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Speech by AU Chairperson Jean Ping UN High Level Meeting on Sudan

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for convening this important High-Level Meeting. I hope that this meeting can be not only a symbolic collective commitment by the world community to the people of Sudan, at this crossroads in the history of their nation, but can also serve as a reaffirmation of the immediate practical steps that need to be taken in order for Sudan to navigate the challenges of the coming months.

In January, the people of southern Sudan will make a momentous decision, on whether to remain within a united Sudan, or to secede to establish an independent state. Elsewhere in Sudan, people will be making decisions about the nature of their governance which also hold great significance, in Abyei, in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and, we hope, in Darfur. These decisions will chart the future for new generations of Sudanese, and will allow citizens from northern and southern Sudan to redefine their relationship, and their national identities.

The Sudanese decisions, and the manner in which they are carried out, will also reverberate across Africa. Sudan is a crossroads of Africa, a meeting place for east, west and north Africa, Muslims and Christians. If the final months of implementing the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement are undertaken in a peaceable, orderly and credible manner, Sudan will serve as an inspiration for how Africa can rise to its challenges.

We are here in solidarity with the people of Sudan and their political leaders. We are here to express our determination to assist the Sudanese complete the interim period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, culminating in the exercise of self-determination by the people of southern Sudan, and to ensure a seamless transition to a new era in Sudan's history after the referendum.

We are also here to express our confidence that the leaders of Sudan, President Omar al Bashir and First Vice President Salva Kiir Mayardit, will exercise the leadership necessary to steer Sudan through the most challenging months of its history as an independent nation. They, and the people of Sudan, will deserve praise and reward for bringing the CPA to a successful conclusion.

This is the moment at which the Sudanese people, and their leaders, must rise up to the challenge of their historic responsibilities. No amount of international engagement can dilute that profound and inalienable responsibility.

At this crossroads, Africa continues to stand in solidarity with the people of Sudan. One tangible expression of this solidarity is the tens of thousands of African peacekeepers who serve in Sudan, in the two international missions, UNMIS and UNAMID. Another expression of our commitment to Sudan is the AU High Level Implementation Panel for Sudan.

The challenges that face the Sudanese leadership are many. They are seized with multiple tasks in a desperately short period of time. Any one of these tasks, alone, would be sufficient to stretch the capacity of a government that is just recovering from a long and devastating conflict. Taken together, these tasks demand not only strong leadership, but also solid international support.

The biggest of these tasks is the Referendum on self-determination for southern Sudan. The scheduled date of the Referendum is just 107 days away, and it is vitally important that the vote is conducted in a manner that is fully credible and legitimate.

The Sudanese parties have made formidable progress in establishing the mechanisms for the Referendum, and earlier this month the joint efforts of the AU and UN, represented by the AUHIP, and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Haile Menkerios, succeeded in unblocking the major impasse, which included the specification of the tasks of the Secretary-General of the Southern Sudan Referendum Commission. This breakthrough resulted in an agreement on a candidate for the post and in turn in an operational plan for the Referendum Commission.

We can expect more hurdles ahead, as the process moves through the stages of registration and compiling the voters' register, correcting the register and responding to any complaints that arise, campaigning, voting and counting the votes. The timelines for these activities are extremely tight and demanding, but we are confident that, with the continued supportive engagement of the AU and UN, the process can be peaceable, credible and timely.

Many important challenges need to be met during these few short months, to ensure that the Referendum can proceed and the choice of the southern Sudanese people can be implemented without hindrance. One of these is the completion of the demarcation of the border between northern and southern Sudan. The AU Panel and the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) have also been working jointly on this, urging the Ad Hoc Technical Border Committee to complete its task, and facilitating their efforts to do so.

Another challenge is resolving the conflict in Abyei Area, which bestrides the north-south boundary, and which has been the focus for multiple efforts at reaching a solution. The AU takes the position that existing commitments, including the Abyei Protocol in the CPA and the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on the border of Abyei, must be implemented. We also recognize that a solution that is acceptable to the communities, must be a holistic and integrated package.

One of the most important tasks in order to create a conducive environment for the Referendum and the faithful implementation of its outcome, is the negotiations between the governments of northern and southern Sudan on post-referendum arrangements. These negotiations are proceeding along four tracks, covering security, finance and economics including natural

resources, citizenship, and legal issues. The AU Panel is facilitating the negotiations, and, to that end, produced a Framework Document to help guide the parties in their overall thinking about the process and outcomes of the negotiations.

In particular, the Framework Document drew the parties' attention to the fact that, while the choice facing the people of southern Sudan is between unity and secession, the leaders of the northern and southern Sudan have many options for how northern and southern Sudan can relate, under either choice.

The areas adjacent to the north-south border hold special importance for Sudan. The governors of the ten states that lie in northern and southern Sudan, adjacent to one another, have established a forum in which they focus on their common interests, such as promoting infrastructural links and shared use of natural resources, for example by pastoral nomads, and on resolving any conflicts that may arise in the border zone.

Another important process is the 'Popular Consultation' in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, whereby the people of these states will be able to express their views on how the internal diversity of these states should be reflected in the governance of the states, and how the states themselves should relate to the Federal Government in Khartoum.

