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Media Monitoring Report

United Nations Mission In Sudan/ Public Information Office

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Highlights

UNMIS celebrates International Day of Peace

Akhbar Al Yom reported that UNMIS, in collaboration with the University of Khartoum, celebrated the International Day of Peace yesterday. SRSG Ashraf Qazi read out the SG's message with its call to make human rights a living reality in the year of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to observe a global ceasefire on the day and to focus on development issues; and his appeal to all to post messages of peace in the UN website calling for prevention of wars and combating hunger and poverty.

University Vice Chancellor Prof. Mohamed Ahmed Ali Al-Shaik affirmed the University's support for peace operations, noting that the celebration confirms the significance of peace throughout the world and the need to complete the peace process in Sudan.

NCP warns SRSG not to exceed mandate

Akhir Lahza reported that the NCP has warned SRSG Qazi not to exceed his mandate, apparently in reaction to remarks by the SRSG that it might not be possible to elections on schedule due to the rainy season.

NCP official Dr. Qutbi Al-Mahdi said it was not within the SRSG's mandate to determine whether elections should or could be held on schedule. It was up to the Elections Commission to decide on election-related issues, he said.

Abyei administration members to be announced on Sunday

Al-Sahafa reports procedures for international arbitration on the Abyei borders will begin in October. The paper says the two parties will announce agreement on the fifth arbitrator, the judge of the panel, early next week.

The Abyei administration and Legislative Council will also be announced next Sunday to facilitate the return of IDPs. Reportedly, parties to the Abyei dispute have finalized nominations for administration and Council membership and will submit them prior to Sunday's announcement.

Sources said NCP's Al-Dirdiri Mohamed Ahmed, who also handles the Abyei area dossier, has arrived in The Hague. The Messeriya committee, led by Abdul Rasoul Al-Nour, has been there for more than a week.

Ajras Al-Hurriya reports Abyei chief administrator Arop Moyak blamed the NCP for holding up announcement of the administration membership. Moyak is to visit Juba today to get First VP Kiir's approval of the SPLM nominees before they are submitted to the Presidency. Moyak acknowledges there may be major reconstruction and infrastructure challenges ahead for the Abyei administration. He has urged those who fled the area to return to their homes, citing the peaceful co-existence currently prevailing between Messeriya and Dinka. If the Messeriya want to live in peace without creating problems there would be no objection, he said.

VP Taha's comprehensive plan to counter Ocampo allegations

Al-Khartoum reports that VP Taha will travel to NY today for meetings of the UNGA and AUPSC. Sudanese Ambassador to UN Abdul Mahmoud Abdul Haleem said Taha would meet

with French President Sarkozy and with the Emir of Qatar. Taha's meetings would focus on peace in Darfur and ICC. Mahmoud noted that VP Taha is carrying a comprehensive plan to address various issues, the ICC indictment of President Bashir in particular.

NCP member accuses international bodies of funding elections

Sudan Vision reports claims by Sudanese General Trade Union Chairman Ibrahim Ghandoor that representatives of international institutions and organizations have been in Khartoum to finance political parties for upcoming elections.

Government and SLM-Minnawi begin implementing DPA security arrangements

Al-Shafa reports that the Government and SLM-Minnawi have begun implementing the security part of the matrix agreed to last Friday in El Fasher. The implementation committee set up by the Government and SLM held its first meeting yesterday and worked out a practical programme for the coming stage. NISS DG Gen. Salah Gosh heads the government side in the committee.

US Charge d'Affaires confirms support to People of Sudan initiative

Al-Khartoum reports NCP leader Al-Haj Atta Al Manan met US Charge d'Affaires Alberto Fernandez at NCP HQs yesterday. According to Al Mannan, they discussed the People of Sudan's initiative, which, Fernandez reportedly said, could lead to a Darfur breakthrough if implemented. He said the US would bring pressure to bear on all parties, including the movements, the Sudan government and in the USA.

