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From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

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Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Chair, United Nations Association-UK
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Thank you for your letter of 28 April 2006 about the situation in Darfur, following UNA-UK's 2006 Annual Conference.

The UK is firmly committed to peace throughout Sudan, including Darfur. We have led the international community's efforts to stabilise Darfur and provide humanitarian support since the current crisis began in late 2003. It remains a priority: we are engaged regularly, and at the very highest level. In early May the Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn, was in Abuja to broker an agreement. This follows a number of UK Ministerial visits to Sudan since August 2004, including by the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for International Development and myself.

Despite our efforts, and those of International Partners, the situation remains precarious. There have been increased clashes between the Government, rebels and Arab Militia, and banditry and criminality are on the rise. We continue to make it absolutely clear to the Government of Sudan and to the rebel movements the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), that the use of violence is unacceptable, and that they must all take urgent steps to improve the situation.

The primary responsibility for Security in Darfur rests with the Government of Sudan, and they are failing. We have made this absolutely clear. We have therefore strongly supported the deployment of the AU mission in Sudan (AMIS) in Darfur. During his last visit to Sudan, the Secretary of State for International Development, Hilary Benn announced that the UK will provide a further £20 million to the AU, bringing our total contribution to over £50 million, which has largely been in logistical support. This is the largest AU deployment, consisting of about 7,000 military, police, and civilian personnel. The AU is doing a good job in the most difficult conditions. Where they are present there has been a decrease in attacks on civilians, including in incidents of rape against women. They are keeping key roads open, allowing the UN and other agencies to deliver much needed humanitarian supplies. However, a peace support



operation will be required for some time in Darfur. The environment in which they work is consistently evolving and long term financial support needs to be secured.

Therefore we welcome the African Union's decision on 10 March to support in principle the transition of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) to the UN. Planning is already underway, and we are providing an expert to the UN, and are pressing for the handover to take place when AMIS' current mandate expires at the end of September 2006. We are pressing the Government of Sudan to accept transition. In particular, we have made clear that they must stop obstructing the UN planning mission from entering Darfur. This mission is needed to allow the UN and AU to carry out further planning to ensure an effective handover. We will continue to support AMIS in the meanwhile, and are urging other donors to do the same.

We support stronger international action to tackle the situation in Darfur, including in the UN. The UK co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 1593, passed on 31 March 2005, referred continued human rights violations in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC). This was an historic decision: the first time the UN Security Council has referred a country situation to the ICC. The ICC is the best mechanism to tackle the principle violators of human rights in Darfur. The Government of Sudan and rebels must co-operate with the ICC investigation, which began on 13 June 2005. The ICC reported to the UN Security Council on 12 December 2005 that the investigation is making progress.

We supported UN Security Council Resolution 1591 passed on 29 March 2005, which threatened targeted sanctions against those who impede or threaten the peace process, or are responsible for violations of international humanitarian or human rights law. The UK subsequently co-sponsored the UN Security Council Resolution 1672 to which you refer which imposes targeted sanctions on four individuals from all sides to the conflict. We will consider whether further individuals should be made the subject of these sanctions should some rebel groups refuse to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement, or should atrocities continue to be committed on the ground.

As I saw when I visited Darfur in October 2005, the need for humanitarian assistance will remain for some time to come. The UK has provided over £113 million to the humanitarian effort in Darfur, and allocated a further £67 million for this financial year for humanitarian assistance to Sudan. We are also urging others to do more. But banditry, insecurity and harassment from all the parties impede the ability of humanitarian agencies to gain regular access to the worst affected areas. These agencies are making valiant efforts to continue operations and ensure basic services and food assistance are maintained and some have unfortunately made the ultimate sacrifice while trying to help the people of Darfur.

Ultimately, there can be no military solution to the problems in Darfur. Only a political process can deliver the long-term peace and security that all Sudan's people deserve. We therefore welcome the signature of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) by the Government of Sudan and the largest faction of the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) rebel group (Minni Minnawi). We now strongly urge the other rebel groups (the other SLM faction and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)) to agree and adhere to the agreement and are looking for ways to bring them on board.