

DARFUR: 'WHEN WILL THEY PROTECT US?'

Civilians trapped by violence in Sudan

"No one is fighting for the cause of the internally displaced. They want to go back home, they want to cultivate their land, they want compensation, they want peace and security, this is their priority."

Darfuri from the Masalit ethnic group

Darfur today is a place of violence and terrifying insecurity. With weapons readily available, the population is trapped in a web of armed attacks that grows ever more complex. Paramilitary forces armed by the Sudanese government grow ever stronger while more and more armed opposition groups emerge. Fighting is often between groups – including ethnic groups – formerly on the same side. One thing has not changed: it is still civilians who pay the price.

- ▶▶ The UN estimates that 4.2 million people in Darfur rely on humanitarian aid. They include 2.2 million gathered in camps for the displaced.
- ▶▶ People are still fleeing. Between January and August 2007, according to UN figures, almost a quarter of a million people fled, some for the third or fourth time.

DANGEROUS FRAGMENTATION

The Sudanese government, faced with a rebellion in 2003, exploited existing tensions to arm militias and forcibly displace hundreds of thousands of people. Since then, the situation has become far more complex.

There are continuing attacks by the Janjawid militias and air attacks by government on civilians or armed groups. There is a heavy government security presence throughout the area. There are also more than 12 armed groups, who fight not only against the government but also against each other. There is fighting between ethnic groups and, within ethnic groups, between clans.

AWASH WITH ARMS

"Because everyone has guns from government and rebels, a small incident leads to disaster."

Darfuri from the Ma'aliya ethnic group

Darfur is awash with arms. When the government armed the Janjawid it equipped them with large quantities of Kalashnikovs, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and militarized vehicles.

Government paramilitary forces in Darfur are made up largely of Janjawid: they include the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), the Popular Police and the Nomadic Police. The Border Intelligence Guards have been greatly expanded and in Darfur are nearly all former Janjawid.

Armed opposition groups such as the various factions of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are also well-armed. Some of their arms were captured from government forces or Janjawid. Some come from across Sudan's borders, from Libya, Chad and Eritrea.

CIVILIANS UNDER ATTACK

Insecurity on the roads

Large parts of Darfur are now unsafe for travel. According to the UN, in July 2007, 14 humanitarian vehicles were hijacked, 15 convoys were attacked and looted. As a result, UN and aid workers are forced to use helicopters, severely restricting their mobility.



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Makeshift camp in a schoolyard in Kas Town, south Darfur



Attacks on humanitarian aid

Nearly every aid agency has suffered armed attacks and nearly every agency has reduced its staff. In July 2007, nine humanitarian centres were attacked and eight aid workers were killed on duty. Some agencies have had to pull out altogether, after government harassment or armed attacks. In December 2006, armed men broke into three aid agency bases in Gereida. One aid worker was raped, another was badly beaten and 12 vehicles were stolen. In July 2007, having failed to obtain credible assurances that attacks would not continue, Oxfam withdrew from Gereida.

Attacks by government and Janjawid forces

In May and June 2007, more than 2,500 people fled from south Darfur, making a painful 10-day trek to the Central African Republic. The refugees said they fled after Janjawid and government forces attacked Daffaq between 12 and 18 May.



The villages of Mazrouk and Um Sa'ouna in south-east Darfur were each attacked by about 300 Janjawid, with vehicles, in August 2007. In Mazrouk two civilians were killed, in Um Sa'ouna about seven. The Janjawid forces were led by a former SLA member and supported by bombing raids by government Antonov airplanes. Such aerial bombardments have been prohibited by UN Security Council Resolution 1591 of 2005.

Sexual violence

"They were raped by any man who wanted. Whenever any man came to them, the women were supposed to comply otherwise they were badly beaten."

