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NACIONES UNIDAS

OFFICE OF UN RESIDENT AND HUMANITARIAN CO-ORDINATOR
FOR THE SUDAN

22 March 2004

Excellency,

DARFUR CRISIS

1. I have the honour to refer to your meeting yesterday with my colleague Dr Nimal Hettiaratchy who was the Acting UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator during my short absence from Khartoum. You sought a reply to a number of points to which I am pleased to respond, following my return to office.
2. I gather that you were concerned at my public statement that the situation in Darfur was akin to the biggest humanitarian and human rights crisis or catastrophe in the world today. This observation is based on our understanding – based on reports and assessments from the region – that indicate that the crisis has affected directly or indirectly all parts of the three Darfur States and the estimated 6 million residents there. This includes, in our view, at least 1 million people directly affected by the violence of which some 110,000 are refugees, and 600 – 700,000 are internally displaced. Credible reports of violence and other human rights abuses against civilians continue to reach us. We have shared relevant reports with the Government. Under these circumstances of unremitting violence and continued large scale population displacement, the Darfur situation is indeed – in humanitarian and human rights terms for the numbers of people involved – the most acutely significant situation on a worldwide basis.
3. I understand that you were also concerned by the references in the international press to comparison with Rwanda. What I said was as follows:

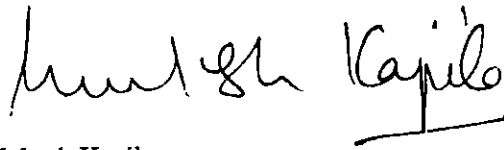
The war in Darfur started off in a small way last year but it has progressively got worse. A predominant feature of this is that the brunt is being borne by civilians. This includes vulnerable women and children (including those among the 3000 – plus IDPs in Mayo camp near Khartoum that were forcibly relocated through violent action by the authorities). The violence in Darfur appears to be particularly targeted at a specific group based on their ethnic identity and appears to be systematized. Thus it is akin to ethnic cleansing. Similar events happened in the early part of the Rwanda crisis but did not receive adequate attention – with the consequence that ultimately a genocide occurred there. In my public remarks, I said that we owe a duty to humanity to learn the lessons from Rwanda (and other situations such as the genocide in Cambodia and

ethnic cleansing in Bosnia Hercegovina) enquires into which have pointed out the responsibility that the authorities as well as the international community have for prevention and mitigation.

4. As you know, we have communicated our concerns several times to the Government with little response. I hope that I have replied to the specific questions you raised with Dr Nimal Hettiaratchy. I am at your disposal to elaborate further or respond to other queries as you deem appropriate.
5. Perhaps I may be permitted to take this opportunity to respond to the statement attributed to His Excellency the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, as carried in the Sudan Vision on 21 March. There are several inaccuracies that I would like to draw to your attention. Among these, I would highlight the following:
 - As you know yourself, the decision for my departure from Sudan was taken as long ago as January 2004, and has no bearing on the current debate over Darfur. Indeed, I am grateful for the Government's support on many issues.
 - We are unable to verify the claim by the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs that many thousands of displaced people and refugees have returned to Darfur. On the contrary, fresh reports of displacement continue to arrive daily – including the thousands who have been desperate enough to make the long trek to Khartoum. The situation in Darfur is not currently conducive to encouraging the return of refugees from Chad.
 - The Minister is quoting UN reports (which we share openly with you) out of context when he refers to improvements in humanitarian access and delivery. At best these improvements have been marginal or, in many cases, temporary. It is indeed correct that the UN has greater numerical staff presence in Darfur today than was the case several months ago. We have acknowledged this publicly. But continued insecurity, lengthy delays in obtaining clearances, and complex and confusing bureaucratic procedures continue to obstruct the ability of the UN and implementing partners to operate safely on the ground. In many cases, as I have said personally to you, this has resulted in unnecessary risks having to be taken by our humanitarian staff on the ground who are seeking to maximise their assistance.
 - His Excellency the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs has mis-represented the facts of my decision late last year to temporarily relocate UN staff from Geneina in view of the threat to them, at that time. This was done at the advice of UN security experts in my capacity as the UN's Designated Official for Security, and following consultations with the authorities under agreed procedures. The Minister tried at that time to exert strong pressure on me not to relocate staff in view of the political implications. My response was that I am obliged to consider the safety of our staff (national and international) as predominating over any other considerations.

I am grateful, Excellency, for this opportunity to re-state our views and concerns, and with assurances of my personal regard and highest consideration for you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mukesh Kapila', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr Mukesh Kapila
UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator

H.E. Nagib El Kheir Abdel Wahab
State Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Khartoum

Cc: H.E. Dr Mustaf Osman Ismail, Minister of Foreign Affairs
H.E. Mr. Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid, Minister of Humanitarian Affairs
H.E. Mr. Mohammed Yousif Abdalla, State Minister of Humanitarian Affairs