UN chief meets with Sudan’s president, who is accused of genocide

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Secretary-General Antonio Guterres met with Sudan’s president, who is accused of genocide by the International Criminal Court, on the sidelines of this week’s African Union summit on grounds of “operational necessity,” the United Nations said Monday.

UN deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters that operational necessities allow the UN chief to meet with President Omar al-Bashir “from time to time” on issues such as the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur and the UN peacekeeping mission in the oil-rich Abyei region that is disputed between Sudan and South Sudan.

“That doesn’t obviate the need, of course, for respect of the International Criminal Court,” Haq said.

Al-Bashir is accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur during fighting since 2003.

Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour told local media that Guterres praised the efforts by Sudan’s government to achieve peace in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan during Sunday’s meeting in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Asked whether that was true, Haq said that “it’s typical for member states to have their own characterizations of meetings.”

“When we talk about meetings … it’s not about praise or about compliments. It’s about results,” he said.

Haq was also pressed on whether there has been a change in the policy under former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of keeping contacts with individuals indicted by the International Criminal Court to an absolute minimum.

“The policy has not changed,” Haq said.

In December, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda accused some of the court’s members, including Jordan, Uganda and Chad, of undermining the tribunal’s “reputation and credibility” by refusing to arrest al-Bashir.

She also criticized the UN Security Council, saying it has failed to take action against al-Bashir and others accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur — or to act against nations that fail to carry out arrests.