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Media Monitoring Report

United Nations Mission in Sudan/ Public Information Office

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Highlights

Local Arabic and English Language Press

Government and JEM to sign “confidence building document” today

Local dailies report Sudan Government and JEM are likely to sign a “confidence-building” document and a declaration of “good intentions” in Qatar today. However, *Al-Rai Al-Aam*’s source said the two sides are unlikely agree on a ceasefire. There is no confirmation that they agreed to a POW exchange. Khalil Ibrahim said JEM was optimistic about a peace agreement and that his movement would become a political party if an agreement is realized.

Arab League fails to invoke article 16

Al-Sahafa reports the AU-Arab League delegation returned from NY after failing to convince the SC to invoke article (16) to defer an arrest warrant for President Bashir. Sudan Ambassador to UN Abdul Mahmoud Abdul Waleem told the paper consultations for a further attempt are taking place.

Thabo Mbeki to visit Sudan for a further Darfur consultation

Local dailies report former South African President Thabo Mbeki is to visit Khartoum in the next few days as head of an AU delegation to discuss Darfur and related issue.

National War Crimes Prosecutor to resume Darfur investigations

Al-Sudani reports Darfur War Crimes Prosecutor Nimir Ibrahim as saying he is to visit West Darfur State today to resume investigation into alleged Darfur war crimes including the militia leader Ali Sushayb.

NCP (South Darfur) recommends UNAMID, INGOs relocation

Al-Sahafa reports NCP (South Darfur State) conference in Nyala has recommended relocation of UNAMID and INGO compounds outside Nyala. The conference also recommended that President Bashir should be re-elected NCP chairman and President of the Republic.

UN Mission to ask MFA about future relationship

Al-Ahdath reports UN Mission in Khartoum is to ask Ministry of Foreign Affairs today about its status. Informed sources said the Mission had prepared a letter expressing its desire to know the fate of its personnel and future relations with Khartoum should an arrest warrant be issued for President Bashir.

Umma Party set conditions for participation in elections

Al-Intibaha reports Umma Party leader Sadiq Al-Mahdi painted a “grim picture” of the situation in the country saying Sudan is passing through a “critical juncture”. He told his party conference in the White Nile State yesterday that the Umma Party was ready for upcoming elections if they are free and fair.

Websites/International News Coverage

Doha talks “close to Darfur deal”

Al-Jazeera 14/2/09 Khartoum and the Darfur JEM are close to agreeing a "trust building and good intentions" document, a rebel spokesman has said.

Speaking at the Qatar-hosted negotiations on Saturday, Ahmed Hussein Adam told the **AFP** the accord would be "signed any moment from now, maybe tonight or Sunday morning".

"The document calls mainly for a stop in violations against the camps of the displaced people, and stopping indiscriminate bombing against civilians, in addition to an exchange of prisoners," the JEM spokesman said.

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem al-Thani, the Qatari prime minister, said there the progress would be "reflected in a draft document now in its final stages of preparation".

Also on Saturday the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abu al-Gheith, held talks with President al-Bashir amid reports that the ICC has decided to issue a warrant for al-Bashir's arrest.

However, an ICC spokesman of the ICC insisted that "at this moment, there is no arrest warrant". Mahjub Fadl, al-Bashir's spokesman, denounced any move to launch proceedings against the Sudanese leader.

In Doha, JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim told **Al-Jazeera** that JEM wants a "credible peace agreement" with the government to end the conflict there.

"This agreement should be fair so that we can sell it to our people. We are merely fighting [to end] socio-economic problems in Darfur," he said. "demands might look “naïve” for the developed nations, he said.

But "We are fighting for pure water supply, education, primary health care, electricity, food, job opportunities and participation in taking decisions."

Al Jazeera's James Bays said the potential arrest warrant, while not an official issue at the Doha talks, was the main point of discussion on the sidelines on Thursday. "One theory here is that the leak from the UN was quite deliberate," he said. "They were flagging up the possibility of an imminent arrest warrant, because they know that this peace deal is getting close." They didn't want the parties here ... to come to a deal and then that deal have to be torn up in a couple of weeks when that arrest warrant is issued."

ICC judges dismiss petition by pro-Sudan groups on Bashir case

Sudan Tribune website 15/2/09 (THE HAGUE) — ICC judges have rejected a motion by pro-Sudan groups to consider their filing demanding that an arrest warrant not be issued for President Al-Bashir. The petition was submitted last month namely by the Sudan Workers Trade Unions Federation (SWTUF) and the Sudan International Defense Group (SIDG).