Darfuri witness, speaking to UN investigators

Rape and sexual slavery continue to be carried out with complete impunity. On 26 December 2006, Deribat, an SLA stronghold, was attacked by armed men on horses and camels, accompanied by vehicles and aircraft. The people fled to the hills. About 50 women were abducted and taken to a dry river bed where they were surrounded by armed men and systematically raped. Many children watched what happened to their mothers and some were raped themselves. The women were held as sex slaves and also had to cook and serve food for their captors.

Women interviewed by UN human rights investigators were held for about a month; some escaped after an SLA attack. The UN named commanders and members of the PDF in connection with the violence, and Fur men belonging to the SLA/Abu'l-Gasim faction were also said by witnesses to be involved.

Displaced women and girls in camps are vulnerable if they go outside to collect firewood or go to market, and also face rising violence within camps and within their families. Hundreds of rapes were recorded by the UN and NGOs. Three of the women raped were relief workers.

The Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) took up arms against the Sudanese government in Darfur in 2003, complaining about the marginalization of the area and the failure to protect sedentary people from attacks by nomads. In response the Sudanese government armed and supported local militias, known as the Janjawid, as a proxy force against the armed opposition groups. The Sudanese government and the Janjawid deliberately targeted civilians of the same ethnicity as the armed groups.

As famine loomed in 2004, a massive aid operation involving more than 15 UN agencies and 80 humanitarian organizations was launched. In mid-2004, an African Union (AU) force, AMIS, was deployed in Darfur, but it has faced resource constraints and obstacles. On 1 August 2007 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1769 setting up an AU-UN hybrid peacekeeping force for Darfur, UNAMID, with more than 26,000 personnel.

In May 2006 a Darfur Peace Agreement was signed between the government and one armed group, the SLA/Minawi, led by Minni Minawi, who split from the SLA led by Abdel Wahed Mohammed Nur. Only a few armed groups have since signed the peace agreement and continuing negotiations for a new peace accord are fraught.



Ethnic conflicts

Hundreds of people have been killed in 2007 in fighting between ethnic groups. As arms have proliferated, disputes that in the past would be resolved by traditional reconciliation processes have led to mass killings.

The fiercest attacks have been by the Northern Rizeigat on the Tarjem. Both groups identify themselves as Arabs, and both groups have provided members of the Janjawid and the PDF. On several occasions in 2007, Northern Rizeigat men, mostly dressed in Border Intelligence uniforms, accompanied by vehicles mounted with RPGs or machine guns, attacked Tarjem villages, burning homes and systematically looting. They shot indiscriminately at the Tarjem. Most of the dead were armed Tarjem villagers fighting back, but old men and those too weak to run also died. According to reliable sources, more than 400 people were killed between January and August.

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Former militia, now in Popular Defence Forces, Darfur

One of the most recent attacks took place on 31 July during a ceremony to commemorate those killed in a previous attack. The government army was warned the day before that armed men were massing in the area, but took no action. At least 68 people were killed.

Abuses by armed groups

A number of armed opposition groups, including the JEM and the various SLA factions such as SLA/Minawi, have committed abuses including kidnapping, detaining and sometimes killing opponents and attacking humanitarian convoys.

Gereida, 136 km south-east of Nyala, used to be a small town of 12,000 people in an area of Masalit farmers and Fallata cattle-herders. Since 2003, the town has swollen and is surrounded by camps for the displaced containing more than 130,000 people. During 2006, Gereida's civilians and displaced were left unprotected. The government actually increased insecurity, for instance by obstructing aid workers through a

fuel embargo and roadblocks. The 100-strong AMIS force deployed there has failed to provide protection: villagers complain that even when they call AMIS during an attack they seldom help.

After the 2006 peace agreement, the SLA/Minawi controlled the area. They are implicated in summary killings of about 42 people. A number of Masalit men were detained by the SLA/Minawi in September 2006 after an attack on their camp; the bodies of eight of those detained were found in January in a mass grave.

Camps for the displaced

"Look at the camps – there is no security, there are no secondary schools. This generation will be the generation of anger, boys and girls."

Darfur political activist

Within the displaced camps, which are constantly expanding beyond their capacity, there is increasing politicization and militarization. Frustrated young men, bitter against the government of Sudan and mistrustful of outside forces, turn to armed groups.

