

Time for justice in Darfur

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In April this year, international arrest warrants were issued for a Sudanese government minister and a leader of the government-supported Janjawid militias. Both are accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur, Sudan, including murder, rape and torture. However, the Sudanese authorities have refused to hand over Ahmed Harun and Ali Kushayb to be tried by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Ahmad Muhammad Harun (commonly known as Ahmad Harun) remains in post as Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs of Sudan. From 2003 to 2005, he was Minister of State for the Interior and was in charge of the management of the "Darfur Security desk" and coordinated the different bodies of the government involved in the counter-insurgency. These included the police, the armed forces, the National Security and Intelligence Service.

According to the ICC arrest warrant, he is accused of recruiting, mobilising, funding and arming the Janjawid, with full knowledge that they would commit crimes against humanity and war crimes against the civilian population in Darfur. He is also accused of personally inciting the Janjawid to attack civilians. The arrest warrant against Ahmad Harun lists 42 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including persecution, murder and forcible transfer.

Ali Muhammad Al Abd-Al-Rahman (commonly known as Ali Kushayb) is one of the most senior leaders of the Janjawid and a member of the Popular Defence Force. He was the "colonel of colonels" in the Wadi Salih locality of West Darfur. By mid-2003, he commanded thousands of Janjawid militias.

Ali Kushayb is accused of leading the attacks on the villages of Kodoom, Bindisi, Mukjar and Ararwala, according to the ICC arrest warrant. He is also accused of enlisting, arming, funding and providing supplies to the Janjawid under his command. The warrant for his arrest lists 50 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including persecution, murder, attacks against the civilian population and forcible transfer.

Ali Kushayb was arrested by Sudanese authorities in November 2006 in relation to incidents that occurred in South and West Darfur, aside from those prosecuted by the ICC. According to some reports, he is currently in the custody of the Sudanese Police. However, several witnesses in Darfur reported that he was freely moving from one town to another under police protection.

An armed conflict has been taking place between the government of Sudan and several armed opposition groups in Darfur since 2003. To counter the insurgency, the government mobilized, armed and funded the militia known as the Janjawid. Over two million people have been displaced by the conflict.

Some 200,000 people have been killed and thousands of women have been raped since the conflict began. Arms, ammunition and related equipment continue to be transferred to Darfur for military operations, in violation of a UN arms embargo on the region.

To mark International Justice Day (17 July), Amnesty International is calling for an end to impunity in Darfur. In particular, the organization is calling for the arrest of Ahmad Harun and Ali Kushayb and their surrender to the International Criminal Court.

International Justice Day commemorates the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998. Each year, human rights activists around the world use this day to host events and activities to promote international justice.

For more information about the situation in Darfur, please see:

Crisis in Darfur and Eastern Chad - <http://www.amnesty.org/sudan>