



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement by

H.E. Karen Van Vlierberge, Deputy Permanent Representative of
Belgium to the United Nations

**Briefing on Sudan/UNITAMS
UN Security Council**

08/12/2020

Mr President,

Thank you to the Under-Secretaries General Ms DiCarlo, Mr Khare and Mr Lacroix for their presentations. I will focus on three aspects: the political context, the humanitarian and human rights situation, and the prospects for Darfur.

First of all, Belgium would like to welcome the progress made by Sudan in its **democratic transition**. The formalisation of the Juba Agreements on 3 October was an important step. Nevertheless, Belgium calls on the parties to continue their commitment through constructive dialogue and to rapidly implement the agreements reached. We call on those groups that have been absent to return to the negotiating table, as this is essential for sustaining peace. The informal discussions with Abdelaziz Al-Hilu's group are a step in the right direction.

Belgium welcomes the fact that the Juba Agreement endorses the importance of justice, accountability and reconciliation in the transition. We welcome the commitment of the parties to transitional justice mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and the Special Court for Darfur. We have noted the intention of the Sudanese authorities to cooperate with the International Criminal Court, whose work we support. Land ownership and land use issues are further crucial points covered by the Juba Agreement. These issues are closely linked to the challenge of the return of displaced persons and peace-building.

Support for reconciliation is one of the strategic priorities of the Transition Assistance Mission. We are encouraged by the preparations for the start of this new mission. Since this is an integrated mission, we hope that it can put into practice a comprehensive approach in its support for the political transition.

The European Union will also offer its political support to Sudan during dialogue in the coming weeks. And the European Union continues to deliver on the commitments it made at the Sudan Partnership Conference last June, reaffirming that Sudan is a priority partner both now and in the long term. Last week's announcement of an additional humanitarian aid package for Ethiopian refugees fleeing the conflict in Tigray, bringing the total amount of European Union humanitarian aid to Sudan to €65.5 million in 2020, is testimony to this.

The **humanitarian situation** in the Sudan remains of great concern. The displacements caused by tensions between communities are compounded by the impact of severe flooding, the coronavirus pandemic and other infectious diseases. The 45,000 Ethiopian refugees must also be taken into account. Belgium commends the work of the humanitarian workers who provided assistance to eight million people in 2020. Nevertheless, we are outraged by the persistent grave violations against children in Sudan, in particular killings and sexual assaults. Moreover, it is unacceptable that groups that are signatories to the peace agreement are continuing to recruit children. We also call on the Sudanese authorities to stop using schools and hospitals for their military operations, and we recall in this regard the Safe Schools Declaration, which Sudan endorsed in December 2015.

These concerns fall under the priority we want to give to **protecting civilians**. This month, the Security Council must take a decision on how the Mission in Darfur should implement its withdrawal. We note the persistence of inter-community conflicts, and armed conflicts involving the group of Abdul Wahid, a non-signatory to the peace agreement. We hear the population's concern at the prospect of UNAMID's departure, while the mission's military and police components are still carrying out regular patrols. We welcome the commitment of the authorities to take responsibility for the protection of civilians, including through the deployment of a joint force, and the support of the Integrated Transition Assistance Mission for the implementation of the national strategy for the protection of civilians.

However, these important decisions will take time to be implemented on the ground. This is why Belgium calls for caution when discussing the possible closure of UNAMID. The challenge is twofold: to ensure the smooth transfer of civilian protection from UNAMID to the Sudanese authorities and to avoid losing the gains achieved by so many years of presence in Darfur.

Thank you.