
RI BULLETIN

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Sudan: U.S. support to the African Union forces can stop violence against women

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice's decision to address the issue of violence against women in Darfur during her recent visit to the region is an important step as part of the U.S. Government's on-going effort to end violence and impunity there. As the Secretary has rightly pointed out, ending violence against women in Darfur requires better security on the ground. Where visible African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) forces are present, violence has diminished. AMIS forces are currently being expanded to 7,700 from the current 3,000. While this is a positive development, the force as it is currently configured is unable to provide adequate protection for the women of Darfur because of inadequate numbers of troops and an insufficiently robust mandate.

Refugees International is also concerned that in the context of U.S. support to the African Union in planning this mission, insufficient attention is being paid to potential sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping troops and the need for HIV-awareness and prevention among them.

AMIS troops operate under a mandate that allows them to protect civilians encountered who are "under imminent threat and in the immediate vicinity, within the limits of mission capability," as civilian protection is the Government of Sudan's responsibility. In the Abu-shouk displaced persons camp that Secretary Rice visited in North Darfur, women have to leave the relative safety of the camp to gather firewood. RI and other agencies have documented that women are frequently raped when they leave the camp, sometimes by Janjaweed militia but also by men in the Sudanese army and police who are stationed outside the camp. Clearly, the Government of Sudan is failing in its responsibility to protect civilians.

Humanitarian agencies in North Darfur asked AMIS peacekeeping forces to patrol the firewood routes in order to discourage rapists from attacking women. While this operation was successful in Abu-shouk, these actions are not necessarily being replicated throughout Darfur, as individual commanders can interpret their mandate differently. The African Union must strengthen the current mandate for AMIS troops to give priority to civilian protection and give them the explicit authority to carry out operations against the Janjaweed and the Government of Sudan's forces that collaborate with them to attack women.

Even 7,700 troops will not be sufficient to provide protection for the women of Darfur. A recent International Crisis Group report argued that 12-16,000 troops are urgently needed in Darfur to provide adequate security. The mandate, however, is perhaps even more important. A clear and strong mandate to protect civilians is critical if AMIS is to be able to prevent Darfurian women from being attacked and raped.

The United Nations is currently addressing the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse of vulnerable women by its peacekeeping troops in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. While the UN has worked to ensure that UN peacekeeping troops are being properly trained and that

disciplinary standards are in place, similar attention and training are not currently being provided to AMIS. Since sexual exploitation and abuse of vulnerable women is not limited to UN peacekeeping troops but has plagued militaries around the world, it is imperative that AMIS troops be held to the same standards as UN peacekeeping troops. The U.S. is addressing this issue in its own military and can provide training and assistance.

African militaries have high rates of HIV infection. Although the UN Security Council has declared mandatory inclusion of HIV prevention programs in UN peacekeeping missions, there are currently no plans to do so for the African Union. A recent U.S. Department of Defense initiative has attempted to strengthen African militaries' attempts to assess HIV infection rates and train its soldiers in HIV awareness. This initiative must be expanded to include all of the African troops that are being deployed to Darfur. The U.S. should provide support in ensuring that these peacekeeping troops are trained in HIV awareness and prevention.

Therefore Refugees International recommends that:

- The U.S. Congress ensure that adequate funds for the AMIS peacekeeping mission are given, particularly for logistic support;
- The U.S. government provide training and support to countries contributing troops to AMIS on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse;
- The U.S. government provide training and support to countries contributing troops to AMIS on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

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