transition period in which the south would enjoy regional autonomy and participate in a national unity government ahead of a 2011 referendum on the region's future status.

Among the new appointments is Deng Alor who replaces Lam Akol as foreign minister.

SPLM secretary general Pagan Amum will become minister of state for presidential affairs, while Mansur Khaleed, a long-time confidant of Kiir's predecessor John Garang who died in a 2005 helicopter crash, will become presidential adviser.

Despite the return to government by the south, agreement remains to be reached on the status of the oil-rich region of Abiye, which is claimed by both north and south.

Dirdiri Mohammed Ahmed, a member of Beshir's National Congress Party, said earlier this month that Abiye "is a complicated question whose resolution requires a lot of efforts and we hope that it will be resolved by December 31 (or) that there will be an agreement on how to resolve it."

A statement from Kiir's office said that he would travel to Khartoum "soon," but did not confirm when the swearing in ceremony would take place.

In a sign of the fragility of the peace holding Sudan together, Kiir confirmed that forces loyal to Khartoum had been involved in fighting in southern Sudan in the past few days but said the troops "were acting under local commanders only."

The statement quoted him as saying that the fighting was "not part of any wider mobilisation and the situation is now under control."

The United Nations had expressed concern that Sudan's political crisis might lead to a resumption of the north-south fighting in which more than 1.5 million people died.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said earlier this month that full implementation of the CPA was "fundamental for lasting peace and stability in Sudan and the region."

Kiir urges stopping escalation at north-south border (AlSahafa)

The FVP and GoSS President Salva Kiir urged stopping military escalation at the areas of ethnic interaction in the South Kordofan and Northern Bahr Al-Ghazal States. He called for avoiding any act that might lead to deterioration in the security situation in the area.

The SPLM Secretary General, Pagan Amum, told SUNA that the senior leadership of the State has instructed the SAF and the SPLA to avoid acts that may contribute to deteriorating the security situation in the area [which witnessed clashes between the SPLA and the Miseriya].

Three movements from eastern Sudan join SPLM (AlSahafa)

It has been agreed in principle that three eastern Sudan movements (Beja Congress for Reform and Development, the Eastern Front breakaway groups and the demobilized military personnel of the Beja Congress) will merge with the SPLM. This agreement was reached after talks which continued for three weeks in Juba between the SPLM and representatives of the three movements.

The President of the Beja Congress for Reform and Development, Osman Musa Bawnin, told Miraya FM that they will establish the Beja Congress in the SPLM.

Umma Party calls for independent investigation on Kordofan events (AlAyam)

The opposition Umma Party has called for establishing an independent fact-finding committee to investigate on the recent events (between SPLA and Miseriya) in South Kordofan.

Miseriya gather in Al-Meram fearing attack by SPLA (AlIntibaha)

The Miseriya tribe is massing its tribesmen in Al-Meram area in preparation for possible attacks by the SPLA. The situation in the area is now quiet but remains tense. The Miseriya say that the SPLA troops are still north of 1956 borders between the north and south.

Armed group destroys Kordofan-Bahr Al-Ghazal bridge (AlSudani)

An armed group has destroyed the bridge linking South Kordofan and Northern Bahr Al-Ghazal States. The destruction of the bridge has yesterday hindered movements between the two States. Sources told AlSudani that there are 1500 Miseriya on horses in Al-Meram area though the situation has become quiet. According to these sources the lack of administrative institutions in the Localities (Counties) of South Kordofan State has impacted the security situation in the area. Authorities in South Kordofan State have not intervened to contain the situation and defuse tensions.

Meanwhile, the Miseriya leader al Hiraika Izzeldin said preparations for a visit to the area by a joint NCP-SPLM delegation of MPs have been completed.