Leaving the camp is still risky, especially for women, and violence within families is reportedly rising. The camps also come under attack from outside. On many occasions members of Janjawid groups have terrorized camps, kidnapping civilians and demanding cattle and ransom.

On 21 August 2007, after two policemen were killed, hundreds of police, army and Border Intelligence Guards raided Kalma Camp near Nyala, which was sheltering more than 90,000 people. As they entered the camp they beat displaced people with gun butts, looted shelters and arrested some 35 displaced men. The police took the detainees to Nyala, where they were tortured.

ACTION NEEDED NOW

"The NGOs provide food and blankets. They cannot provide security."

A displaced person from Mershing camp

For years the internally displaced have campaigned for a UN force to protect them. At last, three years after the UN Security Council first passed a resolution about Darfur, the Security Council has set up a hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping force of more than 26,000 and the Sudanese government has accepted its arrival.

The force, UNAMID, must be rapidly deployed. It needs to replace the existing AU force, AMIS, by 31 December 2007 and achieve full operational capacity to implement its mandate as

soon as possible. That is a daunting task. The government of Sudan has a long track record of accepting interventions under pressure, only to break its promises when the international community looks elsewhere. The work of the AU and UN in Sudan has been consistently hindered by delays in obtaining visas, travel authorizations or import permits. The AU has been hamstrung by not having enough aircraft and by having to gain authorization each time its personnel needed to travel by air. UNAMID must be well resourced and have rules of engagement which reflect its mandate and freedom to move anywhere in Darfur.

In addition to its general mandate to protect civilians, two related areas are vital: the return of displaced people and the protection of women.

- ▶▶ The peacekeeping mission should help to ensure safe, voluntary and sustainable return of the displaced to their homes. This needs to include the protection of those returning home and a visible and lasting protective presence in areas after return.
- ▶▶ The peacekeeping mission should ensure the protection of women, and other vulnerable groups, from violence, and must formulate a detailed action plan to protect women from gender-based violence. Peacekeepers should work in close co-operation with AU and UN experts, with the participation of women and civil society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the government of Sudan

- ▶▶ ensure the protection of civilians in Darfur, end impunity and halt all violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law
- ▶▶ in co-operation with AMIS and UNAMID, take effective measures to disarm the Janjawid militias
- ▶▶ co-operate fully with the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1769 (2007) and 1591 (2005, on the arms embargo) and other UN resolutions.
- ▶▶ co-operate fully with the deployment of UNAMID, including by swiftly issuing visas and allowing access to Darfur for personnel and equipment. Ensure that

peacekeepers, including human rights monitors, have full freedom of movement

- ▶▶ allow unhindered access to Sudan including Darfur for humanitarian agencies and human rights organizations

To the United Nations

- ▶▶ ensure that UNAMID is trained to act robustly and proactively to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians
- ▶▶ ensure that UNAMID is deployed urgently and resourced effectively, with a strong human rights component. This must include the capacity and authority to monitor, investigate and report publicly on human rights violations, including rape and other sexual violence
- ▶▶ ensure that UNAMID is trained in human rights and humanitarian law and that no one reasonably suspected of responsibility for human rights abuse joins the force
- ▶▶ ensure that an effective disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme is implemented for all armed groups operating in Darfur

To the African Union

- ▶▶ work expeditiously with the UN to reinforce AMIS so as to ensure that the civilian population in Darfur is effectively protected
- ▶▶ take all steps necessary to speedily implement UN Security Council Resolution 1769

To armed groups operating in Darfur

- ▶▶ publicly commit to respect international humanitarian law and to protect the lives and livelihoods of civilians in areas under their control
- ▶▶ ensure that combatants do not commit human rights abuses against civilians, and immediately remove any combatant suspected of abuses against civilians from situations where they might recur
- ▶▶ publicly commit to ensure safe and unrestricted access to humanitarian organizations and international human rights monitors in all areas of Darfur

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