

# Open Letter to the Assembly of the African Union Asking Member States to Ensure Protection of Civilians in Eastern Chad

29 June 2006

Your Excellency,

In 2004 the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council acted urgently to send ceasefire monitors to Darfur where Janjawid militias, supported by Sudan armed forces had killed tens of thousands and forcibly displaced nearly two million civilians. The arrival of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) and the statement of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) on 20 October 2004 that the AMIS should “protect civilians whom it encounters under imminent threat” sent a strong message that the AU would not remain a silent witness to the destruction of African lives.

The Assembly of the African Union has repeatedly condemned in the strongest terms the attacks against civilians and has also expressed its “determination to take appropriate measures against those responsible for further obstructing the peace efforts in Darfur” (Assembly/AU/Dec.68 (IV)).

Today Amnesty International is publishing a report, which we enclose, entitled: *Chad/Sudan, Sowing the seeds of Darfur: Ethnic targeting in Chad by Janjawid militias* which focuses on forced displacement of communities in eastern Chad. We are asking the Assembly of the African Union to act firmly again on behalf of civilians systematically targeted by Janjawid militia crossing over from Sudan to attack, kill and loot communities in Chad. Some 50,000-75,000 people from villages in Eastern Chad have become displaced and only a very few receive protection or humanitarian aid.

We ask member states to take the opportunity of the Assembly meeting in Banjul, The Gambia, to impress upon the government of Sudan its primary responsibility to protect civilians in Sudan, to prevent cross-border attacks against civilians in Chad by the Janjawid, and to disarm them in accordance with the Darfur Peace Agreement.

We are also calling on the government of Chad to deploy military forces wherever necessary to protect civilians. The government of Chad should, if necessary, seek assistance from the AU, the UN or the European Union in order to enhance its protection and ensure that civilians, including the internally displaced and refugees, are no longer targeted.

The Assembly of the African Union and individual AU member states have a critical role to play in persuading the government of Sudan to cooperate fully with the UN and to facilitate the rapid deployment of UN peacekeepers with a strengthened mandate to protect civilians. AU members and AMIS will continue to make a key contribution to such a force.

We urge the AU Assembly to adopt a clear programme and timetable for action to address the current human rights crises affecting Darfur and eastern Chad. We would ask the African Union to consider taking further action in the future if the government of Sudan fails in its obligation to disarm the Janjawid. Such further action might include the imposition of sanctions and other measures on Sudan in accordance with Article 23 of the AU Constitutive Act, which provides for such measures against any member state that “fails to comply with the decisions and policies of the Union”. It might also include reconsidering the AU agreement in January 2006 to give Sudan the Chairmanship of the AU for 2007.

In this respect we note that numerous decisions of the PSC and ceasefire agreements brokered by the AU have called for the Sudanese government to disarm the Janjawid. For instance, the communiqué of the PSC of 10 March 2006 which “supported in principle the transition from an AMIS to a UN operation” also called on the Sudan government to “expeditiously implement its stated commitment to neutralize and disarm the Janjaweed/armed militias”. A firm engagement to disengage, redeploy, and disarm the Janjawid within five months is also contained in the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA).

I very much look forward to the outcome of your deliberations in Banjul and a renewed initiative by the AU to ensure the protection of civilians, specifically in eastern Chad and Sudan.

Yours sincerely

For Irene Khan, Secretary General