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PRESS RELEASE

The Inter-Sudanese Political Talks on the crisis in Darfur have been going on in Abuja, Nigeria, since 23 August 2004, under the auspices of the African Union (AU) and with the support of the international community.

Over the past six days, the Parties have made commendable progress in their efforts to address the prevailing crisis and work towards its speedy resolution. Indeed, they have agreed on an agenda for the Talks and have started substantive discussions on the humanitarianism issues.

Furthermore, the Joint Commission, provided for by the N'djamena Ceasefire Agreement of 8 April 2004, met today. On that occasion, the Joint Commission was briefed by the Chairman of the Ceasefire Commission (CFC), General Festus Okonkwo, on the efforts to ensure compliance with the ceasefire and the challenges ahead. On their part, the Sudanese Parties made presentations articulating their respective positions on the status of implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement.

Upon resumption of the plenary session, in the afternoon of 28 August 2004, to complete the consideration of the humanitarian issues, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) made a declaration accusing the Sudanese Government and the Janjaweed militias of repeated violations of the Ceasefire Agreement, over the past couple of days, with aerial bombings of a number of villages.

The two movements further stated that they had decided to boycott the Talks for 24 hours, in protest against these alleged violations.

The Mediation Team, led by the AU Special Envoy for Darfur, Hamid Algabid, regrets this momentary interruption of the Talks, at a time when the Parties were engaged in a constructive dialogue.

The Mediation Team has requested the AU-led Ceasefire Commission to immediately investigate the alleged violations and to report on its findings.

The Talks are expected to resume tomorrow, with the continuation of the consideration of the humanitarian issues.

Abuja, 28 August 2004