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Chad: UN Security Council must work to ensure further extension of UN Mission mandate

The United Nations (UN) Security Council has renewed today the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) for two months, until 15 May 2010. This is a minor achievement that would allow MINURCAT to remain in Eastern Chad while further negotiations about the withdrawal of the Mission – as requested by the Chadian government - take place.

While welcoming the temporary reprieve for MINURCAT, Amnesty International is concerned that such a short extension leaves the mission in a tenuous and uncertain state, meaning increased vulnerability for refugees, displaced persons and the civilian population in both Chad and the Central African Republic. Upcoming negotiations must focus on securing agreement for a longer-range extension of the mission, not on facilitating an early withdrawal. As such, Amnesty International is calling on the Security Council to work closely with Chadian authorities to ensure that the UN Mission is able to continue to fulfil its mandate in eastern Chad and the Central African Republic well beyond 15 May 2010 specifically in terms of protection of the civilian population.

Amnesty International has been calling on all members of the UN Security Council not to accede to the demand of Chadian authorities that MINURCAT leave the country until the benchmarks that were called for by the Security Council are met. The organization has also called on the government of Chad to reverse its position that MINURCAT must leave the country.

Instead of discussing MINURCAT's withdrawal, actors should focus on addressing the many protection problems that still exist, including widespread violence against both refugee women from Darfur and Chadian women. If MINURCAT is forced to withdraw, the level of violence, insecurity and grave human rights violations in Eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic will almost certainly increase substantially. Even with recent improvements, conditions in eastern Chad remain precarious for the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees and displaced Chadians who are living there in camps. A premature UN exit will expose them to further human rights abuses.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the short-term nature of the current extension of MINURCAT's mandate not serve to in any way impede or undermine the mission's current operations. The organization is calling on MINURCAT to retain operations at the level necessary to provide protection to the population in eastern Chad and to continue to pursue measures needed to strengthen human rights protection on the ground. Amnesty International is also calling on the government of Chad to fully cooperate with MINURCAT, to facilitate the mission's work.

Amnesty International is further concerned about the worrying precedent that would be set if MINURCAT were to be forced to withdraw before the benchmarks established by the UN have been met. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the government has requested a complete MONUC withdrawal by June 2011 thus putting the safety of its own population at grave risk. Amnesty International has appealed to the DRC government to reconsider its

request and instead discuss with the UN and other international interlocutors how to overcome the many protection challenges that remain, especially in the war-torn east of the country. As in the case of MINURCAT, Amnesty International fears that without MONUC, government forces will not have the capacity to assume, in a manner that respects human rights, the security functions currently fulfilled by the UN forces.

In 2007 the UN Secretary General proposed a number of benchmarks and preconditions which needed to be met before any large-scale MONUC withdrawal could be considered. They included stabilization of sensitive areas, completion of the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups, and creating national forces respectful of human rights and the rule of law, with the capacity to defend the people of the DRC. To date, none of these has been satisfactorily achieved.

If both of these UN missions were to leave their areas of operations prematurely, Amnesty International fears that the human rights and humanitarian crisis in the two very troubled regions of Africa will deteriorate sharply.

Background

Human rights abuses including rape and other violence against women, recruitment of child soldiers, and other concerns continue in the midst of ongoing insecurity in Eastern Chad. These attacks are carried out by members of Chadian and Sudanese armed opposition groups, members of the Chadian security forces and other armed elements. Other serious human rights abuses take place during clashes between ethnic groups. Those responsible for carrying out these abuses enjoy almost total impunity. The withdrawal of the UN mission in the region will only serve to reinforce this pattern, as Chadian authorities lack both the capacity and the will to tackle impunity, in the east and throughout Chad.

The Chadian government has the right and duty to protect its own population and other persons living on its territory but for many years it has shown itself unable and unwilling to do so with respect to Eastern Chad. Demanding that MINURCAT leave in these circumstances contravenes Chad's national and international human rights obligations. A UN withdrawal from Chad will almost certainly mean that the smaller but sorely-needed UN presence in the neighbouring Central African Republic will have to pull out as well.

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