Assassins of USAID official reveal UN troops and Americans targeted

Local dailies report that the Prosecution in the case of the killing of USAID officer John M. Granville and his Sudanese driver Abdul Rahaman Abbas has placed about 100 documents including CDs carrying confessions of the accused before the court.

The Prosecution said the accused set up a "Jihadi cell" and initially met in Darfur having decided to carry out Jihadi operations in the region. Difficulties and financial constraints caused them to move to Khartoum.

According to the report in **Ray Al-Shaab**, the seized documents show that the accused had planned to carry out a further operation last February and that their original plan had been to target UN troops and Americans in Sudan.

Websites/International News Coverage

Sudanese suspects confess to killing USAID officer

(Sudan Tribune) September 21, 2008 (KHARTOUM) – Four suspects accused of murdering a US diplomat earlier this year made videotaped confessions about their role in the plot.

John Granville, 33, who worked for the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and his 40-year-old Sudanese driver Abdel-Rahman Abbas were hit in their car by a hail of bullets before dawn on New Year's Day.

There are five suspects currently standing trial for allegedly carrying out the assassination.

Today the court watched the confessions on video and two of the suspects said they shot at Granville and Rahma with a 9mm pistol and a Kalashnikov rifle. In the videos one defendant Abdel Basit al-Hajj Hassan, 29, said they had spotted Granville in a U.S. embassy vehicle,

drove up alongside him and opened fire. "With the help of God we killed the American infidel...It all took 12 to 15 seconds" Hassan said.

The suspects also said they were planning a second attack in February on an US target when they were arrested. Defendants told the judge in the last hearing that the police extracted confessions from them by force. The group members could face the death sentence if found guilty. The hearing has been adjourned until September 21st.

Among those in the dock was a 23-year-old son of the head of Ansar al-Sunna, a pacifist Muslim sect in Sudan that has no political affiliations but has links to Saudi Arabia's dominant orthodox Wahhabi sect. Others were listed as an engineering student, a merchant and former security officer from Khartoum and a driver from Atbara, in northern Sudan.

Sudan opposition leader downplays Arab League initiative on Darfur

(Sudan Tribune) September 21, 2008 (WASHINGTON) – A Sudanese opposition leader today downplayed an Arab League initiative aimed at resolving conflict in the Darfur region. But Mubarak Al-Fadil leader of Umma Reform and Renewal party said that the Arab League is not qualified to play the role of an "honest broker".

"The Arab League does not recognize that there is a real problem in Darfur nor the fact that massive human rights violations were committed there. How can they be mediators then?" he told Sudan Tribune. It will be hard to convince Darfur rebels with that" Al-Fadil said

Al-Fadil stressed however that he has no objections to the venue of the talks and revealed that he proposed to the Qatari envoy in Khartoum a few years ago that they host roundtable conference that includes all Sudanese political forces.

"The root cause of the conflict in the entire Sudan is the insistence of National Congress Party (NCP) to hold on to power and exercise hegemony over the State bodies" he said. "There will not be peace in Darfur without addressing the core of the problem" the opposition leader emphasized.

On 9 September, the Arab League Ministerial Council formed a committee co-chaired by the Qatari Prime Minister, Hamad Bin Jasim, Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, Jean Ping and Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa. The Qatari capital, Doha has been proposed as venue for future peace talks between Khartoum and the rebel groups.

US sees some gains in religious freedom in Sudan

(Sudan Tribune) September 21, 2008 (WASHINGTON) — There are some improvements since last year in religious freedom throughout Sudan, where restrictions on Christians in the north were relaxed, said a new report released by the US State department on Friday.

"Unlike prior reporting periods, the Government did not engage in severe abuses of religious freedom," said the State Department's annual report on religious freedoms around the world for the period between July 2007 and July 2008.

The State Department nevertheless singled out the fact that Muslims in the north who expressed an interest in Christianity or converted to Christianity faced strong social pressure to recant.

