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The Honourable Hillary R. Clinton
Secretary of State
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Open Letter to Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton

CALL ON THE US GOVERNMENT TO INSIST THAT THE NEW MINURCAT MANDATE PROTECTS CIVILIANS IN EASTERN CHAD

Dear Secretary of State

Amnesty International is calling on the UN Security Council to ensure that the protection of civilians is at the forefront of the ongoing discussions and will remain part of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) which comes up for renewal on 15 May 2010. I urge you to take the lead at the UN Security Council to ensure such an outcome.

In January 2010, the Chadian government requested MINURCAT to leave the country when its mandate expired on 15 March 2010. The Chadian president has reiterated this request on a number of occasions, even after the Chadian authorities agreed to renew the mission's mandate for two months, to 15 May 2010. We understand that the ongoing negotiations between the Chadian government and the UN have led to a proposal whereby MINURCAT would be extended beyond May but the mission would no longer have a mandate for the protection of civilians. With the new configuration, there will be 1,900 remaining troops that would most likely be in place from mid-May to mid-October 2010 primarily to protect UN personnel and assets. The final withdrawal of the military contingent of MINURCAT would take place at the end of 2010.

Amnesty International is concerned that if Chad's demand for MINURCAT to leave the country this year comes to pass, or if MINURCAT no longer has a human rights protection mandate as of this May, there is a real risk that civilians will be exposed to increased attacks from various parties, including Chadian armed opposition groups, irregular militias, criminal elements and members of the Chadian security forces. MINURCAT's withdrawal would jeopardize the relative security that more than 250,000 Sudanese refugees from Darfur and 170,000 internally displaced Chadians, in addition to the local population in eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic, have enjoyed with the presence of MINURCAT in the region.

Human rights abuses, including rape and other violence against women and recruitment of child soldiers, continue in the midst of ongoing insecurity. Those responsible for carrying out these abuses enjoy almost total impunity.

The Chadian government has the right and duty to protect its own population and other persons living on its territory, but for many years it has shown itself unable and unwilling to do so with respect to

eastern Chad. Demanding that MINURCAT leave in these circumstances may contravene Chad's national and international human rights obligations. MINURCAT has been providing some protection to those people despite difficulties in its deployment since March 2009.

On 24 February 2010, Amnesty International wrote to all Security Council members, including the USA, urging them to reject the request of the Chadian Government and to renew MINURCAT's mandate. In that letter, we stated that if MINURCAT is forced to withdraw, the level of violence, insecurity and grave human rights abuses in eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic will almost certainly substantially increase. We added that it was vitally important that all members of the Security Council unequivocally inform the Chadian government that it is their position that the mandate of MINURCAT must be renewed and that they expect the Chadian government to agree to such a renewal. Until the Chadian authorities are able to develop the capacity and the willingness to effectively protect the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and other vulnerable populations in eastern Chad, MINURCAT needs to remain with the mandate and resources to be able to protect civilians.

The rate of deployment of MINURCAT over the past two years has been disappointingly slow. However, the Mission has considerably increased its deployment since the beginning of this year with clear benefits. Attacks on humanitarian workers and civilians, which reached alarming levels in the last months of 2009, have reportedly begun to decrease as MINURCAT soldiers have been able to carry out patrols in a number of sensitive areas they had not been previously able to cover. The Mission is also developing capacity-building programmes for Chadian officials including judicial personnel and members of the Chadian police force. A National Human Rights Framework is being prepared by MINURCAT and its Chadian partners including the Chadian Ministry of Human Rights.

Additionally, MINURCAT continues to support the work of the Integrated Security Detachment, *Détachement intégré de sécurité* (DIS). At the beginning of February 2010, MINURCAT provided the DIS with more than 90 pick-up trucks and continued the training of its members. While it has faced criticism, challenges and setbacks, the DIS has also begun to play an increasingly important role in bolstering security in refugee camps and IDP sites. Without the UN military presence, however, the ability of the DIS forces to operate throughout the east would be considerably hindered. It is very likely that a number of humanitarian agencies that are assisting refugees, IDPs and the local population in eastern Chad would be forced to end some or all of their programmes if MINURCAT was to pull out or loses the protection component in its mandate. The security vacuum left behind by the UN withdrawal or the reduction of its troops and mandate would make it too dangerous for many to continue their operations. This would leave hundreds of thousands without essential humanitarian assistance and facing increased security risks.

Amnesty international is also very concerned that the Chadian government's position has very direct implications for the ability of MINURCAT to carry out its work in northern areas of the Central African Republic (CAR). The security situation is still volatile in the northern part of the country and human rights abuses are being committed by various actors including members of armed opposition groups and members of the CAR security forces. Other abuses are being committed during fighting between the CAR national army and armed opposition groups, as well as during ethnic clashes. Attacks by the Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern CAR are causing further human rights abuses and the displacement of the population within the area and to southern Chad and Cameroon.

The international community, through the UN Security Council, has the responsibility to ensure that civilians living in eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic, including refugees and IDPs, are effectively protected. In order to live up to that responsibility, I urge your

government to ensure that the UN Security Council reject Chad's demand that MINURCAT withdraws from the country and work urgently to ensure that MINURCAT's new mandate has sufficient resources and can effectively continue its work to protect human rights in the region.

Yours sincerely

Claudio Cordone
Secretary General (ad interim)