Two UK lawyers prepared the filing on behalf of the SWTUF and SIDG, Sir Geoffrey Nice, former senior trial attorney at the Yugoslavian War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague, and Rodney Dixon.

The filing focuses on the impact of an arrest warrant on the prospects of peace in Sudan, emphasizing that prosecuting Al-Bashir is not in the interest of justice and that other alternatives of

transitional justice are being pursued.

But the Pre-Trial Chamber I which is handling the Darfur case ruled that the interests of justice is an assessment made by the office of the prosecutor once an investigation is initiated in accordance with the Rome Statute.

The judges further said that “the Chamber neither has the power to review, nor is it responsible for, the Prosecution’s assessment that, under the current circumstances in Sudan, the initiation of a case against Omar Al Bashir and three alleged commanders of organized armed groups would not be detrimental to the interests of justice”

“The Chamber concludes that the matters to which the Application refers are unrelated to any issue currently before the Chamber...For these reasons decides not to grant leave to the Applicants pursuant to rule 103 of the Rules; and consequently not to take into consideration the observations included in the Application, and to reject the Applicants’ request for a hearing” according to the decision posted on the ICC website.

The two groups submitted an appeal to the Judges’ decision saying that the chamber failed to consider the arguments put forward by them in their application. They requested that the Pre-Trial Chamber I authorize them to challenge the ruling before the Appeal chamber at the ICC.

They warned that overlooking the facts contained in their application “can instantly transform the leader so charged into an international outcast, the leader of a pyriah State, with the crippling political and economic isolation that may result”.

Egypt vows to press for ICC suspension

Sudan Tribune website 14/2/09 (KHARTOUM) — Egypt’s top diplomat today pledged that his government would continue to work on pressing the UNSC to block the ICC prosecution of the Sudan resident Omer Al-Bashir.

“We are moving with the UNSC members and are trying to implement Article 16 of the ICC statute to stop any action against Sudan and President Bashir” the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul-Gheit told reporters in Khartoum today.

“Egypt will not allow this situation to lead to a threat of Sudan, its territorial integrity and safety” he added.

Aboul-Gheit and Egypt’s intelligence director Omer Suleiman held a closed meeting with the Sudanese President after which they were joined by Sudan’s Intelligence chief Salah Gosh and other officials from both sides.

According to the London-based ***Al-Hayat*** newspaper, unidentified Sudanese officials say Mubarak’s letter explained efforts to raise the ICC deferral issue during his visit to France, Turkey and Italy. Reportedly Mubarak urged Bashir to take “practical, serious and quick” steps with regards to Darfur in order to persuade the international community of Khartoum’ seriousness.

The Egyptian Foreign Minister acknowledged that a joint Arab League-African Union delegation that lobbied the UNSC this week on Article 16 have failed to achieve a breakthrough.“ It is clear that this mission has not accomplished what is required of it and we stressed to President Bashir that Egypt will use everything in its power and contacts with UNSC to raise this issue and achieve positive results” Aboul-Gheit said.

The Sudanese presidential spokesperson Mahjoub Badri spoke out strongly against any ICC arrest

warrant. "We put this question to every country that recognizes the jurisdiction of the ICC...if an arrest warrant is issued, are your ambassadors going to consider Omar Al-Bashir as a president or a defendant?" Bakri asked.

Russia signals support to Darfur ICC deferral, UK toughens stance

Sudan Tribune website 13/2/09 (New York) — On Thursday, the Russian government called on the Security Council to invoke Article 16 of the ICC statute to suspend prosecution of Sudanese President Al-Bashir.

"We think their position on this matter makes a lot of sense because we believe that this is a very complex situation" Russian ambassador at the Vitaly Churkin told reporters.

"You have to be mindful of the need for the peace process in Darfur, you have to be mindful of the need to further develop the UNAMID [Darfur peacekeepers] presence in Darfur and the security situation on the ground" Churkin said.

The Russian diplomat was commenting on an informal meeting held on Thursday between joint Arab League-African Union (AU) delegation and the UN Security Council (UNSC) members to discuss Article 16.

Diplomats who attended the meeting said that the delegation's demand was met with strong resistance from the US, UK, Austria and Croatia.

"At this moment we're not ready to support an initiative that would implement Article 16" French Deputy Ambassador Jean-Pierre Lacroix said.

