

Open Letter to UN Security Council Members on Darfur

June 24, 2015

Excellency,

We, the undersigned 83 representatives of Sudanese and international humanitarian and human rights organizations and advocates, write to you requesting the renewal of UNAMID's mandate in Darfur. The UN has rightly described the crisis in Darfur as the world's largest humanitarian crisis in the twenty-first century. Last March witnessed the 12th anniversary of the genocide in Darfur. This year also marked the 10th anniversary of two important occasions in this respect: 1) The report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, examined by the UN Security Council in early 2005, and 2) The referral of the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in March 2005.

Darfur is the genocide of the twenty-first century *par excellence*. It is one of the longest-running tragedies in recent history. The genocide in Darfur so far claimed over 400,000 lives; rendered around 4.4 million dependent on humanitarian assistance, including at least 2.5 internally displaced persons; and forced around 400,000 to cross the borders of Sudan into Chad and the Central African Republic as refugees. The abhorrent crime of rape is endemic in Darfur as thousands of women and girls were sexually assaulted while thousands of homes and livestock were destroyed or looted.

This year alone, the military offensive carried out by the government of Sudan (GoS) and its allied Janjaweed militia resulted in the killings of hundreds of civilians and the displacement of over 150,000 others. GoS's claim before the UNSC that the conflict is in "isolated pockets" and that it is mostly tribal violence contradicts the reality on the ground. Such claims are not supported by the findings of the UN or UNAMID or any independent media outlets. Darfur is a state lacking functioning judiciary or effective rule of law.

So far, the regional and international responses have failed to end the genocide in Darfur. In 2007, the UNSC took the right decision of deploying UNAMID under chapter 7 of the UN Charter and mandated it to protect civilians in Darfur. Alas, the horrific security and humanitarian crisis that necessitated the deployment of UNAMID in 2007 still remains. We believe that UNAMID's bases and patrolling of IDP camps offer the last vestige of protection for growing numbers of civilians in Darfur who otherwise have no other respite from the pervasive and unpredictable violence and brutality. According to local sources on the ground, including some leaders of IDP camps to whom we have spoken, Darfur would be worse-off without the presence of UNAMID, flawed as it is. Nevertheless, the people of Darfur deserve a robust, strong and independent peacekeeping mission.

Below are some features of the ongoing armed conflict in Darfur, which clearly urge the UNSC to renew the mandate of UNAMID in Darfur and ensure that it is squarely focused on effectively implementing its protection of civilians' mandate:

1. The humanitarian and security situations are deteriorating every day. Aerial bombardment against civilian populations and their habitat continues unabated. Harassment and attacks on IDP settlements have increased. The rape of over 200 women and girls in late October 2014 by the government's soldiers in Tabit village (North Darfur State) is not an isolated case, but rather a systematic policy used by the government armed forces and militias as a weapon of war and terror. It is evident that the current brutal tactics of the security forces seek to dismantle the IDP camps, which are considered by GoS as symbols of the genocide in Darfur.
2. The Janjaweed militia has been reconstituted as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and are incorporated in the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) as a fighting force. RSF has been carrying out a horrific scorched-earth campaign against the civilian populations. The current phase of genocide aims to bring the government's military campaign in Darfur to a victorious conclusion. Brigadier Hemeti Daglo, RSF's field commander, is executing a genocidal war aiming at changing the demographic composition of Darfur and controlling more land.

3. The Janjaweed currently has the upper hand in Darfur. The RSF exercises absolute authority conferred upon it by GoS in order to advance the current phase of genocide in Darfur. RSF's authority supersedes that of the States' governors. Information we gathered indicates that GoS is planning to provide RSF with the infrastructure and logistics currently used by UNAMID, and which were built by donors' funds, in a bid to further strengthen their military ability and fill the vacuum upon UNAMID's departure from Darfur.
4. GoS continues to use food as a weapon of war in Darfur. In 2009, it expelled major international humanitarian organizations that catered for more than 50% of humanitarian assistance in Darfur since 2003. GoS continues to deny aid organizations access to the needy civilians in Darfur. Militia groups allied to GoS are carrying out a deliberate policy of destruction of local food produce and impoverishment of the African ethnic groups of Darfur.
5. The state is shrinking in Darfur, the armed movements are still fighting, UNAMID has been restricted and manipulated by GoS, and consequently, the RSF is being empowered to fill the vacuum in Darfur.
6. The inter-tribal and intra-tribal conflicts among the Arab groups of Darfur are rearing their ugly heads apparently with the blessing and support of GoS.
7. The political deadlock continues to be the main feature of Sudan's state of affairs and it has been aggravated by the failure of numerous peace agreements. The newly formed government is considered by many observers to be a security and military-minded government that lacks any commitment to a peace and dialogue agenda.
8. The current attacks on the civilian population in Darfur will further exacerbate the violence and push Darfur into more chaos and a new phase of rebellions.

The UNSC and the world should unite in its resolve not to abandon the people of Darfur at this time of greatest need. To do so would be to turn its back on the victims of injustice. The UNSC should not appease GoS or surrender to manipulation and blackmailing. Members of the UNSC should live up to their legal and moral obligations by providing security and protection for the innocent civilians in Darfur. In order to respond to the ongoing genocide in Darfur, we demand that the UNSC take the following steps:

1. Immediately renew UNAMID's mandate in Darfur.
2. Stop any plans or negotiations for the reduction of UNAMID's troops or accept a partial withdrawal or exit strategy.
3. Embark on an evaluation and reform strategy of UNAMID. The mission needs to be further empowered to effectively implement its mandate. UNAMID could and must do more in order to be able to regularly and publicly report on human rights violations that are being committed by all parties to the conflict. The UNSC should explicitly instruct UNAMID in this regard. This would indicate a break from the mission's past culture of non-disclosure or under reporting of the situation on the ground as far as civilian protection is concerned. This is the best way for the mission to re-build trust with the people of Darfur.
4. It is imperative that the mission undertakes a comprehensive threat analysis so it can provide protection to civilians in the most vulnerable areas (such as through the establishment of temporary forward operating bases.)
5. The Security Council Committee established by resolution 1591 should add to its consolidated travel ban and assets freeze list the names of Brigadier Hemeti Daglo and any others who "constitute a threat to stability in Darfur and the region, commit violations of international humanitarian or human rights law or other atrocities."
6. UNSC should end its support of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD.) A new framework for peace across Sudan is needed. The UNSC should be an advocate for lasting peace, stability and genuine political transition in Sudan, rather than supporting the piecemeal approach that serves GoS's objectives and prolongs the suffering of growing numbers of civilians all over the country.

Sincerely,

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