



Remarks at a Press Conference in Khartoum

John D. Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State

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DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: I have a brief statement and then I'd be pleased to try and answer some questions. This is my first trip to Sudan and only my second trip abroad since becoming Deputy Secretary of State two months ago.

Over the last four days I have had a series of meetings in Khartoum with President Bashir and several of his top advisors, including Foreign Minister Akol and Special Assistant to the President Minni Minawi. I also had an opportunity to visit Juba where I met First Vice President Salva Kiir and General Deng of the Sudan People's Liberation Army.

In Juba I reiterated United States support for the historic Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended this country's civil war and I reaffirmed our continued assistance to the Government of Sudan. The day before yesterday I traveled to Darfur, where I reviewed humanitarian and peacekeeping issues with Internally Displaced Persons, as well as United Nations, African Union, and Sudanese officials. I want to extend my thanks to the Government of Sudan for the hospitality and everyone who has made the excellent arrangements for my trip.

The principal purpose of my trip has been to convey the US's commitment to the complete and urgent implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. I focused in particular on the situation in Darfur, a situation of intense interest on the part of the American people and our government. There is widespread concern The crisis in Darfur has three components: humanitarian, political and security. All these components deserve the prompt attention of the Sudanese government.

On the humanitarian front, the United States has done a great deal to try and ease the suffering of the people of Darfur. The US is the single largest donor to Sudan, more than 2 billion dollars in aid since 2005, and we are working hard to protect vulnerable populations there. Visiting an IDP, or Internally Displaced Persons camp in Darfur the day before yesterday, I was able to see how important it is that the civilians have full access to humanitarian aid.

When it comes to humanitarian access, the Government of Sudan's record is not encouraging. The denial of visas, the harassment of aid workers have created the impression that the Government of Sudan is engaged in a deliberate campaign of intimidation. The Government of Sudan's recent agreement with the United Nations to facilitate humanitarian operations is an encouraging sign, and we will be watching carefully and expect prompt implementation.

With respect to the security situation, our focus is on supporting the ongoing AU and UN efforts to contribute to peace and stability in Darfur. The AU and UN are on the ground and working hard. But they face serious challenges. In fact, there are more Internally Displaced Persons in Darfur than when the DPA was signed in May 2006. We must move quickly to a larger hybrid African Union and United Nations peacekeeping force with a single united chain of command that conforms to UN standards and practices.

In addition to the United Nations and the AU, others have a critical role to play in security. The Government of Sudan must disarm the Janjaweed, the Arab militias that we all know could not exit without the Sudanese government's active support. The non-signatory rebel groups must stop their attacks, put down their arms, and come to the negotiating table.

Turning to the political situation, I found widespread agreement that more must be done to bring the non-signatory groups into the DPA. The US supports the work of UN Special Envoy Eliasson and African Union Special Envoy Salim. I also encouraged First Vice President Salva Kiir in his efforts to convene a conference of the non-signatory groups. The United Nations-African Union peacekeepers are essential to security but it is difficult to see a satisfactory long-term outcome unless these political efforts bear fruit.

It is also necessary to support the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority and other DPA provisions designed to provide the people of Darfur with the political and economic opportunities they deserve. We expect the Sudanese government to fulfill its obligations in this regard.

The Darfur Peace Agreement offers great promise and opportunity to the people of Sudan. It can only be realized through the active efforts of the Sudanese Government. A quick transition to a UN-AU force, an improvement in access for humanitarian workers, and support for the TDRA would improve the situation in Darfur and could pave the way for better relations between Sudan and the international community. If these improvements do not take place, the alternative for Sudan is continued and perhaps even intensified isolation. Thank you very much, and I'd be pleased to answer a few of your questions.

It's eight o'clock now. I would propose that we would have about 15 minutes for questions because then we must continue on our trip.

Yes.

