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QUARTERLY UPDATE ON THE SITUATION IN DARFUR
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Sudan temporarily suspended 52 non-governmental organizations working in Darfur on Thursday, March 22, 2007, as the new U.N. humanitarian chief began his first visit to the country, hoping to win aid groups better access to the region. Jamal Youssef Idriss, from the Sudanese government's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in Nyala, said the NGOs had been suspended from working in southern Darfur state after an investigation aimed at preventing fraud found they did not comply with regulations. He said he planned to meet all the NGOs affected to discuss resuming their operations. International aid agencies have freedom of movement and can work without problems, he said.¹

John Holmes, U.N. under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordination, said he held "very useful and constructive" talks on Darfur with Humanitarian Affairs Minister Kosti Manibe but stressed that only a political solution could end suffering in the remote region.. Manibe dismissed allegations that Sudan was creating bureaucratic obstacles that made it more and more difficult for aid groups and non-governmental organizations to reach Darfur. He said procedures were being studied to make it easier to get to Darfur.²

Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, has said that "Darfur is the most difficult diplomatic challenge we have in Africa." The United States has four priorities on the African continent, Frazer said: conflict resolution, democratization, economic growth, and prevention and treatment of diseases including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Annual U.S. aid to Africa is \$4.1 billion, up from less than \$800 million in 2001. "We've done well on the peace front, but Darfur is the hardest nut to crack," Frazer said. The Sudanese government has backed away from an agreement to allow up to 20,000 African and international troops into the region to help quell the violence. The international community must enforce the agreement -- perhaps with a coalition of international forces -- and stop trying to reach more compromises, Frazer said.³

The Continuing Impasse with the United Nations

New United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent a letter on January 24, 2007 to

¹ Reuters, March 23, 2007.

² Reuters, March 23, 2007.

³ Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, March 23, 2007.

Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir stressing the importance of more support for the African Union mission and also the need for the rapid deployment of the hybrid UN-African Union force. "I have requested very strongly that President Bashir agrees to my letter [on the heavy support package which will enable the early deployment] of a hybrid UN-African Union peacekeeping operations," Mr Ban said in January 2007.⁴ His comments come as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released its latest grim overview of the situation in Darfur, produced in collaboration with other UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), showing the violence forced around 46,000 people to flee their homes in January 2007. "New population displacements were registered weekly in January as attacks on villages, sexual violence and intimidation continued to force large numbers of people to move throughout Darfur," the OCHA overview states. New displacements of villagers towards internally displaced person (IDP) camps continued "relentlessly" through the month as a result of attacks by both the government of Sudan and associated militia and a wing of the Sudan Liberation Army headed by Minni Minawi.⁵

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir responded with a letter of his own to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in early March, wherein he made scant reference to the November 2006 agreements, instead arguing that the U.N. plan "contravenes" the Darfur Peace Agreement signed in May 2006 between Sudan's government and one of Darfur's rebel factions. The first stage of the U.N. plan - a "light support" package adding some equipment, military officers and U.N. police to the AU operation - is nearly complete. But the second phase - deploying a "heavy support" package with more than 3,000 U.N. military, police and civilian personnel, along with substantial aviation and logistical assets - has been held up since December 2006 waiting for al-Bashir's letter and expected acceptance. Mr. al-Bashir insisted in his letter that the November agreement established that the U.N. would provide the AU force with technical and financial assistance and "military consultants with ranks below that of the military commander appointed by the African Union." He also objected to a section of a U.N. report stating that "full U.N. involvement in command and control would be a prerequisite for U.N. funding and troop contribution." As for the envisioned "hybrid" AU-U.N., Mr. al-Bashir said, "the AU forces implementing that phase, in terms of control or command, must remain forces of the African

⁴ The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution in 2006 last year demanding that Sudan allow the UN to bolster the under-funded, 7,000-member African Union monitoring force in Darfur. Bashir rejected the resolution but in November agreed to a compromise plan for a hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping operation -- an agreement he has now backed away from.

⁵ BuaNews (South Africa), February 23, 2007.

Union supported by the United Nations as per the two packages."⁶

The international response to Mr. al-Bashir's letter has been mixed.

- A United Nations spokeswoman, Marie Okabe, said that Bashir's letter "contained positive elements, including the strong expression of support to joint efforts by the African Union and United Nations... as well as assurances over humanitarian aide for the people of Darfur." But she had also said the message "seems to cast doubt on" a November 2006 accord in which Sudan agreed to the deployment in Darfur of a joint UN-AU force.⁷
- China's U.N. ambassador Wang Guangya called on Sudan's president to explain his letter challenging the plan to send United Nations peacekeepers to help African Union troops in Sudan's Darfur region. (China is a significant trading partner with Sudan.) Mr. Wang Guangya referenced a November 2006 meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where an agreement had been reached for the three-stage U.N. plan that would culminate in a 22,000-member joint U.N.-AU peacekeeping mission. "Last year, in Addis, the understanding [was] clear that we are committed to this," he said. "So therefore, it seems that there are some miscommunications and misunderstandings of all this."⁸
- Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, whose country also has significant commercial interests in Sudan, said Moscow is analyzing al-Bashir's letter and wants to hear what the secretary-general thinks about it, but called for more dialogue with Sudan.⁹
- Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit opposed further economic sanctions being imposed on Sudan because of the atrocities in the Darfur region. Mr. Gheit said he had sent "urgent messages" to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and to the secretariats of the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union, calling on them "to treat in a positive way the last letter of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon."¹⁰

⁶ Associated Press, March 12, 2007.

⁷ Agence France Presse, March 19, 2007.

⁸ Associated Press, March 12, 2007.

⁹ Associated Press, March 12, 2007.

¹⁰ Agence France Presse, March 19, 2007.
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- Both Britain and Washington are threatening new sanctions if Khartoum does not back the deployment.¹¹

War Crimes

In February 2007, International Criminal Court prosecutor Luis-Moreno Ocampo named militia leader Ali Kosheib and Ahmed Haroun, Sudanese secretary of state for humanitarian affairs (Sudan's secretary of state of the interior at the time of the alleged crimes), as Darfur war crimes suspects for crimes in the western region of Darfur. Moreno-Ocampo began investigating accusations of persecution, torture, rape and murder in June 2006. He has focused on events between 2003 and 2004, considered the most violent period in the Darfur conflict.¹²

Sudan has announced that it will re-interrogate Ahmed Haroun, who had been cleared of war crimes in Darfur earlier in March 2007. Sudanese Prosecutor General Salah Abu Zeid said that new evidence had called for the re-interrogation of Mr. Haroun. Prosecutor Abu Zeid also announced that three security officials accused of murdering Darfur civilians and burning down their villages are to stand trial.¹³

Khartoum had reacted to the ICC's naming of war criminals by insisting that its judiciary was fully competent to handle the cases, rejecting the legitimacy of any foreign court seeking to try Sudanese nationals.¹⁴

The Expanding War Into Chad

Chad's government said Thursday, March 22, 2007, that two Sudanese planes have been bombing villages on the Chadian side of their shared border for two days, causing an unspecified number of deaths. In an official statement, the government demanded a stop to the attacks along the border, which has frequently been crossed by Sudanese rebels fighting in the western Darfur region and Chadian rebels who operate from bases inside Sudan. It said the government reserves the right to respond with force.¹⁵

¹¹ Agence France Presse, March 19, 2007.

¹² Agence France Presse, March 23, 2007.

¹³ Agence France Presse, March 23, 2007.

¹⁴ Agence France Presse, March 23, 2007.

¹⁵ Associated Press, March 23, 2007.
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