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Sudan: Talisman Energy must do more to protect human rights

Amnesty International today called on Talisman Energy to do more to safeguard human rights in Sudan.

"Amnesty International is disappointed that Talisman Energy's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Report 2000 does not adequately address the issue of the human rights impact of the company's operations in Sudan," the organization said.

As shareholders and institutional investors in Talisman Energy Inc., meet on May 1 in Calgary, Canada, the fighting between government of Sudan forces, armed opposition forces and various local militias continues in the oil-rich regions of Sudan. Reports of unlawful killings and injuries of civilians in bombing attacks also continue to be reported in the Upper Nile and southern Blue Nile during March and April, 2001.

*Amnesty International has documented in its report *Sudan: the Human Price of Oil* (May 2000, AFR 54/01/00) how civilians were forcibly displaced from their villages and many were killed by government troops and government-allied forces around the Heglig and Unity oilfields, where Talisman Energy's concessions lie. Civilians who survived such attacks were driven out of the region, or into towns, such as Bentiu, controlled by the government. While Talisman Energy's CSR report contains information about social and development investment made by the company in the area of its operations, "by underplaying the serious violations being perpetrated, the report does not accurately reflect the overall human rights situation," Amnesty International added. Amnesty International believes the company's shareholders will have to*

look at additional sources of information, such as reports from human rights and humanitarian agencies, international organizations and independent investigators.

Talisman Energy has now started oil exploration in a new concession, in a significant new oilfield, Kaikang. Amnesty International fears that the development of the Kaikang oilfield may well lead to further human rights violations. Despite the many reports of displacement in existing oilfields, in a letter to shareholders on Nov 23, 1999, Talisman Energy's chief executive officer Jim Buckee reportedly said: "In five years of operation, staff in the field have not seen any evidence of forced displacement or relocation in our area of operations."

Talisman Energy justifies its operations in Sudan by arguing that its policy of "constructive engagement" will ultimately lead to an improved human rights situation. It has also cited codes of conduct and international principles, which it says it is implementing, including the International Code of Ethics for Canadian Business and Amnesty International's Human Rights Principles for Companies. Finally, it has appointed the auditing firm, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, to verify its CSR report.

Amnesty International takes no position on Talisman Energy's investment in Sudan. However, Amnesty International remains concerned that there is little evidence that the company has taken effective action in its area of operations to protect human rights of civilians as well as to prevent violations.

While the CSR report mentions the number of times the company's officials have met with Sudanese government officials and discussed human rights concerns, there is sadly little evidence that such discussions have led to any reduction in human rights violations. Amnesty

International is concerned that Talisman Energy is unable to ensure that the oilfield infrastructure is only used for defensive purposes. In fact, Talisman Energy in its report recognises the problem when it says: "The use of oilfield infrastructure for non-defensive purposes is of great concern to Talisman. We have, and will continue to make our concerns known to our partners [Petronas Bhd., China National Petroleum Corp., and Sudapet Ltd., who together with Talisman Energy form the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC)] and to the Government of Sudan."

Talisman Energy acknowledges that for its area of operations armed security is provided by three organs of the Sudanese government security forces. Given the Sudanese security forces' long-track record of human rights violations, including extra-judicial executions, torture, the use of child soldiers and ground and aerial attacks which have killed civilians, there is a significant risk that the Sudanese Government security forces may use the oilfield infrastructure to commit further violations. Indeed, the CSR report goes on to admit: "We believe that there were at least four instances of non-defensive uses of the Heglig airstrip in 2000... Talisman has consistently requested that incidents of this kind do not occur."

The CSR report does not address the critical issue raised by Amnesty International and other human rights and humanitarian groups, relief organizations, religious groups, and some governments: that the Sudanese government continues to commit serious human rights violations in order to clear areas for oil exploration and to secure the oil companies' operations. As Amnesty International and other organisations have noted, in order to secure oil fields, the government has engaged in a deliberate scorched earth policy, leading to massive displacement of civilians within Sudan.

While Talisman Energy and the Sudanese government claim that oil revenues will benefit all Sudanese people, as reported by an international news agency, army spokesman, General Mohamed Osman Yasin, stated that Sudan will reach self-sufficiency in light, medium and heavy weapons and was already manufacturing ammunition, mortars, tanks and armoured personnel carriers, thanks to oil exploration.

Amnesty International has noted the social and development expenditure made by Talisman Energy in its area of operations and welcomes the drafting of an agreement regarding "the provision of security for advocacy within the GNPOC and the Government of Sudan", and the GNPOC Code of Ethics. Amnesty International is concerned about the steps taken to implement the codes, and concerned about human rights protection and the security arrangements of its partners.

Amnesty International once again calls upon Talisman Energy to implement the recommendations laid out in its report and uphold Amnesty International's Human Rights Principles for Companies. Talisman Energy's efforts to date in these regards fall woefully short of these standards.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>