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Sudan: Government must stop human rights and humanitarian disaster in Darfur

Only immediate action can prevent the killing and forced displacement of thousands more people in Sudan", said Amnesty International, as the ceasefire agreement continues to be breached.

Since the ceasefire between the government and the armed opposition groups the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), came into effect on April 12, civilians continue to suffer human rights abuses and are in a desperate humanitarian situation.

"Attacks on villages continue; indiscriminate and deliberate killings of civilians continue; looting continues and rapes continue. Most detainees imprisoned because of the conflict have not been released. The African Union monitors designated to investigate every ceasefire violation are not yet in place", said Amnesty International.

Most villages in Darfur have now been destroyed and the population hardly dares to leave the displacement camps. The Janjawid (government-supported militia) block the roads and even invade the camps. In Ardamata camp for displaced people near al-Jeneina town, Janjawid are reported to enter openly and choose women to rape.

Furthermore, the conflict is in danger of spreading. On 28 April Sudanese planes bombed Kolbus village in Chad and the Janjawid attacked refugees and Chadian civilians across the border.

"This is not an unavoidable ethnic conflict. It is a tragedy deliberately created by the government's support for the Janjawid and fuelled by total impunity for grave violations of human rights", said Amnesty International.

"Two time-bombs are ticking in Sudan in a countdown to disaster: the approaching rainy season, which means that by June many areas may be cut off from food and medical supplies from outside; and the danger that a complete collapse of the ceasefire will lead to an escalation of violations," said Amnesty International.

"Unless the international community put maximum pressure to ensure that the government militia are disarmed and removed from the region the conflict will worsen and spread. Beyond the safeguards for the protection of civilians specified in the ceasefire agreement, the international community must also insist that human rights observers are deployed."

Amnesty International called for ceasefire monitors, including human rights monitors, to be swiftly deployed in sufficient numbers to ensure the ceasefire's implementation and to investigate violations and

for the Janjawid militias to be disarmed and withdrawn to areas where they could not abuse the civilian population.

Background Information

Over the past few years thousands of civilians in Darfur, western Sudan have been killed or wounded by armed nomadic groups. Their homes have been burnt and herds stolen. The Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) took up arms against the government in February 2003, because of what they perceived as the lack of government protection for their people and the marginalisation and underdevelopment of the region.

Since then, the Sudan government appears to have given free rein to the nomadic militias known as the Janjawid to kill and abduct civilians, mainly from the agricultural ethnic groups, and destroy their property. More than 800,000 people have fled from their burnt villages and most have taken refuge in towns in Darfur, while more than 120,000 have crossed the border into Chad. More than 10,000 have been killed in attacks.

On 8 April 2004 the government of Sudan and the SLA and the JEM signed a ceasefire agreement that was due to come into effect on 12 April. It is due to run for 45 days, renewable for an additional 45 days not later than 21 days before the expiry of the Agreement. Under article 2 of the Agreement, each party shall:

- Refrain from any recruitment operations;
- Refrain from any military action, and any reconnaissance operations;
- Refrain from any act of violence or any other abuse of the civilian populations
- Disengage and refrain from any deployment, movement or action which could extend the territory under its control or which could lead to a resumption of hostilities
- Ensure humanitarian access.

A Cease-fire Commission is to be set up; all prisoners of war and "all other persons detained because of the armed conflict in Darfur" are to be freed and "[t]he parties shall ensure that all armed groups under their control comply with this Agreement. The forces of armed opposition should be assembled in clearly identified sites. The Sudanese Government shall commit itself to neutralize the armed militias".