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Sudan: Pledging conference must commit to increasing protection of civilians in Darfur

(Brussels) As a critical pledging conference begins today in Brussels, Amnesty International urges that the current African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) is reinforced so that its troops can start effectively protecting civilians in Darfur.

Despite the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement in May 2006, and the deployment of AMIS since June 2004, the humanitarian crisis in this area remains catastrophic, with abuses against civilians continuing on a massive scale.

"Amnesty International supports the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force with a strong mandate, but in the meantime it is vital that AMIS is strengthened, so that it can begin to provide effective protection," said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

The organization has presented ten recommendations aimed at ensuring that a peace keeping force in Sudan is prepared and capable of protecting civilians (the briefing paper *Sudan: Protecting Civilians in Darfur*, is available at www.amnesty-eu.org)

The efforts of the troops currently on the ground have been obstructed by a shortage of personnel as well as technical and logistic capacities. There has also been a failure on the part of the troops to act strongly to protect civilians.

"Again we see that people asking for help have been turned away because the troops were either not able or prepared to give them the protection they need," said Dick Oosting.

"Donors can make a great difference at this conference by giving a strong political signal that Sudan must give free access to peacekeeping troops in all areas of Darfur, as well as by providing more resources," added Oosting.

Among its recommendations, Amnesty International called on the donors to ensure that AMIS forces are expanded, including with an effective civil affairs component, as well as having increased material resources such as communication and transport capabilities so that they can anticipate and act on imminent attacks, and provide adequate protection especially to women and girls. The ability to patrol supply routes regularly, so that these remain open and safe, is another major concern in a region where at

least two million people are totally dependent on humanitarian aid.

The organization said that the expansion of AMIS must also enable it to deploy troops along the border with Chad to prevent cross-border incursions by Janjawid militia.

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