Republican decrees appointing presidential advisors, ministers and state ministers in the Government of National Unity issued (SUNA)

Khartoum, Dec. 26 (SUNA) - President of the Republic Field Marshal Omer Al-Bashir issued Wednesday republican decrees appointing presidential advisors, ministers and state ministers in the Government of National Unity. The republican decrees appointed Dr. Mansour Khalid, William Ajal Deng and Andrew Makour as Presidential Advisors. According to the decrees Pagan Amom is appointed as Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Deng Alor as Minister of Foreign Affairs, James Kok Rio, as Minister of Foreign Trade, Philip Thon Lik as Minister of Transport, Roads and Bridges, Kosti Manibi as Minister of Investment, Dr. Haroun Ron Lual as Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Prof. George Boreng Niyami as Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The republican decrees also appointed Lual Ashoil Lual as State Minister at the Presidency, Abbas Gumaa Obeidallah as State Minister at the Ministry of Interior, Wik Mamir Kuwal as State Minister at the Ministry of Justice, Abosh Ajok Ako as State Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Paul Marial Dot as State Minister at the Ministry of Industry and Ismail Khamis Galab as State Minister at the Ministry of Animal and Fish Resources. BT/BT

Ministers of SPLM to take oath of office Thursday (SUNA)

Khartoum, Dec. 26 (SUNA) - The ministers of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) are to take oath of office before President of the Republic Field

Marshal Omer Al-Bashir in the Republican Palace Thursday and take part in the session which is to be held by the Council of Ministers. The President of the Republic issued Wednesday republican decrees appointing three presidential advisers, seven ministers and six state ministers from the SPLM in the Government of National Unity. BT/BT

SPLM Amum is appointed as Sudan's cabinet affairs minister (ST)

December 26, 2007 (KHARTOUM) — Sudan's President has named today seven SPLM ministers ending a two-month boycott. The SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum is appointed as cabinet affairs minister while the former FM Akol is out of the new SPLM team.

In a series of presidential decrees issued today Sudanese president appointed, the SPLM Secretary General as minister of the cabinet affairs, while Deng Alor is appointed as foreign minister.

However, the former foreign minister Lam Akol, who had been appointed as cabinet affairs minister on 17 October, is excluded from the today appointed ministers confirming his disgrace within the SPLM.

Also, Telar Ring Deng and Aleu Ayieny Aleu, are not among the appointed officials. Both were sacked from the membership of the SPLM's political bureau and the national assembly as well as the SPLM's membership in general as of 1 December.

The Full list of SPLM appointed ministers

A) Presidential Advisors:

- ▶ Mansour Khalid
- ▶ Andraw Makro
- ▶ William Ajack Deng

B) Ministers:

- ▶ Pagan Amum, Minister of Cabinet Affairs
- ▶ Deng Alor, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- ▶ James Kock Rona, Minister of Foreign Trade
- ▶ Philip Thon, Minister of Roads and transport
- ▶ Kosta Manibi, Minister of investment
- ▶ Harun Run Lual, Minister of Humanitarian Affairs
- ▶ George Bornek, Minister of Higher Education

C) State Ministers:

- ▶ Lual Ashwel Lual, minister of state at the presidency
- ▶ Abbas Juma Aboeidallah, Mnister of state at the Ministry of Interior.
- ▶ Week Mamyр Kwal, Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice.
- ▶ Aboch Kwojock Akwo, Minister of state at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
- ▶ Bol Mirial Dok, Minister of state at the Ministry of Industry
- ▶ Ismail Khamis Jallab, Minister of state at the Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries.

(ST)

SPLM ministerial reshuffle, a step towards active role in Sudan cabinet (ST)

December 26, 2007 (KHARTOUM) — With the ministerial reshuffle announced today, the SPLM appears gathering forces and coming with new agenda to prepare for the electoral battle of 2009.

It is expected that the new ministers will be sworn in by President Omer al-Bashir and First Vice President and Chairman of the SPLM Salva Kiir Mayardit in the Presidential Palace in Khartoum on Thursday.