Let me repeat that one of the hallmarks of our common engagement in efforts to build peace in Sudan is the partnership between the African Union and the United Nations. In Khartoum and Juba, is exemplary, and a model to be emulated.

Nowhere is our common interest more apparent than in Darfur, where the conflict sadly remains unresolved after more than seven years. Nowhere is the need for a joint African Union-United Nations strategy, and a coordinated approach, more important.

The most visible manifestation of our common commitment to resolving the crisis in Darfur, and bringing to an end the horrendous suffering of the people of Darfur, is the UN-AU hybrid operation in Darfur, UNAMID. This is a unique and pioneering exercise in partnership. The very fact that that UNAMID exists, the largest peacekeeping operation in the world today, and a Mission with an innovative protection mandate, is a tribute to what can be achieved when our two organizations work together hand-in-glove.

Sadly, the deployment of UNAMID and the efforts of successive mediators have proved insufficient to bring peace, reconciliation and justice to Darfur.

We commend the State of Qatar for its remarkable commitment to hosting the talks between the Government of Sudan and the Darfur rebel factions, and for its extraordinary fortitude and persistence in this difficult task. We have unrelentlessly supported the efforts of the Joint Chief Mediator, Djibril Bassolé, which have included pursuing several diverse approaches to resolving the Darfur conflict over the last two years. But we cannot look on this process with any sense of achievement or congratulation. The Sudan Government and the Armed Movements have not come closer to a negotiated agreement, and while civil society representatives have made their voices heard at the talks in Doha, there has been no inclusive political process in which the various Darfurian constituencies represent themselves in negotiating an end to the conflict.

Deadline after deadline has passed. Document after document has been drafted by Sudanese and international experts. But we are no closer to a Global Political Agreement.

The time is fast approaching when we must take the bull by the horns and acknowledge that, all efforts at a partial solution, involving only those with guns, have failed. The people of Darfur have made their views perfectly clear: they want all to be represented in a process that will allow them to articulate their needs and their demands, resulting in an all-encompassing political agreement. The time for that process to begin is now.

It is against this background that the AU, on the basis of the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Darfur (AUPD), is actively working towards an inclusive political process, involving all stakeholders, armed and unarmed, to reach a Global Political Agreement for Darfur, and the need for a comprehensive reconciliation and justice strategy. Recognizing that fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Darfurian armed rebel movements was no longer the cause of the larger part of violent fatalities in Darfur, the Panel recommended that the Government of Sudan take unilateral measures to promote security, particularly in terms of increasing the safety of internally displaced persons and reducing inter-tribal conflicts. This approach was discussed and agreed at the two meetings of the Sudan Consultative Forum, in May and July this year, co-chaired by the AU and the UN.

Last month, the Government of Sudan launched its new Darfur strategy, with particular attention to security. We welcomed this, because for the first time, the Government of Sudan is moving towards a coordinated policy, involving all organs of government. Commitment and leadership from the Government of Sudan is the sine qua non for any progress in Darfur. Both the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and head of UNAMID, and the AU Panel have encouraged the Government in this direction.

Agreement has been reached that the Government of Sudan and UNAMID will work together as a matter of urgency to elaborate a common strategy to improve the security situation in Darfur. The importance of this is emphasized by the fact that the security situation in Darfur has not improved. Recent weeks have seen hundreds killed in fighting among Arab tribes, and dozens of IDPs killed by militiamen and in internal conflict within IDP camps. We have received assurances from the Government of Sudan that they will be taking steps to bring this violence to a halt, in close cooperation with UNAMID. We urge them to do so without delay, and to call the perpetrators to account.

Practically speaking, there has been no progress in bringing the perpetrators of heinous crimes, committed in Darfur, to justice.

Justice is not only a basic human right, but is a necessary prerequisite for the people of Darfur to regain confidence in the national authorities. We therefore continue to insist that the issue of justice must be part of the settlement of the conflict in Darfur. Accordingly the AU Panel is engaging the Government of Sudan on the modalities to ensure that this matter is addressed.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the African Union's initiative to convene the Sudan Consultative Forum, jointly chaired by the AU and the UN, and involving the Special Envoys to Sudan, representatives of countries neighbouring Sudan, regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and IGAD, and a multitude of other interested international stakeholders. The Forum meets every two months to discuss the challenges facing Sudan, and to coordinate support to the AU and UN mechanisms in place in the country. It has proved an invaluable forum, and will only increase in importance over the coming months.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my thanks to Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon for convening this important High Level Meeting. The presence of so many Heads of States and Government, including President Obama, senior representatives of the international community is testament to the high importance that we all attach to Sudan, and to the imperative of working together to assist the Sudanese people to resolve their problems.

The primary responsibility for the future of Sudan lies with the Sudanese people and their leaders. I turn to the Sudanese people and implore them to rise up to the challenge of forging their nation anew, whether as one state or two. The responsibility for success or failure is theirs, the rest of us can only assist.

I am confident that, should we meet again in a year's time, to welcome either a renewed and re-united Sudanese nation at the United Nations General Assembly, or to welcome instead two independent nations, the best of neighbours to one another, working out a new relationship of equality and mutual respect, one of them in the bright dawn of its life as a sovereign member of the African Union and United Nations, we will be able to look back upon a year of challenges surmounted, and a year of cooperation in pursuit of the benefit of the people of Sudan.

I thank you.

New York, 24 September 2010