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Sudan: Declared ceasefire must result in concrete improvements for Darfuris

Reacting to today's announcement by Sudanese President Omar al Bashir of an immediate ceasefire in the Darfur region, Amnesty International called on all parties to the conflict to grasp this as an opportunity to make tangible changes in the provision of protection for the Darfuri people.

"There have been several ceasefire declarations during the course of this conflict – and none of them have made any difference for ordinary Darfuris," said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Africa programme.

"The people of Darfur remain at the mercy of armed groups, bandits, and elements of the Sudanese armed forces.

"What the people of Darfur desperately need is security – and it is the responsibility of the Sudanese government and UNAMID to provide that security, ceasefire or not."

UNAMID, the joint AU/UN peacekeeping force, has been in Darfur since the beginning of 2008 but has failed to stem the tide of violence sweeping the region.

Since the conflict began in Darfur in 2003, at least 300,000 civilians have been killed, thousands raped, and millions forcibly displaced. Amnesty International called for those responsible for violations of human rights to be brought to justice.

"Deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians by the Sudan armed forces, supported by allied militia and the armed opposition groups, constitutes war crimes," said Tawanda Hondora.

Humanitarian aid convoys and bases are regularly attacked and looted, affecting the provision of aid to millions. Amnesty International called for measures to be put in place to ensure the safe provision of the urgently needed humanitarian aid.

"UNAMID, which remains severely under-resourced, needs to be strengthened and fully deployed so as to ensure the protection of civilians and enable the provision of desperately needed humanitarian aid," said Tawanda Hondora.

"Declarations are not enough. The people of Darfur have been waiting far too long for security and justice. The international community has not been doing nearly enough to ensure that and it is time they do," said Tawanda Hondora.