The report detailed few instances of specific abuses of religious freedom, but cited limitations on Christian missionary activity and dwelled heavily on the legal framework and political context within which past abuses have occurred. "There are no legal remedies to address constitutional violations of religious freedom by government or private actors," said the report.

The interim national constitution of 2005 and the constitution of Southern Sudan both deny recognition to any political party that discriminates on the basis of religion. The report implies, however, that the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) discriminates on the basis of religion:

“Overwhelmingly Muslim in composition, the ruling NCP favors members of its political and tribal clique. Opposition political parties, often composed of adherents of different Sufi sects and non-Arab northern Muslims, are systematically excluded from the political process and national policymaking.

“Although the Interim National Constitution and the Constitution of Southern Sudan specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion for candidates for the National Civil Service, the selection process favored party members and friends of the NCP,” said the report....

The 2008 report estimates that Sudan’s population is 40.2 million: 70 percent of the population is Muslim, 25 percent of the population holds traditional indigenous beliefs (animism), while the Christians are the third largest religious group, traditionally concentrated in the south and the Nuba Mountains.

The State Department ...cited concerns about aspects of Shari’a law that have been codified into civil and criminal law, including penalties of death or imprisonment in the north for apostasy from Islam, and lashings for consumption of alcohol. There were, however, “no reported incidents of this punishment being applied during the reporting period.”

The report mentions the creation of the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital and says it made little progress in changing official government policy towards non-Muslims in Khartoum. However the State Department acknowledges that it provided a forum for dialogue on religious matters that was previously nonexistent. Also, according to the report, this commission was successful in obtaining the release of some non-Muslims arrested for violating Islamic law.

Specific instances of concern raised in the report are the July 2007 arrest of a Catholic priest in connection with a woman’s planned conversion to Christianity, routine monitoring of religious activity by the National Intelligence and Security Service, and lack of enforcement of legal guarantees to respect the Islamic or Christian holy days and workweek, which require employers and schools to give two hours before 10 a.m. on Sunday to Christians for religious purposes, or two hours on Fridays to Muslims for religious purposes.

In this regard the report also mentions that Muslims in southern Sudan are not given two hours to perform Friday prayer as required by the national law. GoSS offices and businesses in the south follow the Monday through Friday workweek, with Sunday as a day of religious observance.

Although the report said optimistically that “the Government toned down public rhetoric aimed at religious minorities, permitted the publication and distribution of Christian newspapers in the north, and allowed a church to broadcast religious radio programming from Khartoum,” it also cited a July 25, 2007 interview of Sudan’s Defence Minister as a disturbing instance of religious propaganda.

The minister, Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein claimed in the Saudi Arabian newspaper **Okaz** that "24 Jewish organizations" were fueling the conflict in Darfur. According to representatives for Darfur Muslims, the war in Darfur is not caused by Jewish organizations but rather by racial and political divisions and economic marginalization. “Anti-Semitic rhetoric is common in both the official media and statements by NCP officials,” said the State Department report.

The U.S. Administration discusses religious freedom with Sudanese government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since 1999 the Secretary of State has designated Sudan a "Country of Particular Concern" annually under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Also on Friday, another government organization, the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom, criticized Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for not using her authority to make annual updates to the list of “Countries of Particular Concern,” including reiterating this

designation for Sudan.

The commission, which was created by Congress to monitor religious freedom and advise other parts of the government, is hosting a hearing in Washington on Wednesday, "Sudan's Unraveling Peace and the Challenge to U.S. Policy," featuring distinguished scholars, diplomats and humanitarians.

Also, according to the report this commission was successful in obtaining the release of some non-Muslims arrested for violating Islamic law.

Egypt and Libya to coordinate joint efforts to end Darfur crisis

(**Sudan Tribune**) September 21, 2008 (TRIPOLI) — Egypt and Libya agreed to coordinate their efforts in order to end the ongoing crisis in western Sudan region of Darfur and achieve a comprehensive reconciliation between the Sudanese parties.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met with the Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi on Saturday during a one-day visit to Tripoli. The leaders discussed ways to enhance and coordinate bilateral efforts on regional issues. They also tackled issues to be raised at the next African Union summit, and Libyan-Egyptian coordination at those issues.

