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Seven Steps for Peace in Darfur

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The destructive armed conflict in Darfur continues despite regional and international efforts to put an end to it. The security situation remains precarious even with the United Nations (UN) Security Council agreement in August to send blue berets to bolster the African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission (AMIS). Canadian and international human rights groups have recently reported on increasing levels of killing and rape, and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the region. Several armed groups continue to violate the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) negotiated last year and AMIS appears unable to halt the numerous serious violations of human rights.

There are now disturbing reports of Janjaweed militia from Darfur carrying out increasingly brutal and extensive attacks on civilians in eastern Chad. Evidence gathered by human rights groups suggests that the Chadian government, like the Sudanese gov-

ernment, is failing to act against these militia as they rape, torture and forcibly displace more civilians. These reports provide proof that the conflict and human rights crisis in Darfur has now spread to Chad and neighbouring Central African Republic (CAR), causing fears of the “Somalisation” of the region.

Insecurity in Darfur

In August, in response to increasing international pressure, including Security Council discussions about deploying UN peacekeepers to Darfur, the Sudanese government offered its own “security

plan” that involved sending more than 22,000 government troops to end the crisis. Few observers believed that the government in Khartoum had much interest in protecting civilians but rather was seeking to secure a military victory for the central government. Over the next few months, human rights groups continued to document the Sudanese



A resident of Beliel camp, near Kalma, drawing a camel in the sand. The Janjaweed typically ride camels and horses. Photo: John Robinson/MCC

government's indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilians in Sudanese and Chadian villages on both sides of the border.¹

Evidence continues to show the Sudanese government's support for the Janjaweed. Human Rights Watch research indicates that in spite of all the evidence of massive atrocities committed by its Janjaweed militia, the Sudanese government resumed recruitment of new militia forces in late 2006.²

In early January, the Sudanese government and rebels agreed to a ceasefire as a first step towards ending the violence that has affected millions of people. Again, this was largely due to another spike in international pressure including successive visits by human rights groups and US officials to the region. According to the US envoys, President Omar El-Bashir agreed to the start of another peace process that included a 60-day cessation of hostilities. On January 24th, President Bashir confirmed that government forces had bombed areas of northern Darfur region, breaking the ceasefire.³

Regional Insecurity

With support from Chad and Eritrea, elements of the rebel groups that did not sign the DPA have regrouped as the National Redemption Front (NRF) and since late June have launched attacks. The lone rebel signatory of the DPA – the Sudan Liberation Army faction of Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM) – increasingly acts as a paramilitary wing of the Sudanese army.

The Janjaweed have also been attacking villages across national borders, according to reports. In November alone, more than 300 civilians were killed and at least 17,000 people displaced in Chad in ethnically motivated attacks.⁴ As noted above, the government in Khartoum is actively aiding these attacks.

Attacks on Humanitarian Organizations

Humanitarian agencies have also faced rising numbers of attacks on their workers and restrictions on their work by government forces and armed opposition groups. Evacuations of humanitarian personnel have accelerated recently in Darfur and eastern Chad. As fighting escalates with the ending of the rainy season, and fresh attacks on civilians drive thousands more people from their homes, humanitarian access to civilians in Darfur will remain se-

riously compromised unless the security situation is addressed immediately.

Gender-based Violence

As with all conflicts, a disproportionate number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the conflict are women and young girls who are most at risk of sexual abuse and gender-based violence. Since the outset of the conflict, there have been disturbing reports of sexual attacks on children under 10 years old.⁵ Violence against women has surged in 2006, with more than 200 instances of sexual assault in five weeks around the Kalma camp in South Darfur alone.⁶

Most of the victims are assaulted when they leave camps and villages to collect firewood, a necessity that forces them to walk miles into the bush where they are vulnerable to attacks by Janjaweed militia or members of the rebel groups. AU troops had been providing some protection by escorting women on firewood routes, but due to economic setbacks the AU has largely discontinued this practice, with devastating impacts for the women and girls who continue to collect firewood rather than allow their brothers, husbands, sons and fathers to run the very real risk of being killed by the assailants.

Peace and Security

Most observers agree that it will take a broad political process to halt the conflict in Darfur. But until a genuine ceasefire between groups fighting in Darfur and a broader political resolution to the conflict is achieved, the security situation will continue to deteriorate. At this point, with the AU mission under resourced, the best option for establishing security and encouraging peace remains the United Nations. It needs to assume much greater responsibility for protecting the people of Darfur, including the immediate implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Security Council passed Resolution 1706 on 31 August, 2006, extending to Darfur the mandate of the UN mission in Sudan (UNMIS), which currently has 10,000 in-country personnel monitoring the 2005 peace agreement for southern Sudan. This resolution "invited" Khartoum's consent to the deployment of 20,600 UN peacekeepers to the region, including Darfur. A reinforced UN mission in southern Sudan would support and expand the African Union's currently overstretched mission in

Darfur, which although threatened with expulsion in September, has now been extended through the end of March 2007.

