

AI Index: PRE 01/033/2008
01 February 2008

Chad: Escalating conflict risks war crimes; threatens deployment of EU forces

As the conflict between the Chadian government and armed groups escalates, Amnesty International today called on all parties to the conflict not to attack civilians.

“The escalation of the conflict threatens the lives and security of civilians in N’Djamena and eastern Chad,” said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme. “Government forces and armed groups must refrain from any actions that would endanger civilians.”

Amnesty International warned all parties to the conflict that deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians constitute war crimes.

The escalation of the conflict between the Chadian government forces and armed groups comes as EU forces (EUFOR) were beginning to deploy to Chad to protect civilians in the eastern part of the country.

“This standoff risks severely undermining the deployment of the EUFOR force, which in turn will leave the civilian population without protection.”

“The current escalation is threatening the full and complete deployment of EUFOR – putting the lives of civilians at further risk,” said Hondora.

Further escalation in the conflict is likely to have dire consequences for an already beleaguered civilian population in eastern Chad. International humanitarian aid agencies have evacuated their staff from refugee camps due to the insecurity, as have gendarmes that were providing a modicum of security in refugee camps.

Amnesty International also called on all sides to the conflict to cease all attacks on humanitarian agencies operating in Chad.

“Chadian civilians are in urgent need of protection and basic services,” said Hondora. “Humanitarian organizations should be allowed to operate freely and without fear in all parts of Chad.”

“This escalation will have devastating consequences for the men, women and children who have been waiting far too long for protection.”