But the Russian envoy urged the UNSC to proceed forward with stalling the ICC move against the Sudanese head of state saying it will contradict with the pursuit of justice.

"If the UNSC were to go resort to Article 16 of the ICC it would not be infringing on the legal process because actually the statute itself provides for this possibility... in our view the circumstances are exactly such that the UNSC must seriously consider resorting to Article 16" he said.

However the UK envoy at the UN strongly rejected the argument put forward by his Russian counterpart saying that justice is one of several tracks in Sudan which includes UNAMID, peace process, and humanitarian access.

"There has always been four tracks to our policy towards Sudan... we don't see any reason why any one track should be slowed down because of concerns on other tracks" ambassador John Sawers said.

"Peace and justice go hand in hand and we want that to be the case. In fact it's the only way to create peace in Sudan if it is accompanied by justice" he added.

Meantime the US reiterated its position that it would veto any move to block the ICC Darfur investigation. "We want to see those who commit atrocities, who are responsible for atrocities taking place anywhere around the world, held accountable" the US State department Acting Spokesman Robert Wood told reporters Thursday.

LRA fighters trapped - Congo spokesman

KINSHASA (**AFP**) — LRA remnants are trapped by opposing forces in northeastern DRC and will have to surrender, a Congolese government spokesman said Saturday. "We think that Joseph Kony is with them," he said, referring to the LRA leader, the target of a joint operation by Congolese, Ugandan and south Sudanese forces launched in December. "The hard core of the Lord's Resistance Army is in a swampy forest in the Garamba national park," spokesman Lambert Mende told AFP, putting their numbers at about 250. "They have no way out of these swamps except to surrender," he said. Mende said the rest of the LRA had surrendered or disbanded.

Meanwhile, two LRA commanders who reportedly were to surrender failed to appear at a rendezvous in southern Sudan near the Congolese border, a United Nations official said. Okot Odhiambo, believed to be Kony's number two, and his deputy Dominic Ongwen, had been in negotiations to hand themselves in. UNMIS had been preparing their return to Uganda.

But "for reasons that remain unclear none of the combatants had presented themselves at the designated rendezvous point as of Saturday afternoon," David Gressly, UNMIS regional coordinator for southern Sudan, said in a statement.

Odhiambo and Ongwen are wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for a raft of war crimes charges, including raping, killing civilians and forcibly enlisting child soldiers.

Sudan reports clashes near key Darfur town

AP 14/2/09 (Khartoum) The Sudanese army and a key Darfur rebel group clashed near the town of Muhajeria military and rebel spokesmen said Saturday. There were few — and conflicting — details about the fighting near the town which coincides with Government and JEM talks in Doha.

Other Darfur rebel groups are not attending the talks, which began Tuesday. But fighting has continued even as the two sides have talked about a framework for peace.

Sudanese army spokesman Brig. Gen. Osman Mohammed al-Aghbash said JEM troops attacked government forces near the area of al-Malam Thursday, according to a report carried next day by the Sudan Media Center.

But JEM Spokesperson Ahmed Hussain, reached in Doha Saturday, said it was the Sudanese army that had attacked twice, first on Wednesday and then the day after.

The rebels said they also had captured a Sudanese army officer who told them that a senior Sudanese commander had been killed in the battle.

New mobile operator launched in South Sudan

Sudan Tribune website, 14/2/09, Juba -- A Lebanon-based Fattouch Investment Group has officially launched a new GSM mobile network in southern Sudan called Vivacell.

The new network can be accessed in Juba, Torit, Bor and Yei, and is reportedly working to expand network coverage throughout the whole of Southern Sudan. Current network capacity can host up to 1 million subscribers. It is expected to create more than 5,000 job opportunities plus extensive training programs for Southern Sudanese, executives say.

GoSS acting Minister of Telecommunications and Postal Services Gabriel Changson officially launched the network. Also the GoSS Minister of Information and Broadcasting, he pointed out that the Ministry of Telecommunications is regulating the allocation of network frequencies in order to avoid rampant network interruptions that are associated with many mobile networks in Sudan. He said Southern Sudan would obtain its own international dialing code soon.

UN calls for immediate access to areas in South Darfur

12/2/09, Khartoum -- UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Ameerah Haq calls for immediate access to over 100,000 civilians in Muhajariya, Sheria and Labado areas of South Darfur. International humanitarian agencies have attempted to reach the area four times since 7 February but are unable to obtain clearance for humanitarian flights. "We are very concerned about the state and condition of civilians in these areas," said the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sudan, Ameerah Haq. "Aid agencies need urgent access to Muhajeriya, Sheria (Mijekha and Kazanjadeed areas) and Labado where people are in critical need of assistance. Unless access is immediately granted, the situation for hundreds of thousands of civilians could deteriorate rapidly."