The exclusion of Lam Akol, the former foreign minister, suggests that the SPLM wants to distance its self from people who were viewed as too close to the National Congress Party (NCP).

Also, the entry of Pagan Amum in the government at a pivotal ministry indicates that he will be the driving force behind the SPLM team in the government and to align their policies with that of the party.

The participation of the SPLM during the last two years in the federal government has been marred by indiscipline from its own ministers such as the outgoing foreign minister Lam Akol who was accused of bypassing his party's decisions. Also, the former state minister at the presidency Telar Deng was reportedly acting without consulting with the SPLM.

However Pagan, who will maintain his position as SPLM's Secretary General, is likely to need more aides to run the party. Sources suggest that he may restructure the SPLM in order to have several deputies. The former deputy secretary general, Abdel-Aziz El-Helou appears to be the ideal candidate for the post. El-Helou is now in Kenya after spending two years in the USA.

THE MISSION OF THE NEW SPLM MINISTERS:

The new SPLM team has to work to ensure the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and particularly the problem files such as Abyei.

James Wani, the speaker of the southern Sudan parliament, told the Sudan TV yesterday that the row over Abyei should not prevent the SLM from going ahead in the peace implementation. He stressed that through the dialogue people can find a solution for this issue.

There is a political objective: the SPLM has to set foot in the political arena in the perspective of the general elections.

During the past two years the SPLM, dedicated much of its time to quarrel with the NCP over the oil shares, troops redeployment and border demarcation. Moreover there have been widespread allegations of corruption within southern Sudan administration. All these issues altered the image of the SPLM as a viable alternative for political change in Sudan.

Also, one of the tasks of the party is to rally support to the SPLM in the Blue Nile and the southern Kordofan. The natives of these regions feel they have been abandoned by

their allies in southern Sudan who are waiting for the 2009 referendum on self-determination.

(ST)

Akol Did Not Observe SPLM Policies at Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Dr Mansour

(SMC), Members of SPLM political office and presidential advisor Dr Mansour Khalid said President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir did not oppose his nomination for ministry of foreign affair portfolio. He said he was nominated previously by late Dr. John Garang to the position. However he said he had rejected the offer on the ground that he did not want to hold such a position he had it something 25 years ago. The presidential advisor however noted that former minister of foreign affairs Dr. Lam Akol was distances from the positions because had not observed SPLM policies particularly in Darfur. He explained that SPLM consider Darfur rebels as an opposition has legitimate rights while the ministry of foreign affairs under Akol considered them terrorists' movements.

Political and Ministry leadership of Hybrid Troops Remain African/Gen martin

(SMC), Wednesday 26 December 2007, Hybrid troops for Darfur commander Lt. General Martin Luther Goy announces about 18 African garrison are expected to join Darfur peacekeepers during the transition of AU forces to UNAMID on 31st of December 2007.

He said the arrival of the forces is pound to government approval first. He said the nature of the mission will remain an African at political and military leadership level he explained that antiparticle agreement was reached between AU, UN and the government for deploying two garrisons form Egypt and Ethiopia in the period from January- February.

GoSS

Aleu calls for judicial probe on Garang's death (Sudan Vision)

By: Staff Writer, Sudan Vision yesterday received a document from SPLM ex-member Aleu Ayieny Aleu stating that, according to Annex 13 in Article 5.4.1 of the Convention of International Civil Aviation, the investigation conducted on Garang's death was for the sole objective of preventing similar accidents rather than to apportion blame or liability as the Annex stipulates that:

"any judicial or administrative proceedings to apportion blame or liability should be separate from any investigation under the provisions of this Annex."

Aleu added that according to Annex 13, the investigation only raised questions that it will not answer, which, he said, is the more reason for constituting judicial proceedings.

He further pointed out the inconclusive results of the investigation, citing that violation of the crash site by non-experts before the arrival of the investigation team made it difficult to perform an on-site forensic investigation. Aleu also said the political urgency to separate bodies and hurry them for burial could not give accurate conclusions, in addition to several other factors that he cited in the document.

