

## **Informal Consultations of the Security Council, 7 May 2004**

### **Briefing by Mr. James Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, on the High-Level Mission to Darfur, Sudan**

#### **Introduction**

Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on the high-level mission to Darfur. As Council members will recall, the Secretary-General deployed this mission in response to an invitation from President Al Bashir to send a team to assess the situation on the ground. This invitation was issued a few days before Mr. Egeland briefed you on the situation in Darfur on 2 April.

The mission arrived in Darfur on Wednesday, 28 April. As you can see on the first map, the mission covered all three states in Darfur by splitting up into two teams. The teams were composed of representatives from several UN agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, FAO, UNFPA and WFP, and supported by OCHA. The first team, which I led, traveled to El Fasher and visited a number of locations in North Darfur. We then proceeded to Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, from where we also visited Mornei, which I will describe in some detail. The other team, which was led by Ambassador Vraalsen, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs in Sudan, traveled to Nyala and other areas in South Darfur.

In each of these locations, the teams spoke at length with victims of the conflict, particularly internally displaced persons, as well as with local officials. We also met with senior government officials in Khartoum, including President Al Bashir, Foreign Minister Ismail and Humanitarian Affairs Minister Hamid. The assistance and cooperation provided by the Government of Sudan throughout the mission was excellent. Subsequent to the mission, I traveled to Chad to visit several refugee camps and meet with the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Chad.

#### **Massive Internal and External Displacement**

What we witnessed throughout Darfur and in neighboring Chad is a dramatic humanitarian crisis, no doubt one of the worst in the world today. It is a crisis of massive displacement, critical humanitarian needs, and extreme levels of violence and fear. We visited many IDP camps and drove by dozens of burnt down villages and what we saw and heard was devastating. Any time people are driven from their homes, their situation instantly becomes precarious – they lose their belongings and their ability to sustain themselves, as well as their community and often their families. All of these effects would be threatening enough. But in Darfur most of the displaced have also witnessed, or were themselves subjected to, terrible acts of violence as they were forcibly displaced, acts that will be described in much more detail in the briefing by Mr. Ramcharan, the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Violence has not only forced people from their homes and deeply traumatized them. Even in and around most of the IDP camps, there is a constant threat of further attacks by the Janjaweed militia. Most IDPs are also too scared to return home. Time and again, they told us that they wanted to go home but could not do so without credible assurances of protection and security. It is hard to overstate the level of fear we witnessed. In fact, in all my travels as the head of the World for Food Programme, I have never seen people who are as frightened as those displaced in Darfur.

We estimate that at least one million people have been displaced internally. An additional 100,000 refugees have fled across the border to Chad. As you can see on the second map, many of the refugees initially stayed close to the border where they were at constant risk of being attacked by militia conducting cross-border raids. This is why UNHCR, together with the Chadian authorities, has been relocating refugees away from the border areas to newly established camps. So far, more than 50,000 refugees have been relocated to five different camps in the interior of Chad. This number is increasing every day and additional camps are being planned. The Chadian authorities have been extremely supportive of these efforts but they urgently need more international assistance. Eastern Chad is a very poor, dry and difficult area under regular circumstances, so providing support to an additional 100,000 people poses tremendous challenges to the Government of Chad and the aid agencies.

Let me now turn to the situation of the internally displaced, those who remain inside Darfur but have been forced to leave their homes and villages. We estimate that only about half of the IDPs actually live in camps. The others are scattered throughout towns and rural areas, with many of them hiding from the militias and without any access to assistance. In addition, as shown on the map, there are large IDP concentrations in each of the three Darfurs, many of them with several ten thousand people living in makeshift camps. In the camps we visited, we were struck by the truly desperate conditions and the large percentage of children among the displaced. Allow me to illustrate these points with a specific example, the town of Mornei which we visited on Friday, 30 April, exactly one week ago.

Mornei is in West Darfur, southeast of the capital Geneina. It has an IDP population of more than 60,000 people. What the map does not show is that Mornei used to be a town of about 3,000 inhabitants. That was before people from surrounding villages started fleeing to Mornei in October of last year, quickly overwhelming the ability of the local community to provide assistance. The conditions in the camp are deplorable and the assistance that is currently being provided is far from adequate. A single NGO - Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) - is trying to provide health care and nutritional support for more than 60,000 people. There is also a serious shortage of water, with the average person only getting 6-8 liters a day, less than half of the required minimum of 20 liters. Malnutrition rates are already high and continue to increase, particularly among children under five. Children make up more than half of the displaced population in Mornei and their condition is deteriorating. In this camp alone, MSF is treating about 2,000 malnourished children, a number that has multiplied within the last few weeks.

