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Sudan: Obstructions and delays endanger UN deployment and civilian lives in Darfur

Amnesty International today released a 16-point agenda for effective protection of civilians in Darfur and warned that the peacekeeping operation in Darfur was doomed to fail – thereby further endangering civilian lives -- if the Sudanese government and international community do not immediately halt the obstructions and delays that have been plaguing the mission thus far.

“The Sudanese government continues to obstruct the deployment of non-African units, continues to deny forces permission to fly at night, and continues to demand the right to disrupt communications for peacekeeping forces.”

“If this continues, the UN’s hands will be tied as much as the African Union’s have been – spelling disaster for the UN and, more importantly, for the Darfuri people,” said Erwin van der Borgh, Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme.

“The Sudanese government must stop playing games with the lives of the Darfuri people. They must allow the UN peacekeeping force – whose deployment they clearly agreed to – to do their job effectively. That means allowing them all facilities, personnel and infrastructure necessary for the important tasks that lie ahead.”

On 1 January 2008, a UN force (UNAMID) is due to take over peacekeeping duties from the African Union (AU), which has suffered under the persistent restrictions imposed by the Sudanese government.

On 14 December, the Sudanese government delayed the evacuation of an AU peacekeeper who had been shot in the back by an unknown attacker. It took three hours of negotiation before the AU was finally given permission to fly the seriously wounded soldier to Khartoum for urgent medical treatment.

“The Sudanese government is obliged, under international law, to assist in the evacuation of anyone wounded during the course of the conflict. The delays they are imposing are dangerous and simply unacceptable,” said van der Borgh. “UNAMID must gain assurances that this kind of behaviour will stop as they get ready for deployment in the coming weeks.”

“In addition to the obstacles imposed by the Sudanese government, the UN’s efforts are being hampered by the fact that the international community, on their side, has so far refused to supply the helicopters needed for them to do their job,” said van der Borgh.

The UN has said that it needs a minimum of 24 helicopters to carry out an effective peacekeeping operation in Darfur. Thus far, not one helicopter has been donated – despite personal pleas from the UN Secretary-General to European, US, Canadian and other heads of state.

“It is not enough for the international community to simply wring its hands about the ongoing tragedy in Darfur, while not providing the necessary equipment” said van der Borgh.

“International anguish about the suffering in Darfur seems insincere when governments are not even willing to donate a single helicopter to enable the troops to be able to do the job being asked of them – to protect civilians in Darfur.”

Please click [here](#) to see Amnesty International's 16-point agenda for effective protection of civilians in Darfur, *Time is not on our side -- An agenda for the Darfur Peacekeeping Mission*, AI Index AFR 54/065/2007).