UN and NGOs in Nyala stand ready to provide vital food, water, shelter and medical care to vulnerable civilians who were displaced from Muhajariya into the surrounding areas following recent hostilities in the area.

US ambassador raps Libya over Darfur:

Associated Press, UN -- U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice said Thursday the United States was "deeply disappointed" by the U.N. Security Council's failure to reach unanimous agreement for a statement condemning the escalating civilian losses in Sudan's Darfur region.

Earlier this week, Libya blocked the 15-nation council from issuing what is known as a presidential statement -- a nonbinding statement of the sentiments of the body.

"Two days ago, we were very close to consensus. But instead one country wanted a statement that was highly imbalanced," Rice told AP.

The draft statement backed by the U.S. also would have called on Sudan's government and the rebels of the Justice and Equality Movement to ease fighting in Darfur, where rebel groups complaining of discrimination and neglect took up arms against the government in 2003.

It also would have deplored a recent offensive by the rebel movement and expressed "grave concern" at the Sudan government's response including intensified aerial bombing.

Libya objected to language connecting Sudan's government to the aerial bombing and the proposed calls for it and all other military action to stop.

Council members unanimously agree to the wording of a statement read aloud by the council's monthly revolving president. Such language from the U.N.'s powerhouse council carries less weight than a binding resolution, but still has heft because of international consensus.

Rice said the proposed council statement could have helped urge calm at a critical time. "It challenges our collective conscience to respond, and we were deeply disappointed by this," Rice told the AP. "The process got politicized, and ultimately it was one country which blew it up. It was a disappointing process to witness, because there was extended debate and compelling briefings from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the need for this."

The statement would have condemned the killing and displacement of civilians resulting from escalating military action and expressed particular concern at the recent fighting around Muhajeria, a flash point town in southern Darfur where the rebel Justice and Equality Movement and Sudanese government have fought since mid-January.

It also would have reaffirmed the U.N.'s "full support" for its Darfur peacekeeping mission, which has been severely hobbled by a lack of troops and equipment, and also backed Ban's decision to remain in Muhajeria. "We would have spoken with one voice," Rice said. "It would have provided meaningful support to the troop-contributing countries."

"It's important in any case for the council to speak authoritatively and on one voice on an ongoing genocide," said Rice, who also met Thursday with Sudan's U.N. ambassador, Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem Mohamed.

He said his government will pursue peace in Darfur even if the ICC, which is independent of the United Nations, issues an arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir for his alleged role in atrocities in the war-ravaged western province.

US, France, UK oppose suspending Bashir Darfur case

Reuters, 13/2/09, UN -- U.S., British and French diplomats told African Union and Arab League delegates on Thursday that they oppose suspending a war crimes indictment of Sudan's president over atrocities in Darfur, diplomats said.

U.N. diplomats and officials said on Wednesday the ICC had decided to issue an arrest warrant for President al-Bashir. On Thursday, ICC said it had not reached a final decision but U.N. officials said the Sudanese government was already aware that Bashir would be formally indicted later this month.

Sudan: Trial of suspects in killing of US diplomat resumes

Sudanese Media Centre website, 13/2/09 -- According to informed sources, Khartoum North Court presided over by the judge of the general court, Sid Ahmad al-Badri, is to resume its session on the case of the killing of the [US] diplomat, John Granville, and his Sudanese driver, Abbas Abd-al-Rahman, on 16 February when it will hear testimony by defence witnesses.

Sudanese army says four soldiers killed in clashes with rebels

Sudanese Media Centre website, 13/2/09 -- SAF has revealed new information regarding clashes that took place between the army and JEM east of the Jabal Marra region where it was pursuing rebels from the Muhajeriya region.

SAF spokesman Brig-Gen Muhammad Uthman al-Aghbash told SMC that JEM troops launched a treacherous attack on armed forces stationed in the Malam region and were giving a positive indication of the government's good intentions towards the Doha talks. He said SAF repelled the JEM attack and killed a large but unspecified number of JEM commanders. SAF, he said, also destroyed 14 armed vehicles belonging to JEM. Four members of the armed forces were killed and three were injured, he added. .