

U.N., AU ANNOUNCE DARFUR PEACE PLAN

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The United Nations and African Union announced a two-pronged plan to bring peace to conflict-wracked Darfur, pledging Tuesday to move "expeditiously" to deploy 3,000 U.N. peacekeepers while intensifying efforts to achieve a political settlement.

Moves to speed deployment came as a confidential U.N. report charged that the government of Sudan has been flying arms and heavy military equipment into Darfur in violation of Security Council resolutions, according to a report in The New York Times.

() At the end of two days of meetings, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and AU chief executive Alpha Oumar Konare asked their envoys who have been trying to promote a political settlement to prepare "a roadmap" to bring all rebel groups to the peace table.

"There will be a two-track approach," Ban said. The U.N. and AU want "a more detailed and workable roadmap for a political process, so that this political process and military operation can proceed hand-in-hand."

After five months of stalling, Sudan sent a letter to Ban just before the start of Monday's AU-U.N. meeting giving a green light for the deployment of the U.N.'s so-called "heavy support package" to help the beleaguered 7,000-strong African Union force in Darfur. It includes 2,250 U.N. troops, 750 international police, and logistical and aviation equipment including six helicopter gunships which Khartoum initially opposed.

() According to The New York Times, the confidential report said that military planes used by Sudan to transport the arms were painted white to disguise them as United Nations or African Union aircraft and were being used for aerial surveillance and bombardments of villages, in addition to cargo transport.

() The panel's report said the Khartoum government had done little to disband armed groups and described a nighttime attack by men wearing Sudanese armed forces uniforms and traveling in 60 Land Cruisers mounted with rocket propelled grenades and machine guns on a village, according to the paper.

() "We have also agreed to intensify our political process, embracing all rebel leaders," Ban said. "We hope that the government of Sudan and the rebel groups will be committed to an ongoing political process."

Full text is available at:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/17/AR2007041701638.html>