COMMENTARY

By Richard Holbrooke

Financial Times (22/9/08) -- The request from the International Criminal Court prosecutor for an arrest warrant for Omar al-Bashir, Sudan's president, caused much hand-wringing by diplomats and others who say the search for justice will derail peace negotiations or endanger humanitarian relief workers. Fearing that the crisis in Darfur will worsen if the prosecutor is allowed to proceed, they have launched an ill-considered campaign at the United Nations Security Council to delay the court's proceedings, perhaps for a year. The very nations that created the ICC appear to be afraid to let it do its work. A vote for deferral might come as early as next month.

For me, this is familiar terrain. When Radovan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, the Bosnian Serb leaders, were indicted by the Yugoslav tribunal in July 1995 for orchestrating atrocities in Bosnia, the media and many diplomats lamented that we would be unable to negotiate peace for Bosnia. Less than five months later, an agreement was reached in Dayton to end the war.

What had seemed an insurmountable obstacle turned out to be an unexpected opportunity. Before the indictments, we had already decided to marginalize Gen Mladic and Mr Karadzic and force Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian president, to take full responsibility for the war. Our negotiating team met them only once - in a hunting villa just outside Belgrade in September 1995 - but only with a prior understanding that Mr. Milosevic would be responsible for their conduct, and only to lift the three-year siege of Sarajevo, which we accomplished that night. Later, when Mr. Milosevic insisted that to achieve peace the two men had to participate in negotiations, I offered to arrest them personally if they set foot in the US.

Their removal from negotiations helped greatly in our success even though Mr Karadzic, forced by Mr Milosevic to sign the Dayton agreement, must have known it would end his political career. After he stepped down he invented a fable that I - and later Madeleine Albright - made deals with him that Nato would not pursue him. This wholly fabricated story, coming from a war criminal who also said the Muslims bombed their own marketplace in Sarajevo to lure Nato into war, is grotesque.

The key point is that the pariah status created by the indictment contributed to resolving the

conflict and creating a more stable situation in Bosnia. The tragedy was not that these evil men were indicted; it was that it took almost 13 years to arrest Mr. Karadzic and that Gen Mladic is still at large.

The US and the European Union confront a similar issue with Darfur. In 2005, the Security Council determined that offering impunity was a threat to peace. It referred the situation to the ICC prosecutor, who announced that the evidence pointed to the top of Sudan's government. Suddenly, some Council members backed away from their earlier stance. In a routine resolution to extend the mandate of the Darfur peacekeeping mission, they added a statement of "concern" about the prosecutor's request and promised to raise the issue again.

The US abstained, neither wishing to veto the mission nor wanting to support anything leading to a delay in the prosecution of Mr Bashir. China, Russia and others argued that an arrest warrant against Mr Bashir would frustrate peace prospects and jeopardise humanitarian workers. In October, these countries plan to ask the Security Council to defer the ICC's investigations for a renewable 12-month period.

Those advocating this step argue that it would give negotiators leverage to produce results in Darfur. Yet they have never produced evidence for this, nor defined what the benchmark for success would be at the end of the 12 months. Mr Bashir is simply playing for time, offering nothing. Mr Milosevic did the same. Give Mr Bashir a year and he will take it - and ask for more.

The US and the EU must resist efforts to suspend ICC prosecutions. Peace negotiations have been stalled for nearly a year for reasons unrelated to a possible warrant against Mr Bashir. Suspension may seem a safer course to follow in the short run, but it will embolden him and other future suspected war criminals.

Bringing perpetrators of international crimes to justice is undeniably difficult when trying simultaneously to end a conflict, but it is the right choice. War criminals should know that they can run but - as the evil Mr Karadzic ultimately learnt - sooner or later they will be brought to justice.

[The writer is former special envoy for the Balkans, former US ambassador at the United Nations and is a supporter of Barack Obama]

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