

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: AFR 54/025/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 102
6 June 2007

Sudan: Amnesty International adopts powerful technology in campaign to protect civilians in Darfur

(New York) -- Amnesty International is using satellite cameras to monitor highly vulnerable villages in war-torn Darfur, Sudan. The human rights organization is inviting ordinary people worldwide to monitor 12 villages by visiting the **Eyes on Darfur** project website (www.eyesondarfur.org) and put the Sudanese Government on notice that these and other areas in the region are being watched around the clock.

"Despite four years of outrage over the death and destruction in Darfur, the Sudanese government has refused worldwide demands and a U.N. resolution to send peacekeepers to the region," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International. "Darfur needs peacekeepers to stop the human rights violations. In the meantime, we are taking advantage of satellite technology to tell President al-Bashir that we will be watching closely to expose new violations. Our goal is to continue to put pressure on Sudan to allow the peacekeepers to deploy and to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable civilians on the ground in Darfur."

Ariela Blätter, director of the Crisis Prevention and Response Center for Amnesty International USA (AIUSA), who led development of **Eyes on Darfur**, will describe the project and its capabilities at the Fifth International Symposium on Digital Earth at the University of California at Berkeley on Wednesday, June 6. Blätter will give a presentation from 2-3:30 pm Pacific time.

According to Blätter, new images of the same villages are being added currently within days of each other. This time frame offers the potential for spotting new destruction. Amnesty International worked with noted researchers to identify vulnerable areas based on proximity to important resources like water supplies, threats by militias or nearby attacks.

Amnesty International worked closely on the project with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), which offered expertise on satellite imagery and other cutting edge geospatial technologies.

The images from commercial satellites can reveal visual information about conditions on the ground for objects as small as two feet across. According to Lars Bromley, project director for the AAAS Science and Human Rights Project who advised Blätter on technical matters, the photos could show destroyed huts, massing soldiers or fleeing refugees.

Amnesty International has been at the forefront of efforts to wed human rights work with satellite technology. For example, Amnesty, the AAAS and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights joined in a ground-breaking project in 2006 to document the destruction of a settlement by the Zimbabwean government. The groups presented evidence that the government destroyed entire

settlements, including the informal settlement of Porta Farm, forcing thousands of civilians to flee.

Eyes on Darfur also includes an archival feature, which shows destroyed villages since the conflict began in 2003 and includes expert testimony. For example, an image of the village of Donkey Dereis in south Darfur taken in 2004 shows an intact landscape with hundreds of huts. Two years later, a satellite image shows the near total destruction of the villages -- 1,171 homes gone and the landscape overgrown with vegetation.

Eyes on Darfur adds a new component to Amnesty International's global campaign to stop the human rights violations in Darfur. In 2003 and 2004, Amnesty International supplied some of the earliest documentation -- eyewitness testimony from the ground -- that warned of the impending humanitarian and human rights catastrophe. A critical mission in 2004 focused world attention and galvanized opinion about the brutal conditions in the country. Amnesty International's exposure of horrific violence -- the torching of villages and the campaign of sexual violence against women and girls -- built awareness worldwide of the brutality.

This month, AIUSA launches the CD "Instant Karma: The Amnesty International Campaign to Save Darfur," a collection of iconic John Lennon songs recorded by best-selling artists to support its efforts on Darfur and inspire a new generation of human rights activists through music. To learn more about the project, go to www.instantkarma.org

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International's 2.2 million members include people from all walks of life taking action to protect people wherever justice, freedom, truth and dignity are denied. Amnesty International, the world's largest human rights organization and winner of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, investigates and exposes abuses, educates and mobilizes the public and helps transform societies to create a safer, more just world.

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