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Sudan: Death and devastation continue in Darfur

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Amnesty International delegates, who recently returned from a research mission among Sudanese refugees in Chad, are calling on the international donors' conference on Darfur, meeting in Geneva on 3 June, to ensure that the protection of civilians is addressed with the same urgency as humanitarian aid.

"The armed militias (*Janjawid*) supported by the Sudanese government armed forces have been responsible for massive human rights violations against the civilian population in Darfur," the delegates said.

"Our research confirmed again the systematic and well-organized pillaging and destruction of villages, which led to the forced displacement of the rural population of Darfur," said Amnesty International's delegates. "The *Janjawid*, often in military uniform, accompanied by soldiers, attacked each village not once, but often three or four times before the population fled. Local people gave us more details of the two large-scale extrajudicial executions in Murli and Deleij carried out by security forces and *Janjawid*."

The international concern about the horror and devastation in Darfur needs to be translated into real changes on the ground, said Amnesty International's delegates.

The Sudanese government has so far failed to take concrete and prompt measures to stop the horrendous cycle of killings and rape committed by the *Janjawid* militias against the civilian population of Darfur.

"While the logic of peace is emerging between the Khartoum authorities and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the dynamic of war is still well rooted in Darfur."

"The violence against civilians breached not only international human rights standards but also appeared often to be an intentional attempt to humiliate and destroy the social fabric of the communities. We heard accounts of summary and systematic killing of civilians including in mosques, rape of women and girls with their husbands or parents nearby and the burning of old women in their homes," organization's delegates said.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been forced to abandon their devastated villages in Darfur. Some of them have been compelled to seek refuge in overpopulated centres in the region. These centres face serious scarcity of basic needs such as food, water, tents and medical supplies.

Thousands of others have braved serious risks to life to reach eastern Chad. A refugee told Amnesty International's delegates: *"I have lost everything now; I have nothing but the fingers of my two hands."* Another added: *"As long as the safety of my family is not guaranteed, I don't wish to return home."*

A 13-year old boy told how he was abducted by security forces and the *Janjawid* from a farm and taken to a camp near Khartoum. There, he was stripped naked and flogged. Another youth told how he was held in a *Janjawid* camp for three weeks until he escaped.

One of the focuses of the Amnesty International mission was violence against women. *"They came and took away our wives and daughters; they were not ashamed to rape them in the open,"* a village chief said of the violence done to women during the conflict.

A woman told how she and a group of girls were taken away by attackers wearing civilian clothes and khaki uniforms and raped repeatedly over a three-day period. They told them: *"next time we come, we will exterminate you all, we will not even leave a child alive"*.

"The 8 April cease fire agreement between the Sudanese government and the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has not changed the disastrous daily plight of civilians in Darfur and in the refugees in eastern Chad," said the delegates.

Nearly two months after the ceasefire, signed on 8 April 2004, the ceasefire monitors, who are mandated to report on violations, are not yet in place. It is not clear how effective 90 monitors, 60 military and 30 civilian, will be in an area the size of France where daily killings and rapes are still being reported.

"The international community should provide the African Union with the necessary political and logistical support for them to be effective and they must report publicly," the organization urged.

Amnesty International is repeating its call for human rights monitors under a mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to closely monitor the human rights situation in Darfur. "Given the many cases of rape and accompanying trauma, monitors must include a component with expertise in gender and sexual violence," it said.

On 22 May, *Janjawid* violated the ceasefire and killed at least 40 villagers and burnt five villages including, Tabaldiya and Abqarajeh, 15 km south of Nyala. They reportedly arrived, some in army uniforms, on horses and camels. On the day the observer agreement was signed on 28 May the Sudanese air force bombed the village of Tabet on a market day, reportedly killing 12 people. The Sudanese authorities have denied these attacks and accused the SLA and the JEM of violating the ceasefire.

"The *Janjawid* who attacked the Tabaldiya villages reportedly came from the former army training camp of Dumai, near Nyala," said Amnesty International. "The government is not addressing the impunity of the *Janjawid*, it is integrating them into the army."

Delegates stressed the continuing fear of the refugees in the Chad border area of attacks by the *Janjawid*.

"Only if steps are taken to ensure that the militias are no longer in a position to abuse human rights will the displaced have any confidence in the future," they said. "Consistent reports from Sudanese in Chad and Darfur suggest that the *Janjawid* are actually occupying many of the villages left empty by the fleeing population."

For online content and actions on the Darfur crisis, go to:

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