

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 54/067/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 155
20 June 2004

Embargo Date: 20 June 2004 00:01 GMT

Sudan: Government responsible for human devastation in Darfur but still in denial

As World Refugee Day is marked for the fourth time, Amnesty International calls on the international community to translate its concern about the destruction and devastation in Darfur into concrete actions by ensuring that protection and pledges of material and financial support for the displaced population become a reality.

"The Sudan government is ultimately responsible for the displacement of more than one million civilians and the horrendous cycle of burning of villages, killing of civilians, rape, widespread looting and systematic destruction of livelihoods carried out by government-supported *Janjawid* militias helped at every stage by the Sudanese army and air force," the organization said. "Yet the Sudan government, which is duty bound to take all necessary measures to protect the rights of the civilian population and to allow free and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to those who are internally displaced, is still hindering access of vehicles, medical supplies and even food, while in numerous public statements it continues to deny the seriousness of the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Darfur."

"World Refugee Day is an opportunity for the international community to show solidarity with those countries which cannot cope with the burden of a large-scale refugee crisis on their own" Amnesty International said. "When solidarity fails, or when it arrives too late, we have learned that the cost in human life and suffering can be enormous. This is what is at stake in the Darfur crisis."

Chad is currently providing safe haven for some 130,000 refugees from the conflict in Darfur.

"As the rainy season sets in, there is extreme urgency to ensure that the displaced populations on both sides of the Chad/Sudan border get the protection and assistance they need as the rains will make access to refugee camps virtually impossible until October," Amnesty International said. "When camps and settlements become even more inaccessible to international humanitarian agencies there is a risk that large members of vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly will die."

Many refugees have arrived in Chad traumatised by the events they have survived and witnessed. Many women have been raped in Darfur by the *Janjawid* and are suffering the after effects of their experiences, such as sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, psychological trauma and social stigmatisation.

The hundreds of thousands of civilians inside Darfur who have been driven from their homes but remain within Sudan's borders, are in an extremely precarious situation. Amnesty International

continues to receive reports of harassment and human rights abuses by the *Janjawid* against the displaced in the camps and settlements inside Sudan where they had thought they could find safety.

Many refugees arrived in Chad only with the clothes they had fled in. The shelters they are able to build from fabrics or from sticks are poor protection against the extreme weather conditions in the region. There are serious sanitation problems, caused by lack of toilet facilities or places to wash .

Refugees along the border are still not safe from attack. They have been targeted by the *Janjawid* and bombed by the government of Sudan air force. As a result the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has established a number of camps further away from the border area. The UNHCR has opened eight camps that are currently reportedly occupied by 90,000 people. Conditions in the camps are poor and an estimated 40,000 people are still living in desperate conditions outside the camps.

Amnesty International also stresses the need for the civilian and humanitarian nature of the camps and settlements for refugees in Chad to be upheld.

Background

There are around 12 million refugees and asylum-seekers in the world today. Most of them, around 75%, are in the developing world. Millions are displaced as a result of conflict and widespread human rights violations in West and Central Africa, and in places such as Colombia, Russia and South Asia. Palestinians still constitute the largest group of refugees today. Although it is just one of many situations of massive displacement where there is a dire need for international attention to be given to the human rights and humanitarian protection of displaced people, the crisis on the Chad/Sudan border is a particularly desperate and urgent situation.

In addition to the people who have sought refuge outside their own country, there are an estimated 23 million internally displaced persons in the world. Although they should enjoy the same rights as any other national of their country, in many cases their government cannot or will not protect them. Sudan has the highest number of internally displaced persons of all the countries in the world.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>