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Open letter to the Security Council

Dear Ambassador,

Amnesty international is deeply concerned that refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable civilians could be at risk in eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic (CAR) when the European Union Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (EUFOR) withdraws on 15 March 2009. The transition period before the full deployment of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) can produce a security and protection vacuum and jeopardize the fragile stability gained with the EUFOR presence in the region. The Security Council should seriously take into consideration developments in the political and security situations in Chad, Sudan and the Central African Republic in order to prevent any risk to the safety of civilians living in the region.

On 15 March 2009 MINURCAT will replace EUFOR. The Security Council, through resolution 1861 (2009), has authorized 5,200 military personnel to replace the 3,300 EUFOR troops.

The security situation in eastern Chad and the CAR continues to be of concern. Serious human rights violations, including attacks against civilians, the militarization of some refugee camps, rape and other gender-based violence, recruitment of child soldiers and enforced disappearances, are still ongoing. Members of the Chadian security forces and those of opposition armed groups from Chad, Sudan and the CAR responsible for this situation continue to enjoy impunity while victims are left without assistance.

Tension is currently high between Chad and Sudan especially after the International Criminal Court issued on 4 March 2009 an arrest warrant against Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir for his alleged involvement in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Darfur region. Reacting to the court's decision, the Sudanese Government expelled 13 international non-governmental organizations and closed down three Sudanese organizations on 9 March 2009. According to United Nations figures, the withdrawal of these humanitarian organizations could affect at least 4.7 million people in Darfur, leaving 1.1 million people with no access to food, a further 1.5 million will lose access to health facilities and services and more than a million might be deprived of access to potable water and sanitation.

During months leading up to and after the December 2008 Inclusive Political Dialogue in the CAR, there was a considerable expectation in the country that politically motivated violence was receding. However, the months of February and March 2009 have seen a resurgence of attacks by at least one armed political group and threats of violence by others in northern CAR. There is an urgent need to re-establish security in the entire northern CAR and to rebuild confidence between the CAR government and its opponents.

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As a result of Khartoum's decision, living conditions for internally displaced people in Darfur are likely to deteriorate in the coming days. People from the affected areas could be forced to move across the border into Chad, increasing the already large number of Sudanese refugees living in refugee camps in eastern Chad. Around 263,000 refugees from Darfur, 57,000 refugees from the northern Central African Republic and 180,000 Chadian IDPs are receiving daily assistance and protection from humanitarian organizations, EUFOR, MINURCAT and UN agencies. New refugees from Darfur due to a worsening political and humanitarian situation in Sudan will present a great challenge for MINURCAT in terms of their physical protection, in particular during this transitional period before the effective and full deployment of the UN troops.

On 19 January Chadian opposition armed group leader Timan Erdimi was appointed as the chief of the Union of Resistance Forces (*Union des Forces de résistance*, a coalition of eight rebel groups formed in late 2008) during a meeting of Chadian opposition armed groups in Sudan. The Union's aim is to remove president Déby from power and it has threatened to start fighting from the eastern part of Chad.

The Security Council decision to authorize the deployment of a military component to replace EUFOR in eastern Chad and northeastern CAR is a welcome step. However, only a speedy and full deployment of MINURCAT would be effective to prevent further attacks against civilian communities, refugees and IDPs, and to ensure that the perpetrators of serious human rights abuses are brought to justice. Amnesty International also urges the Security Council not to limit MINURCAT's mandate to north eastern CAR and to extend its deployment to all parts of northern CAR that have been afflicted by violence and human rights abuses against unarmed civilians.

Therefore, Amnesty International urgently requests the Security Council to:

- Make sure that MINURCAT is fully deployed in the shortest period possible, and to be ready to reconsider at any time the authorized number of its uniformed personnel in order to be able to react to political and humanitarian developments in eastern Chad and neighboring Darfur, as well as northern CAR, and to make sure that the civilian population in the region is properly protected;
- Urge the European Union and the countries contributing to EUFOR to continue to provide technical, logistic and financial support/assistance to MINURCAT in order to allow for a smooth transition between the two forces and for MINURCAT to be able to face new challenges that could arise;
- Provide full support to MINURCAT enabling the mission to effectively implement its human rights and rule of law mandate as expressed in SC resolution 1861 (2009) and to ensure that the victims of human rights abuses have access to justice and reparations, including that the perpetrators are brought to justice;
- Step up pressure on the Government of Sudan to immediately reverse its decision to expel from Sudan and deregister 13 international and 3 local humanitarian aid agencies and immediately permit them to resume their operations without fear of further harassment and to halt any action to expel or deregister international and local humanitarian organizations operating in Sudan, and especially in the affected Darfur region.

Amnesty International hopes that these recommendations will be considered by the Security Council and reflected in any further decision regarding the Republic of Chad and the Central African Republic. The organization is ready to provide with more information if required.

Yours sincerely,

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Head of Amnesty International Office at the United Nations