## Immediate Assistance Needs and Response

What I just described – the situation in Mornei – is only one of more than a dozen major IDP concentrations in Darfur, each with several ten thousand people. Unfortunately, conditions in most of the other locations are very much comparable to those in Mornei. Malnutrition rates are increasing and crude mortality rates are reaching catastrophic levels in some areas. Water shortages and poor sanitation pose severe health threats, particularly to people who are undernourished. We estimate that between 40 and 50 percent of the affected population has access to food assistance and less than one third has access to essential health services. Shelter, clothing and other non-food items are also urgent priorities. It was not uncommon during our mission to speak to women who were sharing their only dress with two other women. The lack of clothing and adequate shelter will become life-threatening once the rains start.

As I mentioned earlier, the conditions for a voluntary and safe return of the displaced do not yet exist in most areas. This means that hundreds of thousands of farmers will miss the current planting season and will require food and other assistance at least until the harvest that follows next year's planting season. We therefore have to be prepared for a humanitarian crisis, including large-scale displacement, that will last at the very least until November 2005, another 18 months from now.

In addition to assessing the needs, our mission also looked at the capacity that exists on the ground to respond to the crisis. The first line of response – and primary responsibility - of course lies with the Government of Sudan itself, including the local authorities. However, there are two main problems relating to the Government's response – lack of capacity and the need for political will at all levels. Most of the local authorities, which have very limited capacity to provide essential services even under regular circumstances, are utterly overwhelmed by the current situation. It also seems that some local government officials still do not fully recognize the seriousness and urgency of the situation, so even the limited capacity is often not fully utilized. As a result, the Government of Sudan urgently has to reinforce its local capacity to respond, provide as much direct assistance as it can, and give clear directions to local authorities. I am pleased to say that in my conversations with senior Government officials, including President Al Bashir, I sensed a strong commitment by the Government to gear up its support. This includes a recent allocation of 20,000 tons of food assistance to the Darfurs.

Apart from providing urgently needed assistance, these developments also send an important political signal to the affected population. Their trust in the Government is very low or non-existent. Showing that the Government is providing assistance, not only short-term emergency relief but also in strengthening long-term local capacity, is an essential step towards restoring that trust and helping to achieve peace in Darfur.

Much has been done by UN agencies and a small number of NGOs to assist the affected population. But our mission found that more could and should be done even with the limited capacity of UN agencies on the ground. It also clear that both UN agencies and international NGOs have to strengthen their capacity as quickly as possible

to increase the size and tempo of their relief operations. Each of the key agencies that participated in our mission is planning to substantially reinforce their presence in the days and weeks to come. Many major NGOs are doing the same, as is the ICRC which is expanding its operation in Darfur to 50 international staff, making it one of its largest operations in the world. Getting additional NGOs into Darfur quickly is critical at this stage.

All of these operations require the urgent and generous support of donors. For UN agencies, the priorities and financial requirements for the remainder of the year are set out in two special appeals – a total of \$141 million for the response in Darfur and \$30 million for assistance to refugees in Chad. Less than 30 percent of the requirements for Darfur have been met so far and nearly all of those funds have been spent. The appeal for refugees in Chad is only five percent funded. We are making an urgent appeal to all donors to come forward with immediate contributions.

### Access Constraints

One of the main reasons why the international presence inside Darfur has been very limited have been the severe restrictions on access, particularly throughout much of last year and in the first two months of this year. Since late February, we have been able to increase our presence in all three Darfurs, mainly because the Government of Sudan has been more forthcoming with the travel permits every international staff member requires to travel to and within Darfur. We estimate that we now have access to about 500,000 of the more than one million people in need.

In all of my meetings with senior Government officials, I stressed the immediate need for full and unimpeded access to all areas of Darfur. Given the overwhelming needs, urgency and logistical challenges we are facing, any delays caused by cumbersome bureaucratic procedures cannot be accepted. Whether it is visas and travel permits for international UN and NGO staff, or import permits for equipment and supplies, delays at this stage will cost lives. The President and the Foreign Minister of Sudan gave me their strong commitment that all such requests will be granted without delay. The rapid and full implementation of this commitment is essential, particularly for international NGOs, many of which are still facing extensive delays or are being prevented by the Government from entering Darfur.

There are two other access constraints that I would like to mention briefly - insecurity and the rainy season. With regard to security conditions, we have seen a gradual improvement over the last few weeks, particularly since the signing of the ceasefire agreement on 8 April. But as the map on access indicates, a number of the main roads and several areas remain off limits for UN staff. The Government needs to re-establish security and law and order in these areas to enable relief operations to reach everybody who is in need of assistance.