[Full text of the release from Aleu will be published in our Saturday issue.]

Darfur

Chad sentences French Zoe's Ark to hard labour (ST)

December 26, 2007 (N'DJAMENA) — Six French aid workers were sentenced to eight years of hard labour each after a court in Chad found them guilty on Wednesday of trying to kidnap 103 children from the African country.

France, while calling the verdict a "sovereign decision", said it would ask Chad to implement a 1976 bilateral judicial accord which would allow the convicted six to be transferred home to serve jail sentences in their own country.

The court in the capital N'Djamena handed down the sentence on the fourth day of the trial of the six members of the French humanitarian group Zoe's Ark. They were arrested in October for trying to fly the 103 children, aged one to 10, to Europe.

The court also ordered the accused to pay compensatory damages of 40 million CFA francs (44,000 pounds) for each of the 103 children involved in the case, totalling 4.12 billion CFA francs (\$9 million) in all.

After the sentence was read by the court president, the four men and two women were escorted from the courtroom among a jostling mob of journalists, their faces serious.

Defence lawyers and relatives of the six reacted with dismay to the sentence and called on France's government to work for a solution with Chad that would enable them to be returned home.

Chad's government had faced heavy popular pressure to punish the Zoe's Ark members with an exemplary sentence.

But there has been widespread expectation of a diplomatic deal between Paris and N'Djamena to send them back to France, either through the judicial accord or a pardon granted by Chadian President Idriss Deby. None of these options were immediately mentioned by the court in delivering the sentence.

French Foreign ministry spokeswoman Pascale Andreani said in Paris: "France, after obtaining the agreement of the members of Zoe's Ark and examining the

implementation of the judicial cooperation accord between France and Chad, in particular article 29, will ask the Chadian authorities for the transfer of the prisoners to France".

One of the six's defence lawyers, Gilbert Collard, criticised the sentence, saying there was no justice in Chad. "I hope the French government will move to quickly bring home our compatriots, who have been caught in a trap," he told reporters.

RESCUING "DARFUR ORPHANS"

Janine Lelouch, mother of Emilie Lelouch, one of the six convicted, told French television she also hoped the group could come home quickly, "because they can't stand it much longer."

"It's bad, it's very bad. They haven't done anything wrong, they're not criminals. I don't understand ... It's a masquerade ... I'm very worried about the future of my daughter," she said.

Since the trial opened on Friday, the six had persistently rejected the abduction and fraud charges against them.

They testified they believed the children were orphans from Sudan's war-torn Darfur region whom they intended to give to European families for fostering. They said international law justified the humanitarian operation.

"Our intention was to fetch orphans from Darfur," Zoe's Ark's leader, Eric Breteau, told the court.

Defence lawyers had accused the Chadian court of rushing through the trial under political pressure from Paris.

France is an ally of Deby and has a military contingent stationed in the landlocked former French colony.

French troops have been supporting Deby's forces against eastern rebels and will provide the bulk of a European Union peacekeeping force due to be deployed in east Chad in January.

Chad's government has said the six did not have permission to take the children out of the country.

Prosecutors said the group duped parents in eastern Chad into handing over their children with promises of schooling.

The French have blamed their local intermediaries for misleading them over the identity of the children, who Chadian and U.N. officials said were mostly not orphans and came from villages in Chad on its eastern border with Darfur.

(Reuters)

[SBA Sends Ten Senior Advocates to Defend S. Abducted Children in N'djamena](#)

(SMC), Wednesday 26 December 2007, Sudanese Bar Association (SBA) has sent a delegation from senior advocates to N'djamena capital of Chad. The delegation was sent for defending the case of Sudanese Children exposed to trafficking attempt committed by the French Ariek De Zoes at eastern Chad refugees camps. SBA dean Fathi Khalil noted that the delegation composed of ten advocates left to N'djamena by charter plane to defend the children case according to their relative's mandate. He said the counsel should request the court postpones trial until after the defensive counsel completes its arrangements. However, Khalil warns against any bad scenario such as releasing the suspects or transporting them to France. Khalil said the main charges against suspects must include slavery and trafficking.

