

January 2007

UA 13/07 Fear for safety

SUDAN **Three villages in West Darfur: Bir Dageeg, Sirba and Abu Suruj**

The government-backed *Janjawid* militia have threatened to attack three villages in West Darfur which they apparently believe are supporting anti-government forces. On 15 January, *Janjawid* gunmen reportedly warned villagers out searching for firewood that if they did not leave their village within 72 hours they would be attacked. As they fled to neighbouring villages, carrying their valuables, the *Janjawid* robbed some of them. The *Janjawid* are now reportedly also planning to attack two other nearby villages, and have been gathering near each village. An attack will likely result in civilian deaths

Although the African Union (AU) peacekeepers in Darfur have a mandate to protect civilians, they have frequently failed to do so even when informed of impending attacks on civilians.

The villagers under threat belong to the Erenga ethnic group. In the past three months they have been repeatedly attacked by the *Janjawid*, seemingly because the government believe most people in the area support the armed opposition groups that have rejected the Darfur Peace Agreement.

Over the past year Amnesty International has reported on a series of attacks in this area of West Darfur. On 14 December 2005 the *Janjawid* attacked three villages, killing 11 people. On 29 October 2006, and again on 11 and 12 November, they attacked another village, killing a total of 67 people, both adults and children.

At least 37 people were killed and 10 injured on 9 December 2006 during a *Janjawid* attack on a truck carrying passengers as well as medical supplies. The truck was travelling from the capital of West Darfur, Al-Geneina, to the village of Sirba. A group of *Janjawid* militia on horseback ambushed the truck, and shot the driver dead. They then fired a rocket propelled grenade at the truck and set fire to the fuel barrels inside. Many of the deaths came when the *Janjawid* opened fire on people as they fled.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) took up arms against the Sudanese government in Darfur in 2003, the government has armed and supported the *Janjawid*, as a proxy force against the rebels. The government and the *Janjawid* have deliberately targeted civilians from ethnic groups or areas seen to be supporting the armed opposition. Some 85,000 people have been killed, while around 200,000 have died of hunger or disease after they fled the fighting, and more than two million people have been forced to flee their homes. Rebel groups have also committed human rights abuses, including robbing humanitarian convoys and aid workers. Amnesty International and the UN have called the attacks committed in Darfur crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In May 2006, the government and one rebel group, a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army led by Minni Minawi (known as the SLA/MM), signed the Darfur Peace Agreement. Other SLA factions and the JEM refused to sign the agreement. Since the agreement was signed, the security situation has worsened in Darfur, with more civilians killed, raped or forced to flee their homes.

Peacekeepers from the AU have been present in Darfur since 2004 with a mandate to "protect civilians under imminent threat and in the immediate vicinity". However, citing a lack of resources and a limited mandate, they have often failed to protect civilians under attack. On 31 August, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to send UN peacekeepers in Darfur to take over from the AU. The Sudanese government said that it would refuse to allow the UN to deploy troops in Darfur, but has agreed in principle to the deployment of a hybrid UN/AU peacekeeping force. The composition and date for full deployment of this force have not yet been agreed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- calling on the African Union Mission in Sudan to urgently deploy troops to the area of the villages Bir Dageeg, Sirba and Abu Suruj to protect civilians from *Janjawid* attacks;
- urging the government to immediately disarm the *Janjawid* militias.

APPEALS TO:

Office of the Spokesman of the African Union Mission in the Sudan

Noureddine Mezni

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Salutation: Dear Mr Mezni

Prof. Al-Zubair Bashir Taha

Minister of Internal Affairs

Ministry of Interior, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

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+ 249 183 776554 (Please mark, "FAO Minister of Internal Affairs")

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 February 2007.
