

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 54/101/2003 (Public)  
News Service No: 267

**Embargo Date: 27/11/2003 01:00 GMT**

## **Sudan: Humanitarian crisis in Darfur caused by Sudan Government's failures**

There is compelling evidence that the Sudanese government is largely responsible for the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Darfur in the western Sudan, Amnesty International said today after its delegates returned from visiting refugee camps in eastern Chad.

"At the very least the Sudanese government has totally failed in its obligation to protect its own people," said Amnesty International. "The testimonies of scores of refugees describing attacks on rural communities by militias which included members of the armed forces or other security forces has led us to the bleak conclusion that at least some elements in the army are encouraging this devastation."

Since April some 500,000 refugees fleeing nomad militias, usually known by the local people as "Arabs" or *Janjawid* (armed men on horseback), have flooded into towns in Darfur with little capacity to cope with the crisis. Within Darfur itself, the rural areas are reported to be devastated. Thousands of refugees have crossed the border to Chad.

Amnesty International delegates visited nine settlements in eastern Chad, from Tine in the north to Birkengi in the south. They spoke to refugees (including members of an Arab group which had refused to join the militias), Chad government officials and representatives of UN and non-governmental organizations. They described a dangerous humanitarian situation.

"The refugees are in an extremely vulnerable position. They have little or no food and difficult access to water, they live in precarious shelters and suffer badly from the cold at night."

"We heard how hungry refugees returned to their villages to search for food and were killed. There have also been cross border raids by militias; in one, on Kolkol camp, a woman, Aysha Idris was killed and cattle were taken; three men pursuing the militia were also killed."

In Chad, there has only been a limited distribution of food and non-food items to the most vulnerable refugees in a few sites. Some refugees have not yet been accessed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the local authorities because of poor road infrastructure and lack of adequate transport for long distances. Many have not yet been properly registered.

"Refugee after refugee, in widely scattered areas, told how militias armed with Kalashnikovs and other weapons, including bazookas, often dressed in green army uniforms, raided villages, burnt houses and crops and killed people and cattle," said the

Amnesty International delegates. "We had numerous descriptions of deliberate killings and allegations of abduction and rape by the *Janjawid*. Some refugees described how villages were bombed by government planes. People detained by the military security described torture and appalling conditions of detention."

"The situation in Darfur is at risk of rapidly degenerating into a full-scale civil war where ethnicity is manipulated, and some will want to take revenge for those killed, seek arms to defend themselves or join armed opposition groups," Amnesty International said. "It also has the potential for a major humanitarian disaster. Many attacks have happened before farmers were able to harvest; fields have been burnt, people killed and cattle looted, and homes destroyed. On top of this the government is severely restricting humanitarian access to the displaced."

"The international community must show the same determination and use the same pressure to end the conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Darfur as it is doing in the peace process to end the war in the southern Sudan between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA)," the organization stressed.

Amnesty International is calling on the Sudanese government to acknowledge and address the political and human rights crisis in Darfur and to take steps to restore peace and security in the areas of conflict. The government should:

- take immediate action to protect civilians in Darfur from deliberate attacks by armed groups;
- ensure unimpeded and secure access for humanitarian organizations to all internally displaced people in Darfur;
- strengthen the Tripartite Commission set up under the ceasefire agreement in September with international monitors including human rights monitors.
- ensure they are able to travel freely throughout the region to oversee respect for the ceasefire and investigate and report publicly on ceasefire breaches;
- hold the perpetrators of human rights abuses, including soldiers of the Sudanese army and members of militia groups, accountable, by bringing them to justice in fair trials, without the application of the death penalty or other cruel, inhumane or degrading punishment;
- set up an independent and impartial Commission of Inquiry which should examine the complex causes of the crisis, report publicly and make recommendations which must be implemented immediately; and
- provide redress and rehabilitation for the victims of human rights abuses.

Furthermore, all armed groups active in Darfur, including the government-aligned Arab militias, the opposition Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the opposition Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), should declare their commitment to human rights and ensure that their combatants do not commit human rights abuses, including deliberate killings of civilians, rape, torture and attacks against civilian targets. They should also ensure unimpeded and secure access for humanitarian organizations and ceasefire monitors in all areas.

The Chadian authorities and the international community, including UNHCR and other UN agencies, should:

- ensure that refugees from the conflict in Darfur are not forced to return to areas where they would be at risk of human rights abuses;
- use every possible influence to end human rights abuses in Darfur and avert a worse human rights crisis;
- provide support to humanitarian organizations bringing relief to the victims of the conflict inside Darfur or in refugee camps in Chad;
- make all possible efforts to ensure that refugees in Chad are in locations where they will not be at risk from cross-border raids; and
- ensure that the basic protection and humanitarian needs of the refugees and internally displaced persons are met.

## Background

In an apparent attempt to conceal the dangerous consequences of this violent political conflict, the Sudanese Government has barred or severely restricted the outside world from access to the internally displaced people in Darfur. Amnesty International delegates travelled to Chad from 12-26 November to talk to the Sudanese refugees scattered along the border.

The sedentary population of Darfur have complained for years that nomad militias armed by the government were raiding and looting their villages and killing their people. The government has said that the problem was one of desertification and competition for scarce resources and denied that security forces failed to act against abuses.

In January an Amnesty International delegation visited Darfur and called for the conflict to be solved by reconciliation. The organization called for an impartial Commission of Inquiry to be set up to examine the complex causes of the crisis and make recommendations to resolve it which should be implemented immediately.

In February 2003 a group of Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit and other agricultural groups formed the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) which attacked Sudan government forces saying they had failed to protect the farming population. Another group formed an armed group known as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

From February, the conflict worsened; the SLA attacked the security forces, including El Fasher military airport, while the Sudanese authorities appear to have given free rein to the pro-government militias to attack the sedentary population whose members had joined the SLA or the JEM armed groups.

One refugee at Birak refugee camp told delegates: "The Arabs and the soldiers came to Amir, our village, at 8am with Kalashnikovs, bazookas, and another weapon mounted on a vehicle. They killed 27 persons. There were also bombings in Amir. Before, we had good relations with the Arabs. The problem is the involvement of the government."

Another refugee in Birak from Kishkish said: "The militia said to us: 'You cultivate the fields and the rest is ours. We have the government in our right hand, you are in the left hand. You have nothing for yourselves.'"

Yet another refugee in Birak from Jafal said that the *Janjawid* told them: "You are opponents to the government, we must crush you. As you are black, you are slaves." The government is on our side. The government plane is on our side."

In September 2003, a ceasefire was agreed between the Sudanese government and the SLA/M under the auspices of the Chadian government. A committee, the Tripartite Commission, composed of five members each of the Sudanese army, the SLA/M, and the Chadian military, was created to monitor cease-fire violations and oversee an exchange of prisoners between both sides. In October, the cease-fire was extended until 4 December, the date at which negotiations are set to start. However, bombings by the Sudanese air force, attacks by Arab militias and attacks by the opposition Justice and Equality Movement have continued.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44

20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>