N Darfur State Commits to Rehabilitate Service Facilities to Receive IDPS

(SMC), Wednesday 26 December 2007, Northern Darfur state has announced commitment to rehabilitate health and water facilities at Al Tina Locality so as to receive IDPS back to their original villages. Commissioner of the locality Adam Mina Nyal said the government of the state and the locality held intense meeting with dignitaries in the area in collaboration with AU to coordinate receiving IDPS who are willing to return. Meanwhile he said the state's government is currently studying means of replanting Al Tina area on scientific way and determining on desperate needs of IDPS besides rehabilitation of hospitals and water services.

Konare says political talks only will bring peace to Darfur (Pana Press)

Pana Press, Addis Ababa - 25/12/2007, African Union (AU) Commission Chairperson Alpha Omar Konare has urged the Sudanese authorities to facilitate the deployment of troops for the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and stressed the need for all people involved to find a political solution to the bloody conflict in the region.

Despite its limited financial, material and personnel limitations, the AU would never abandon the people of Darfur Region and Sudan in general until peace reigns throughout the country, Konare said Monday during a one-day visit to El Fasher, North Darfur.

Addressing the troops and civilian personnel of the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), Konare also called on rebel groups in Darfur to join the AU/UN-sponsored peace negotiations taking place in Sirte, Libya.

PANA quoted Konare as saying "Instead of blaming foreigners for being slow in fulfilling their pledges, Sudanese must realize that they have the first responsibility to stop violence in their country.

"They must stop committing wicked acts against their own people, violence against children and against women.

"Sudanese must stop unprovoked attacks against the soldiers of peace and against humanitarian personnel who have come to their help.

"Rebel movements should join the peace process, observe the ceasefire and respect it on the ground."

The AU chief executive had gone to El Fasher to bid farewell and pay tribute to AMIS personnel ahead of the formal transfer of the peace-keeping authority from AU force to the UNAMID 31 December, 2007.

Konare thanked AMIS for a job well done and said: "I wonder what would have happened in Darfur if the AU had not intervened?"

"I am proud to tell you that you have done whatever you have been able to do in order to make Africa be up to its commitment by engaging in the peace process in Sudan. You have done this job despite all the difficulties in which some of our people lost their lives.

"We will never forget about Haskanita. We will never allow another Haskanita. We will never allow attacks against civilians and violence against innocent children and women," he said, recalling the death of 10 peacekeepers 29 September, 2007 when Darfurian rebels attacked an AMIS camp at Haskanita, South Darfur.

Konare was optimistic that the UNAMID mission would take off without hitch and be accomplished in the interest of all Sudanese and the African continent.

AMIS has operated in the Darfur region since June 2004 when it was launched with a core staff of 60 military observers and a protection force of 310 troops.

Currently, it has grown to a 9,000-strong force of military, police and civilian personnel.

"It has never been easy for the AU to deploy such a force. It was the first experience ever for the AU in peace-keeping operation that involved the mobilization of a lot of resources, finance and personnel," Konare remarked.

Underlining the commitment of the AU to reach a solution to the conflict in Darfur, Konare said UNAMID would run on an annual budget of approximately US\$ 2 billion that could have been directed to social development if there were peace in the region.

He said security and stability on the Chadian/Sudanese border would be instrumental to achieving peace in Darfur.

"Reaching a peace agreement in Darfur is essential. Then everything will change. That's what we are looking forward to because there cannot be a military solution to this conflict," he said.

According to Konare, Sudanese people must commit themselves to ending violence and stop carrying arms.

Before returning to Addis Ababa, Konare held private discussions with Sudanese P resident Omar Al-Bashir in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital.