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Sudan: Amnesty International deplores loss of life in Kalma Camp, Darfur

Amnesty International calls on the government of Sudan to desist from the use of lethal and disproportionate force in their policing activities. The death of tens of civilians in Kalma camp, Darfur, on Monday 25 August at the hands of Sudanese Security Forces is unacceptable and unjustifiable.

Although there are conflicting reports on the number of people who died or were injured, sources in Kalma Camp informed Amnesty International that at least 47 people were killed during the operation, among them many women and children.

This tragic loss of life starkly illustrates – again - the failure by the government of Sudan, the armed opposition groups and the peacekeeping force in Darfur known as the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) to protect an already beleaguered civilian population, most of whom live in camps for the internally displaced scattered in Darfur and as refugees across the border in eastern Chad.

On Monday 25 August, Sudanese security forces entered Kalma camp in South Darfur, the largest Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Darfur, with a population of 90,000 IDP. It is reported that the security forces intended to disarm and arrest those residents of Kalma Camp in possession of weapons. Kalma camp is still surrounded by government forces.

It is deplorable that the Sudanese government authorities have not explained in detail the events leading up to the incident in Kalma camp, the circumstances that led to the tragic loss of life or the number of civilians injured. The Sudanese government must promptly initiate an investigation into the deaths and the circumstances surrounding the security operation in and around Kalma camp.

Amnesty International reminds the Sudanese security forces of their obligation to protect civilians and not harm them. In addition, they must immediately let in humanitarian aid agencies and human rights monitors and facilitate their work.

Amnesty International warns that the deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians or the use of civilians as human shields by any side to the conflict constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law.

Amnesty International calls on the armed opposition groups in Darfur to respect the civilian character of IDP camps. Armed opposition groups must not operate in or from IDP camps or engage in activities that compromise the safety of civilians living in such camps. In addition, armed opposition groups must not arm or provide weapons to civilians inside IDP camps.

Amnesty International is surprised that the UNAMID peacekeeping force which normally patrols Kalma camp did not intervene or seek to engage the Sudanese authorities with a view to resolving the clashes that ensued, and putting in place adequate measures to retain the civilian character of IDP camps.

The UNAMID peacekeeping force has responsibility under United Nations Resolution No. 1769, to protect civilians in Darfur, including in camps for the internally displaced. Its effectiveness and reputation will depend in part on the manner in which it discharges its mandate to protect vulnerable civilians in Western Sudan.

Amnesty International reiterates its call upon the international community to provide the UNAMID peacekeeping force with adequate military transport and other hardware, which will enable the force to adequately protect civilians in Darfur.

Background

300 000 people have so far died from conflict related causes in Darfur. More than 2.3 million have been displaced with most living in IDP camps and refugee camps in eastern Chad. Kalma Camp is the largest of IDP camps in Darfur. Despite the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in 2006, conflict still rages. The armed opposition groups continue to splinter and fracture and this has made the attainment of a peace deal problematic. UNAMID started operating in Darfur on the 1st January 2008, but troop levels continue to stagnate at less than 10,000.

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