

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

PRE 01/012/2010

09 January 2010

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 00:01 GMT, SATURDAY, 9 JANUARY 2010

Sudan365: A beat for peace

Thousands of Activists Gather in 15 Countries to Warn of Worsening Conflict

Celebrities and Activists Caution One Year to Prevent War in Sudan

(LONDON) Today (9 January 2010) thousands of activists are gathering at events in 15 countries in a global coordinated effort, calling on world leaders to take urgent steps to prevent a return to severe and widespread conflict in Sudan.

Sudan365 (www.sudan365.org), a year of campaigning for Sudan, has been organised by a coalition of groups including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Save Darfur Coalition, FIDH, Refugees International, Darfur Consortium and Arab Coalition for Darfur. [The full list of participating countries and groups can be found at: www.sudan365.org].

The effort comes with one year remaining until a referendum that will decide the future of Sudan and marks the five year anniversary of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan and called for this referendum. With many highly contentious issues still to be resolved and amidst increasing inter-ethnic violence in the South and continued attacks on civilians in Darfur, there is a real risk of a return to conflict that could destabilise the entire region and place civilians in grave danger.

Sudan365 is being supported by some of the world's most famous drummers - including Phil Selway, Radiohead; Stewart Copeland, The Police; Nick Mason, Pink Floyd; Jonny Quinn, Snow Patrol; Caroline Corr; Richard Jupp, Elbow; Middle Eastern star Mohammed Mounir and Mustapha Tettey Addy who has been drumming since the 1970s. The celebrity drummers are coming together to create a 'beat for peace' in Sudan. A film of this global beat for peace, featuring drummers from five continents, will be released to coincide with the launch of the campaign. Today, activists will also drum along at events worldwide to call on governments to take action to prevent worsening violence and ensure civilians are protected.

Activists are calling on world leaders to dramatically increase their engagement to:

- Provide intensive and coherent diplomatic support to Northern and Southern Sudanese parties on unresolved issues such as wealth sharing, borders and security, and legislation for the referendum;
- Increase international monitoring and reporting on human rights violations throughout Sudan in the run-up to the April elections and referendum, and support measures to protect civilians from potential violence related to these events;
- Push the United Nations Security Council to strengthen the civilian protection mandate of the Sudan peacekeeping force (UNMIS) by increasing its presence in remote and volatile areas and by rapidly deploying its personnel to conflict-prone areas.

The 2011 referendum will determine whether or not the Southern region of Sudan becomes independent from the North. Experts fear that instability in the run-up to the referendum or its aftermath could reignite a civil war and cause massive human rights abuses unless international efforts are intensified to find a peaceful path through the next 12 months.

“The people of Sudan experienced 22 years of civil war,” said Tawanda Hondora, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme. “The conflict was finally ended by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which required massive investment and support from the international community. We now see a real risk of this agreement breaking down and a return to devastating conflict with disastrous consequences for the people of Sudan and for the region. Our leaders must provide intensive diplomatic support over the next year.”

“We are already seeing a grave increase in inter-ethnic violence in the South and violence continues in Darfur,” said Tawanda Hondora. “The coming year poses serious threats to human rights in Sudan that can be prevented if governments act now.”

More than 2 million people lost their lives in the 22 year long civil war between the North and the South. 2009 has seen a serious spike in violence in which more than 2,500 have been killed and 350,000 displaced in South Sudan. In Darfur, the conflict in which hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed remains unresolved and millions continue to suffer daily in camps.

“Ideally the parties will reach agreement on a path to avoiding renewed conflict,” said Joel Charny, Acting President of Refugees International. “At the same time the international community must be prepared to respond to increases in violence, attacks on civilians and new population flows, which may occur around the referendum. We recognize the real potential for renewed conflict and we must prepare ourselves to respond.”

“We urge world leaders to pay particular attention to the human rights situation in Sudan in 2010 and to act to prevent the country from spiralling again into bloodshed, violence and impunity,” said Souhayr Belhassen, President of FIDH.

“This campaign is unprecedented. It's incredibly exciting. Thousands of drummers from some of the most famous drummers in the world – Radiohead, Pink Floyd, Snow Patrol, Elbow – to community groups across 5 continents coming together to create a global beat for peace in Sudan. The next 365 days will be critical for the people of Sudan,” said Jamie Catto, founder member of 1 Giant Leap and Faithless. “And this global drumbeat is a cry for positive action from world leaders to prevent conflict from returning.”