Another major concern is the onset of the rainy season next month which will make many areas very difficult or impossible to access by road. We expect each of the IDP concentrations that are in yellow on the map to be inaccessible for two to six days

after heavy rains. Each red circle on the map is expected to be completely inaccessible during the rainy season. There are several ten thousand IDPs in these locations. So we are in a race against time before the rainy season starts. We have to preposition as many supplies as we can and deploy equipment that will allow us to access these areas once the rains start, including special trucks and sufficient aircraft to conduct airlifts and airdrops. Needless to say, these kinds of operations significantly increase the cost of our assistance.

### Protection and Security as Overriding Concerns

I have briefed you in detail about the humanitarian needs and assistance that is required. But as Mr. Egeland told Council members on 2 April, no amount of humanitarian assistance can protect people from being attacked. On the contrary, unless those in need are given security and protection first, any assistance we provide can make them even more vulnerable to further attacks.

The ceasefire that was agreed on 8 April is by and large holding, at least as far as the fighting between the Government and rebel forces is concerned. But the same is not true for attacks by the Janjaweed militia against civilians, including IDPs in and around camps. These atrocities have to stop. Under Article 6 of the ceasefire agreement, the parties must ensure that all armed groups under their control comply with the ceasefire. The Government of Sudan also committed itself to neutralize the armed militias.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is that these obligations are fulfilled immediately and effectively. The Government must take immediate action to control and disarm the militia and to provide protection and security to all people in Darfur. It cannot allow the killing, raping and forced displacement of its own population to continue.

President Al Bashir indicated to me that he had instructed the Sudanese army to provide protection and security, which he views as an important priority. However, the impression we had of the affected population, and I believe Mr. Ramcharan will confirm this, is that they do not distinguish between the Janjaweed militia and the regular army. They appear to be equally scared of both. This complete lack of trust has to be addressed with decisive action by the army and the police to protect the population and reign in and disarm the militia. In addition, all militia members will have to be carefully excluded from security and protection tasks. At the moment, Janjaweed are sometimes used to “guard” IDP camps, creating virtual prison camps surrounded by militias who, on a daily basis, attack women and children in the camps or on their way to search for food, fuel or water. It is hard to imagine a more cruel or frightening situation.

The parties to the ceasefire also have to implement and comply with the other provisions of the agreement. More specifically, the ceasefire commission has to be deployed as quickly as possible to all parts of Darfur. The parties are already accusing each other of violating the ceasefire. It is precisely the task of the ceasefire commission to verify and ensure compliance by the parties. The African Union, which is leading the process of establishing and deploying the international monitors, needs the full cooperation of the parties and the support of the international community. I understand

that a preparatory mission arrived in Khartoum today that will assess the conditions for the establishment of the ceasefire commission on the ground.

A larger international presence throughout Darfur, whether it is ceasefire monitors or international relief workers, is also needed to provide additional protection to the population. The Government of Sudan bears the primary responsibility for protection and security. But given the breakdown of trust and the level of fear we saw, we also need an international presence in all parts of Darfur that is as visible and numerous as possible, at least in the short to medium term.

### Conclusion

Despite the desperate conditions and the many challenges I have described, we should not lose sight of some of the progress that has been made since the last briefing to the Council. A ceasefire was agreed and direct fighting between the parties has largely stopped. Access has improved somewhat. And the Government of Sudan has expressed a strong commitment at the highest level to resolve the situation peacefully, ensure security and protection, and provide assistance to the population.

I believe that our mission has reinforced these commitments. It has also helped create a stronger sense of partnership between the Government and the UN agencies. All of us have to do everything we can to expand and accelerate the relief that is so desperately needed by more than one million people. That includes the immediate and generous support of the donors.

Unless these commitments are fulfilled and the necessary support is provided now, a serious and rapid deterioration in the situation is inevitable. If the violence is not stopped and protection is not provided, more and more people will flee their villages. If the ceasefire, which expires in about two weeks, is not renewed and the underlying political issues are not addressed, the fighting could resume and the conflict might escalate. In other words, there is a real possibility that we could face a humanitarian catastrophe in Darfur and Chad with major implications for peace and security in the region, and the prospect of tens of thousands of deaths.

Even if everybody, including the parties to the conflict, fully cooperates, the challenges remain daunting. Providing assistance and keeping people alive of course will be the most immediate priority. But we should not forget that the conditions have to be created for a voluntary, dignified and safe return of all of those who have been displaced. We have seen too many crises where long-term displacement became a fact of life for millions of people. We have to make sure that the people in Darfur will be able to return home. No doubt this will take some time and none of them should be forced to return prematurely, as has already happened in several cases. At least one million people will need assistance to rebuild their villages and lives, probably long after Darfur has disappeared from the front pages. Giving the displaced hope for the future, for a return to normal lives, is almost as important as the immediate relief they desperately need today.

Thank you, Mr. President.