

U.N. envoy: Disarm Sudan marauders

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - The top U.N. envoy in Sudan declared last week that efforts to bring peace to Sudan's Darfur region have failed and called for a U.N. peacekeeping force of up to 20,000 troops to disarm marauding militias and provide security so over 2 million refugees can return home.

Jan Pronk said an ethnic cleansing campaign in 2003 and 2004 had been successful and a larger, more sophisticated and mobile force was needed to help end the continuing rapes and killings and stop the groups of 500 to 1,000 militia on camel and horseback that still attack villages at least once a month.

"Looking back at three years of killings and cleansing in Darfur we must admit that our peace strategy so far has failed," he told the U.N. Security Council. "All we did was picking up the pieces and muddling through, doing too little too late."

Decades of low-level tribal clashes over land and water in the vast western Darfur region erupted into large-scale violence in early 2003 when ethnic African tribes took up arms, accusing the Arab-dominated central government of neglect.

The government is accused of responding by unleashing Arab tribal militias known as Janjaweed to murder and rape civilians and lay waste to villages. It denies the charge.

An estimated 180,000 people have died in the upheaval — many from hunger and disease.

Pronk briefed the council a day after the African Union's Peace and Security Council accepted in principle the need to transform its 7,000-strong peacekeeping force in Darfur into a U.N. peacekeeping force.

The AU council extended the AU force's mandate un-

til March 31, authorized consultations with the U.N., and said a final decision would be taken by ministers at the end of March, Tanzania's U.N. Ambassador Augustine Mahiga told reporters.

The AU force has made a significant difference where its troops have been deployed. But it has been hampered by a shortage of funds, troops, and equipment and its mandate has been limited to monitoring an April 2004 cease-fire that is regularly broken by all parties and offering limited protection to civilians.

Pronk said a new type of force with sophisticated military hardware and air surveillance is needed to disarm militias, help stop attacks, and deploy to villages so the 2.2 million people who fled the violence and now live in camps can return to their homes.

"People don't go home if they are uncertain, unless there are reliable people to protect them," he said.

Pronk said he envisions a U.N. force of at least 12,000 to 20,000 troops. But a U.N. force could face problems from the Sudanese government, which has opposed non-African peacekeepers.

Sudan's charge d'affaires Yasir Abdelsalam told reporters that "the African Union is doing well" and Pronk commended its work. "This is why we think the African Union should be given more support to succeed," he said.

Tanzania's Mahiga, the current council president, told reporters the Security Council hopes that negotiations between the government and rebels on a peace agreement in Darfur will be completed before a U.N. force deploys.

Both the AU and the Security Council must authorize the hand over and no date has been set.

Clinton strikes AIDS drugs' deal

NEW YORK (AP) - Former President Clinton announced recently that his foundation has negotiated agreements to lower the prices of rapid HIV tests and anti-AIDS drugs in the developing world, potentially saving "hundreds of thousands of lives."

Under the agreement, four companies will offer the tests for 49 cents to 65 cents apiece, slicing the cost of a diagnosis in half. Four more companies will provide the antiretroviral drugs efavirenz and abacavir at prices about 30 percent less than the current market rates, Clinton said.

"Too many people die because they can't afford or don't have access to the drugs," Clinton said at his office in Harlem. "Too many people are being infected because most of the people who have the virus today have not been tested."

The products and prices will be available in 50 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Clinton said the availability of quick HIV tests at half their current cost should mean many more people will get tested.

"I hope that the availability of these low-cost testing and the quickness of the response will encourage employers all over the world, especially in the high infection rate countries, and schools, governments and others to take advantage of this," he said.

The tests will be sold by Chembio Diagnostics Inc., based in Medford, N.Y.; Organics, a subsidiary of Inverness Medical Innovations, based in Israel; Qualpro Diagnostics in partnership with Core Diagnostics, based in India; and Shanghai Kehua, based in China.

The two antiretroviral drugs that will be sold at reduced prices under the agreement are typically used when first-line AIDS drugs lose their effectiveness and are several times as expensive as first-line drugs, Clinton said.

Cipla, Ranbaxy and Strides Arcolab, all based in India, and Aspen Pharmacare, based in South Africa, relying on active pharmaceutical ingredients from Matrix Laboratories of India, will offer efavirenz for \$240 per patient per year, and Cipla will offer abacavir for \$447.

Clinton said he expects to announce price reductions of additional AIDS drugs later this year.

Liberia president vows unity

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) - Liberia's newly inaugurated president pledged to unite her war-battered country. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took the office Monday and plans to earn the trust of international donors whose aid is crucial to rebuilding it.

Liberia knew little but violence from 1989 to 2003, when a peace accord sent then-President Charles Taylor into exile and ushered in a transitional government backed by 15,000 U.N. peacekeepers. Many are hoping President Johnson-Sirleaf's election will mark an end to the West African

nation's violent past.

"Our challenge in our country is, first and foremost, the challenge of peace and security," Johnson-Sirleaf said addressing a forum of West African women in the capital, Monrovia.

She is a Harvard-educated economist and former World Bank official and is the first democratically elected female president in all of Africa. She takes office Monday as leader of the continent's oldest republic, founded by freed American slaves in 1847.

The inauguration will be attended by Laura Bush and Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice.

Johnson-Sirleaf bested the soccer star George Weah in a November runoff. Backed by most of Liberia's former warlords, Weah contested the ballot but grudgingly conceded defeat in December. International observers deemed the vote fair.

One of the president's biggest challenges will be ensuring 100,000 ex-combatants who have laid down arms under a U.N.-backed disarmament campaign are integrated into civil society. Many of them are jobless, and the wounds are still raw from a conflict that claimed 200,000 lives and displaced

half the population.

"This government represents all Liberians no matter who you are, what your name, what your tribe, what your religion, what your county or your background," she said. With massive unemployment and the country's infrastructure in tatters, Liberia will need the help of international benefactors to rebuild the economy and provide basic services such as water and electricity, lacking even in the capital.

Arriving at the forum, Sirleaf was greeted with a popular song. "No longer men in front and women in back..." the group sang.

Black Book

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during Hinson's investigation — that Hinson had already been cleared of any criminal liability in 2003, and cleared by Internal Affairs in 2004.

Hinson returned to duty and has been cleared of any wrongdoing.

"The decision that was made by Chief Wray is not supportive of the core values of this organization," said Johnson, "and did not support a truthful representation of the actions that had been made on Lt. James Hinson and other police officers."

So far there are no criminal charges against Wray. *

Formerly the assistant chief, Tim Bellamy is the now the interim police chief of the Greensboro Police Department. The Hallsboro, N.C., native has served in the department since 1983.

Melde Rutledge writes for the Carolina Peacemaker.

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