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Darfur, Sudan: UN Security Council must challenge human rights violations

As the UN Security Council (UNSC) discusses the Secretary-General's latest report on the situation in Darfur, Sudan, Amnesty International is urging the Council to demonstrate political will and commitment to end continuing human rights violations and halt impunity in Darfur.

"Strengthening the numbers, capacity and resources of international human rights monitoring in Darfur is vital but not enough," Amnesty International said.

The UN Secretary-General's report makes clear that monitors cannot work adequately in the present climate of intimidation created by the Sudanese government. "The Security Council must give monitors strong political backing to compel the Sudanese government to account for the gross human rights violations committed by its security forces and its militia, the *Janjawid*," the organization said.

Amnesty International is concerned that, contrary to its promises, the Sudanese government has not disarmed any member of the *Janjawid*. On 27 August, the UN Special Representative attended a "disarmament" ceremony of 300 militia members in Jeneina. However, according to people living in Jeneina, those who were allegedly disarmed were given their arms back after the Special Representative left.

A further obstacle to the effective disarmament of the *Janjawid* is evidenced by their progressive integration into the armed forces, the Popular Defence Forces and the border police. Amnesty International is concerned that this makes it more difficult for international monitors to identify those responsible for human rights violations.

The Sudanese government and the UN have designated "safe areas" for internally displaced persons (IDPs) which allows the Sudanese government armed forces to move in a perimeter of 20 km around camps for the displaced. Amnesty International is concerned about the safety of the displaced in these "safe areas" and by the fact that such a policy is likely to institutionalise displacement, as was the case in the Nuba Mountains in Central Sudan.

The UN report also states that there are no forced returns of the displaced by the government. However, the displaced are pressured to return to their villages: in Kalma camp near Nyala, more than 70 IDPs were arrested by the authorities in August after protesting at government attempts to return them to unsafe villages. IDP camps are monitored by the government security and military intelligence.

Amnesty International is concerned that the police force, sent by the government to restore security in Darfur, has been accused of sexually exploiting IDPs. Women and girls continue to be raped in the vicinity of camps, and can only get medical treatment if they report rape to the police. Members of the police force have refused to take women's accounts of rape. Moreover, many amongst the displaced do not trust the police, who are considered to be part of a government which is responsible for the devastation in Darfur.

The displaced and witnesses of human rights violations, as well as human rights activists who speak out on Darfur, interpreters and journalists are being intimidated after talking to African Union monitors and international missions. Monitors are unable to guarantee the safety and confidentiality of witnesses.

The dismal human rights situation in Darfur is a critical test of the Security Council's resolve to bring the Sudanese government to end the crisis.

The Security Council should include the establishment of an international commission of inquiry to investigate war crimes, crimes against humanity and allegations of genocide in Darfur and to recommend ways to bring to justice suspected perpetrators.

It should also suspend arms transfers to the Sudanese government which are likely to be used to commit human rights violations. The UNSC should demand the release of prisoners of conscience, the abolition of Special Courts and a monitoring of detention centres.

"If the international community had taken action sooner, the devastation in Darfur may have been avoided. The UN Security Council, as the embodiment of the will of the international community, should now uphold its responsibility to save the lives of the people of Darfur," Amnesty International said.

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