QUESTION: You said that your main idea is to deploy UN forces with UN support. What is the outcome that you reached with the Sudanese government about that? Also, today in New York, Mr. Kenare agreed to the UN Secretary General to have a statement from the UN issued to finance the second package. What is, any comments on that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Right. First of all, while we had discussions during the past three days, the question of the hybrid force is being negotiated and discussed between officials of the UN and the AU and as you correctly point out will no doubt also be a subject of discussion in New York today between Mr. Konare and United Nations officials. What we have stressed and what has been our consistent position throughout, is that, whatever the arrangements between the United Nations and the African Union, there must be a single, united chain-of-command for these forces and that the forces will carry out their mission in accordance with United Nations standards and practices. On the other hand, we acknowledge and have agreed that the preponderance, the majority of this force will be recruited from African countries and the commander of this United Nations-slash-African Union force will also be from Africa. So, no matter what the final arrangement for this unified command, there will be a strong African voice.

QUESTION: My question is, the United States is seeking to have a resolution issued at the United Nations to impose sanctions on the Sudan. If the Government of Sudan does not respond to the issue of the hybrid force, the Secretary General has asked for more time to give the diplomatic work its course. Also President Bashir has spoken with the King of Saudi Arabia and confirmed the success of the Arab initiative and the approval of Sudan on the second package of heavy equipment and also the deployment of aircraft. Do you know about that and do you think that from that the United States may change its position?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: As I mentioned in my statement, the security situation in Darfur continues to be extremely challenging. And in fact there are

even more internally displaced people today than there were at the time the Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in 2006. So our position has been that there is an urgent need to deploy additional forces to the Darfur area in order to help stabilize the situation. Otherwise we could be faced with a situation where the humanitarian crisis deepens and there will no solution, or end in sight, to this situation. So our focus is to work with the United Nations and all the member states concerned to mobilize additional peacekeeping forces as soon as possible. I would note that there have been some indications that steps are being taken towards creating such forces. But as all of you know there have been disappointments in the past where there have been agreements made but then not necessarily carried out. So what I would stress, stress at this particular point is that it is the actions that are required and words are not sufficient.

QUESTION: You have spoken a lot about the humanitarian situation and about the increase of the number of the IDPs. However the UN envoy during his last visit spoke about an improvement in the situation. And in the meantime the United States continues its sanctions and don't you think these sanctions only affect the Sudanese citizens and not the Sudanese government?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: As I said in my remarks, there are three different elements of the situation: the humanitarian, the security and the political. I also noted that there has been, and I have noted this in the conversations that I have had here in the past three days, some stabilization in certain aspects of the humanitarian situation, particularly with respect to nutrition, on the one hand, and the mortality rate on the other. But also as I noted there has been an increase in the number of internally displaced people, so that situation has not improved. And because of insecurity and a lack of political agreement among the various parties, the situation remains very precarious and very unpredictable. And I would say it continues to be fraught with danger.

We believe that with additional peacekeeping forces that progress can be made towards stabilizing the security situation. And we consider such an increase an indispensable element towards making progress on the issue of Darfur, while efforts are also made to find some kind of political solution between the signatory and non-signatory groups to the Darfur Peace Agreement.

There's a gentleman who has been waiting very patiently here. This, this will be my last, last question.

QUESTION: My question, uh, do you think the agreement of war in Darfur they can make smooth landing in The Hague.

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: You have to repeat that.

QUESTION: Do you think the agreement of war in Darfur, they can make smooth landing in The Hague? and why not America one of the members of the High Court? The last question, what about on the table between Khartoum and Washington in this meeting?

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: That's not one question. (laughter) Well, there are, there are several people under indictment by the International Criminal Court and as you know when that matter was brought before the United Nations Security Council the United States abstained, therefore allowing that resolution to pass so I think there is a possibility that at some point in the future these people who are under indictment may well be brought before the Court. I can't recall the other two questions you had. What was the other two?

QUESTION: (inaudible)

DEPUTY SECRETARY NEGROPONTE: Why we are not members of the High Court? Well, that was a decision that was taken by the United States a number of years ago at the time of the negotiation of the International Criminal Court and is not, is not a new situation. But we certainly believe that our own domestic legal procedures are very adequate for dealing with these kinds of situations and we believe that we have a judicial system in the United States that is second to none in dealing with crimes that might be committed.

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