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Chad: Urgent international action needed to prevent humanitarian crisis

Amnesty International is calling on all parties to the conflict in eastern Chad not to attack civilians or place them at risk. As the UN Security Council meets to discuss the crisis in Chad today, Amnesty International is demanding that the full complement of United Nations peacekeeping troops (Minurcat) be immediately deployed and provided with adequate resources.

“The international community promised the people of Chad and the Darfuri refugees they will be safe, but the on-going clashes between Chadian government forces and armed opposition groups make it clear this promise of security remains an illusion,” said Tawanda Hondora, Amnesty International’s Africa Deputy Programme Director.

There has been an international military presence in eastern Chad for close to fourteen months, charged with protecting refugees, displaced Chadians, UN agencies and organizations carrying out humanitarian work. But they are under-staffed and under-resourced.

In a report to the Security Council on 14 April 2009, UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon indicated that the military force (MINURCAT) is only at 40% of its intended deployment of 5200 troops. The force has also only received pledges for six of the 18 military helicopters it needs.

“We are alarmed at reports that humanitarian aid agencies are evacuating from some areas of eastern Chad due to the escalation of fighting between government forces and armed opposition groups. The people of eastern Chad need protection, now. The slow deployment of UN peacekeepers has left civilians vulnerable,” said Tawanda Hondora.

“The Security Council must call on governments to immediately provide the necessary troops to complete the deployment on an urgent basis, and to provide all necessary material, including helicopters.”

Amnesty International has received reports indicating that insecurity and serious human rights violations continue to be the overwhelming daily reality in eastern Chad, particularly for women and girls. Internally displaced Chadians, the local population, refugees from Darfur, UN humanitarian agencies and international and national nongovernmental organizations carrying out relief, development and human rights work in

eastern Chad all face the consequences of this insecurity and have regularly been the victims of a growing number of violent attacks.

Background

Fighters with Chadian armed opposition groups began to enter eastern Chad at the beginning of May and have had a number of battles with the Chadian military. There has been confusion and uncertainty in the country concerning the whereabouts and plans of the armed groups, which has caused considerable anxiety and led many UN agencies and NGO's to limit their activities in eastern Chad.