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Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a Security Council Stakeout, on the situation in Darfur

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Ambassador Rice: Good morning. I just wanted to say a few words about the briefing we just received from Joint Special Representative Gambari on the situation in Darfur. We are alarmed and gravely concerned by the dramatically deteriorating security situation in Darfur. We heard reported that May was in fact the deadliest month in Darfur since UNAMID has deployed. In which some 400 civilians were killed. In June, the government’s aerial bombardment resulted in an estimated 160 or more additional civilian deaths in Deribat. There have been numerous attacks on UNAMID peacekeepers and humanitarian workers which have resulted tragically in the deaths of a number of UNAMID peacekeepers and the kidnapping of civilian humanitarian workers. This deteriorating security situation is unacceptable and it needs to be effectively addressed.

We welcomed the progress that UNAMID has made in its deployment in getting closer to its fully mandated strength, the actions that it has taken to expand its presence on the ground and in particular to train police and others to, particularly female police, to strengthen its ability to deal with sexual and gender based violence, and I expressed appreciation for that in the council. But the government of Sudan’s continued restrictions on UNAMID’s movement, its access, its ability to its fly helicopters in defense of its mission and including protection of civilians and evacuation of UNAMID peacekeepers under attack is absolutely unacceptable and needs to be halted and we demand that the government of Sudan fulfill its obligations to allow full freedom of access and movement for UNAMID and for humanitarian workers.

Finally, we underscored the United State’s strong support for the mandate of UNAMID and its core function which is protection of civilians. And as we role over the mandate this week, the United States will work with others to ensure that the protection of civilians remains the paramount purpose and focus of UNAMID and that its ability to carry out that mandate is as effective as possible.

I’d be happy to take a few questions.

Reporter: Some would say, some say that the administration, sort of, that you have one message, and Scott Gration has another message. He was quoted recently as saying that the indictment for genocide of President Bashir makes his job more difficult. So I guess what I’m wondering is, is there something called Project AWOL that says the administration has sort of lost its way on Sudan policy? What do you make of that criticism and do you think that—is the administration moving with one voice to put pressure on President Bashir both on Darfur and on South Sudan having the referendum, or are there mixed messages, as some say?

Ambassador Rice: No, the United States is very clear and united behind President Obama’s policy towards Sudan, which has multiple components as it was outlined by Secretary Clinton and I and others and General Gration in October. We are placing very strong emphasis on full and urgent implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement as the referendum approaches and we attach great urgency to resolving the many issues that remain unresolved. At the same time, we are gravely concerned by the deteriorating security situation in Darfur, the need for accountability for justice for ending the violence and ensuring full protection of civilians. And so, the situation in Sudan is complex, there are multiple imperatives, and we’re united in our efforts to meet those imperatives.

Reporter: Does the genocide indictment make your job more difficult, just one follow up. Is that actually what he said?

Ambassador Rice: I’m not in a position to say precisely what others have said. Suffice it to say that the United States stands firmly behind justice and accountability for war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity in Darfur and elsewhere.

Reporter: Staying in Sudan, the ICC, Ocampo, is very keen to have the support of the Security Council in chauffeuring his mandate. After the president’s visit to Chad, what’s your view of Chad’s action of not arresting and what can the Security Council do to support the ICC in fulfilling that mandate? Is there anything can be done?

Ambassador Rice: I think the Security Council has expressed its view both on the ICC and the essential need for accountability for those who have committed crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes in Darfur. The United States fully supports those efforts and calls upon all members states to uphold their obligations, consistent with their obligations, with respect to the ICC. And we look to the ICC to continue its efforts to promote justice and accountability.

Reporter: Ambassador, the SG’s report said that, as you said, the security situation is deteriorating. One of the reasons is that there’s been an increase, a sharp increase, in local conflicts, tribal conflicts, partly due to the increased availability of weapons. What—why is it that weapons continue to flow in there, who’s responsible for that, there’s supposed to be an arms embargo for the entire area of Darfur.

Ambassador Rice: The continued flow of weapons into Darfur is a cause of grave concern. It is something that we have raised repeatedly in the Security Council and particularly in the context of the sanctions committee as it relates to Darfur. There is an obligation on all member states and indeed on the government and the parties to the conflict in Sudan to halt the flow of weapons there and their continued proliferation exacerbates the security situation for civilians and it’s something that we gravely and forcefully condemn. And we will continue to work as we have in the sanctions committee to strengthen enforcement of the overall sanctions regime, including as it relates to the arms embargo.

Reporter: Madame Ambassador, do you have a reaction to the attack on freedom of the press in Iraq, on Al Arabiya. We were in Baghdad. We lost 6 of our people and many injured. What can be done to prevent this? This is the second time we got bombed in Iraq.

Ambassador Rice: Very deeply distressed, by the attack on Al Arabiya. I condemn it, as does the United States. We think it’s a horrible instance of violence and particularly tragic as it targeted those who are doing their utmost to support and extend freedom of the press in Iraq and to stand up for openness and transparency which are so important to Iraq as it matures its democracy. Clearly the security situation in Iraq, when there are instances of violence whether directed against Al Arabiya or government facilities or civilians or the United States and Iraqi forces are all of grave concern and we condemn them all forcefully as any terrorist attacks.

Reporter: Do you expect the Iraqi government to do any more? What more can they do to prevent such attacks?

Ambassador Rice: I think the Iraqi government is working very hard to protect its people, its facilities and indeed all present in Iraq against terrorist attacks. This is the very high priority of the government for obvious reasons and we fully support it in its efforts to do so.