The UN has begun providing the first phase of a “light support package”, releasing \$21 million to AMIS along with equipment and military advisers, police officers and civilian staff. The second phase of the UN’s support for AMIS should include additional staff and equipment. The UN hopes that a force of 17,000 peacekeepers and 3,000 police officers will eventually be deployed to support the 7,000 African troops in the region.

Nevertheless, the government of Sudan continues to send conflicting signals about its support for a UN presence, declaring that only African peacekeepers will be allowed into Darfur regardless of which hat (UN or AU) they are wearing. As recently as January 10th, the President repeated his refusal to allow UN troops saying that he would only allow “technical” UN support to help AMIS.⁷

Divisions have now emerged within the international community over whether to drop the UN-AU mission proposal in favour of a strengthened AU-led mission. The UN Human Rights Council, for example, appears unable to agree on how to resolve the crisis other than sending investigators back to the region. The final decision from December’s Special Session on Darfur largely absolves the government of Sudan of its responsibility toward civilians. Unless these divisions are quickly reconciled, the government in Khartoum will exploit them to continue to neutralize international pressure.

An immediate priority is to make AMIS as effective as it can be, but that mission, whose credibility in Darfur is decreasing, is not a substitute for the more robust joint AU-UN peacekeeping force mandated by Resolution 1706, which would be able to call upon greater resources. The situation in Darfur demands the most effective response possible, which can only come through full UN support for AMIS.

Justice for Darfur

The government in Khartoum has been largely uncooperative with all attempts to establish peace and justice in Darfur. Investigators of the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose mandate was established by the Security Council of the UN, have been blocked in their investigations by the government. The Sudanese Minister of Justice has implausibly declared that Sudan is better equipped than the ICC to investigate human rights violations occurring within its borders. In the four years since the outbreak of violence in Darfur, no major actor in conflict has ever been charged.

The Secretary General has warned that if the Sudanese government does not protect its own people or allow the international community to do it, “then the government will have to be held accountable, both collectively and individually.” The ICC is expected to announce arrest warrants soon for the leaders of systematic killings of civilians, some of them expected to be members of the government and its forces.



Women returning from collecting firewood to the Kalma IDP Camp near Nyala. Hundreds of women have been raped while collecting firewood outside the camps. NGOs have helped the women construct more efficient stoves, thus lessening the need for firewood. Credit: Paul Jeffrey/GlobalAware ©

Recommendations to the Government of Canada

1. Pressure the government of Sudan to cease offensive military flights and to fulfill its obligations to the UN Security Council by ending its military and financial support to the Janjaweed.
2. Press all parties – including the Government of Sudan, the SLM/A, the National Redemption Front and others – to negotiate seriously to reach a sustainable political solution to the conflict. The Ceasefire Commission established by the DPA must now be reconstituted to include all those involved in the fighting and it needs to sit permanently.
3. Work for a more comprehensive approach to the peace process, such as including local Arab groups, an increased role for women, and a strong focus on local conflict resolution. The DPA will be considered a failure unless all groups in Darfur are included in it and power-sharing is taken seriously.
4. Insist the Government of Sudan allow the unfettered access by humanitarian agencies to victims, especially women and children, who have been victims of sexual violence since the start of the conflict.
5. Ensure the transition of AMIS into the hybrid AU-UN mission with the appropriate mandate to allow peacekeepers to protect civilians in Darfur, eastern Chad, and CAR.
6. Pressure the Sudanese government to fully cooperate with the ICC and consider targeted sanctions against Sudan's leaders if they continue to block investigations and arrests.
7. Urge regional actors to commit to a genuine peace process for Darfur which includes at a minimum the governments and major opposition groups in Sudan, Chad, Uganda and CAR. This process could take the form of the process set up by the Inter-

governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) which resulted in an agreement for peace in southern Sudan. The AU and other relevant international partners should accompany this process.

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Endnotes

¹ Amnesty International, "Sudan: Human rights situation deteriorating in Darfur five months after peace agreement," October 5th, 2006.

² Human Rights Watch, "Letter to China on the Crisis in Darfur," January 29th, 2007.

³ BBC News, "Sudan Leader Admits Raids," January 24th, 2007.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Chad/Sudan: End Government Support to Militias," January 9th, 2007.

⁵ USAID, "The Use of Rape as a Weapon of War in the Conflict in Darfur, Sudan," October 2004.

⁶ International Rescue Committee, "Increased Sexual Assaults Signal Darfur's Downward Slide," August 23rd, 2006.

⁷ Associated Press, "Sudan leader: No U.N. troops needed in Darfur," January 10th, 2007.