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Sudan: Time running out for two million affected in Darfur

Amnesty International is calling for the rapid implementation of the enhanced African Union Mission in Darfur (AMIS). The mission's speedy deployment throughout Darfur will enable it to act more effectively in fulfilling its mandate to protect civilians and investigate violations of the ceasefire and humanitarian law. Strong political support for AMIS is necessary to ensure that its reports on such violations are addressed.

"The AMIS monitors and troops are already said to be taking a more proactive role in protecting civilians, patrolling in areas where there have been clashes in order to try to build confidence," Erwin van der Borght, deputy director of the Africa Program said. "But their deployment has been slow; their recommendations are not acted on; and, even their reports on ceasefire violations are usually blocked by the parties to the conflict. As a result, their presence has neither yielded improved security for civilians, nor has AMIS so far been functioning as a deterrent to attacks."

The displaced, who have already fled several times, continue to be attacked where they have sought refuge and continue to flee from one place to another. Those in camps find that the government and police who should be protecting them are the ones who are bulldozing their shelters and expelling them. Most of the few who do dare to go home return to the camps for the displaced, feeling vulnerable and unprotected from the militias who attack them.

"The passivity of the UN Security Council with regard to Darfur, during its November session in Nairobi which prioritised the North-South peace process, has been interpreted by parties to the conflict as a signal that they can continue with their attacks", Erwin van der Borght said.

In a new report today: *Sudan: Darfur: What hope for the future? The need to protect civilians*, Amnesty International describes five examples of attacks against civilians in Darfur in camps, villages or towns after the signing of humanitarian and security protocols in Abuja on 9 November.

As of December 2004, 1.65 million people from Darfur are displaced within the region, more than 200,000 have fled to Chad and tens of thousand are displaced in Kordofan, Khartoum and elsewhere in Sudan. Others have temporarily settled in towns or villages or eke a precarious existence in the bush eating wild seeds and fruit.

Most of those displaced in Sudan hope for an ultimate return but are strongly dissuaded by the lack of security in their home areas. As one man in Riyadh camp in al-Jeneina told Amnesty International: "*We will wait a few more months, and if there is no security in Darfur, we will go to Chad*".

Amnesty International is also calling for an increase in the numbers of UN human rights monitors. They have been able to follow up on many cases of arrests and rape, but now number only nine in the vast region of Darfur. The organization is also calling for the police component, set up in October by the African Union Peace and Security Council, to be attached to Sudanese police forces in every locality in order to assist, monitor and act as a visible presence to give confidence to the displaced.

"The people, who have suffered so much, distrust the government. The introduction of a new police force has not changed their attitude. New and old police are still seen as opposed to the people. Displaced people have been forcibly relocated, beaten up, and arrested by police forces which are still failing to investigate cases of women being raped," Erwin van der Borght said.

No progress has been made on the disarming of the *Janjawid* militias. The African Union monitors should take seriously their mandate to monitor and verify efforts of the government of Sudan to disarm Government-controlled militias.

"Local communities in Darfur demand a foreign presence that would ensure their security. Only by listening to their concerns and involving them in decision-making will it be possible to build up the confidence of those in camps and villages," Erwin van der Borght said.

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