

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AFR 54/004/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 032
15 February 2007

Sudan Blocks Visit by the UN Human Rights Council High-Level Mission

The Council Must not Allow Sudan to Obstruct its Efforts to Contribute to the Protection of Civilians in Darfur

Amnesty International deplores the refusal of the government of Sudan to cooperate with the Human Rights Council by failing to issue the visas necessary for the High-Level Mission to carry out its work inside the Sudan in fulfilment of its mandate. This refusal blatantly ignores the Council's Decision S-4/101 to establish the Mission, which was adopted by consensus following intense consultations that included the participation of representatives of the Government of Sudan.

Amnesty International notes the High-Level Mission's decision to continue work outside Sudan and to present a report to the Human Rights Council as mandated. Although it is deeply regrettable that the Mission will not be able to travel to Darfur, the organisation believes that the Mission can still make an important contribution by suggesting practical measures to protect the civilian population in Darfur and to bring to justice those responsible for the gross and systematic violations of human rights and grave breaches of international humanitarian law committed in Darfur. Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council to address urgently at its fourth session the human rights situation in Darfur on the basis of Mission's report and the other information already available to it and to identify measures that the government of Sudan and the international community must take without further delay to protect the civilian population in Darfur.

Amnesty International is also dismayed that the refusal by Sudan to cooperate with the High-Level Mission marks the third time since the creation of the Human Rights Council less than a year ago that a government has refused to extend the necessary cooperation to fully implement the decisions of the Council. Israel refused to cooperate with both the fact-finding mission established by the Council at its first special session and with the high-level fact-finding mission established at the third special session. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that this negative trend seriously hampers the ability of the Council to take effective action to promote and protect human rights in accordance with its mandate. The organization strongly encourages the Council to find effective means to address non-cooperation by governments with the Council and its mechanisms.

Background:

Earlier Amnesty International welcomed the decision by the Human Rights Council to dispatch a High-Level Mission to assess the human rights situation in Darfur and the needs of Sudan in this regard. Amnesty International considers that there is already clear and compelling evidence of both gross and systematic violations of human rights and grave breaches of international humanitarian law committed in

Darfur by the Janjawid and the Sudanese armed forces as well as evidence of the continuing close links between the two. According to current information reaching Amnesty International on a regular basis, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continue unabated and civilians continue to be murdered, raped and forcibly displaced.

In Decision S-4/101, adopted by consensus on 13 December 2006, the Human Rights Council established a High-Level Mission to assess the human rights situation in Darfur and the needs of Sudan in that regard. The Council asked the Mission to report to its fourth session, which starts on 12 March 2007. On 14 February the Mission announced that it could no longer allow continued uncertainty regarding visas from Sudan to impede the continuance of the Mission.

In Resolution S-1/1, adopted on 6 July 2006 by 29 votes to 11 with 5 abstentions, the Council decided to dispatch an urgent fact-finding mission headed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. In Resolution S-3/1, adopted on 15 November 2006 by 32 votes to 8 with 6 abstentions, the Council decided to dispatch a high-level fact-finding mission to travel to Beit Hanoun to assess the situation of victims, address the needs of survivors, and make recommendations on ways and means to protect Palestinian civilians against any further Israeli assaults. Neither mission was authorized to enter Israel.