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Fear for Safety/Torture or other ill-treatment

15 July

SUDAN

Over one million internally displaced persons in Darfur

The Sudanese government is attempting to force villagers who have fled their homes in Darfur, western Sudan, to return to their villages from the camps and settlements around towns in Darfur where they are living. They are already being attacked in the camps where they are receiving some humanitarian and medical aid, but are in danger of starvation or further attacks by government-backed militias if they return to their villages. Over a million people are in danger.

On 3 July, following UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's visit to Darfur, the government and the UN issued a joint statement in which the government agreed to "ensure... that any return of the displaced to their homes is done in a truly voluntary manner." The government of Sudan may now be forcing people to return so as to ease the international scrutiny of their actions in Darfur and to give an excuse for removing the numerous humanitarian organizations at present working in the Darfur camps.

The nomad militias supported by the government, known as the *Janjawid*, have killed thousands of people in rural Darfur. They are reportedly present near the abandoned villages, making the inhabitants afraid to return. Although people in the camps are also vulnerable to *Janjawid* attacks, they are in even greater danger outside the camps. People have been killed and women and girls raped when they leave the camps. On 12 July the UN news agency, IRIN, reported that the government had promised people in the Zamzam camp, near al-Fasher, that they would be safe if they returned to their homes, but according to a woman living in the camp people who had gone back had been attacked again by the *Janjawid*. However the Sudanese authorities are trying to force people to return home in numerous ways: by evicting them or destroying their shelters, or by threatening to cut off humanitarian aid (some of which comes from the government). In one camp people were beaten and left for dead on the road with the message "The WFP [World Food Program] will provide for you here". In other places, such as Garsila, people who protested at pressure to return home have been detained by the security forces. In Zalingei, according to IRIN, officials reluctant to return people to their villages have had their salaries cut off, or been threatened with arrest.

People who return to their villages are also in danger of famine or disease. Farmers have now missed the planting season, so will be unable to plant any crops until next May, and they will be dependent on international food aid until the next harvest, in October/November 2005. Their homes and villages have been burnt, and their cattle, crops and seeds looted. Many areas in Darfur are already cut off by the rainy season, which has washed away roads and it will be difficult or impossible to supply food to remote villages. IRIN quoted one aid worker as saying: "The government wants them to go home, the UN wants them to stay. There is no food [in the villages]: they will go back to die."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two armed groups drawn from agricultural communities attacked the government in Darfur in February/March 2003, because of what they perceived as the lack of government protection for their people and the marginalisation and underdevelopment of the region. The government then gave free rein to the *Janjawid* to kill and abduct civilians, mainly from agricultural ethnic groups, and destroy their property.

Besides those internally displaced in Darfur, an estimated 30,000 people have been killed, thousands of women have been raped, and at least 170,000 people are now living as refugees on the Chad border or in camps in Chad. Internally displaced people are among the most vulnerable in Darfur: they receive less assistance and protection from the international community than the refugees in Chad. They still face serious human rights violations by government forces and the *Janjawid* militia.

People forced to flee their homes should benefit from the full protection of domestic law, as well as the rights enshrined in international human rights and humanitarian law: these include the right not to be forced to return or to resettle to an area where their life, safety, liberty or health would be at risk, the right to freedom of movement, including the right to move freely out of camps and other settlements, and the right to an adequate standard of living.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to ensure that people now living in camps in Darfur are not forcibly returned to any place where their life, safety or health is at risk;
- urging them to immediately disarm and disband the *Janjawid* and ensure that they are no longer in a position to commit human rights violations;
- urging them to ensure that any member of the *Janjawid* responsible for human rights abuses, whether or not they have been integrated into the armed forces, is arrested, and tried in accordance with international standards for fair trial, without the possibility of the death penalty;
- urging them to accept the full and unhindered deployment of international human rights monitors who should investigate all allegations of human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict in Darfur and report publicly.

APPEALS TO: (Faxes in Khartoum frequently do not work; we advise UA writers to also send letters by post)

Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir
President's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax : + 249183 779977
Salutation: Your Excellency

Major General Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein
Minister of Internal Affairs
and Presidential Representative for Darfur
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax : +249 183 773046
Salutation: Dear Minister

Engineer Al-Hajj Atta Manan
Governor of South Darfur
c/o People's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 249 11 771 024
Salutation: Dear Governor

Major General Suleiman Abdulla Adam
Governor of West Darfur
c/o People's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: 249 11 771 024
Salutation: Dear Governor

Mr. Osman Kubor
Governor of North Darfur
c/o People's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Fax: + 249 11 771 024
Salutation: Dear Governor

COPIES TO:

Mr Yasir Sid-Ahmed
Advisory Council for Human Rights
PO Box 302, Khartoum, Sudan

Fax: +249 183 770883

Salutation: Dear Mr Sid Ahmed

and to diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 August 2004.