

## **Sudan: Rhetoric versus Reality in Darfur**

### Continuing Abuses Despite Government Charm Offensive

(New York, December 2, 2008) – Recent claims by the Sudanese government that the situation in Darfur is improving are not borne out by reality, fifteen organizations said in a report released today. In an effort to bolster their argument that the U.N. Security Council should suspend the International Criminal Court's (ICC) consideration of an arrest warrant against President Omar al-Bashir, Sudan has contended that there have been serious improvements in Darfur. The ICC prosecutor is scheduled to brief the Security Council on December 3, 2008, about the progress of his investigation.

In stark contrast to Khartoum's claims, the 22 page report, "*Rhetoric vs. Reality—the Situation in Darfur*," prepared by a coalition of nongovernmental organizations—including the Save Darfur Coalition, Human Rights First and Human Rights Watch—documents the lack of progress in Darfur in recent months regarding security, the humanitarian situation, the deployment of peacekeepers and domestic justice.

Following the July 14 announcement by the ICC prosecutor that he was requesting a warrant for the arrest of President Bashir on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, his administration began a diplomatic campaign aimed at convincing Security Council members to suspend the case against him. The government has made a number of public statements proclaiming its willingness to pursue justice in national courts and to achieve peace in Darfur, and has claimed that the situation on the ground there has improved. President Bashir claimed in a televised interview on October 17, that the situation in Darfur is now "very normal."

*"The situation in Darfur is far from what the world would define as 'normal',"* said Julia Fromholz, Director of the Crimes Against Humanity Program at Human Rights First. *"Millions of people are living under daily threat of violence and are dependent on humanitarian aid that is hindered or entirely blocked by ongoing insecurity and endless bureaucratic hurdles."*

The report describes the ongoing insecurity in Darfur. Between July and October 2008, government bombing and fighting in North Darfur led to the displacement of some 90,000 people. In October government forces and allied militia carried out attacks on at least 13 villages near Muhajariya, South Darfur, in which at least 44 civilians were reportedly killed. Even in November, following the government's declaration of a "unilateral, unconditional ceasefire," the Sudanese army continued to bomb villages in North and West Darfur.

*"Once again the Sudanese government is talking peace with diplomats and journalists while waging war in Darfur"* said Save Darfur Coalition president Jerry Fowler. *"And once again civilians are bearing the brunt of the violence."*

More than four million people in Darfur remain in need of humanitarian aid, but the dire security situation prevented access by relief agencies to 250,000 people in September, the greatest number so far this year. Since the beginning of the year, 170 aid workers have been abducted and 11 killed. The Sudanese government also continues to

obstruct the delivery of assistance through bureaucratic constraints and harassment of humanitarian staff.

The United Nations/African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) remains at less than 50 percent of its mandated strength and has repeatedly come under attack. The Sudanese government has once again recommitted to fulfilling its obligations to facilitate the force, but these commitments have yet to be tested. At a local level, government forces and authorities consistently hamper the ability of the force to protect civilians, through obstruction, bureaucracy and even violent attacks.

Sudanese authorities have also announced a series of steps ostensibly designed to improve domestic justice for crimes in Darfur, including a new prosecutor for Darfur. However to date the prosecutor has only considered three cases, and no fresh prosecutions in relation to major atrocities have begun.

*"The international community has an unfortunate record of judging Sudan by its words rather than its actions,"* said Richard Dicker, International Justice Director at Human Rights Watch. *"The Security Council must not allow itself to be hoodwinked by Khartoum into handing Bashir impunity in return for empty promises. Following its Presidential Statement of June 16, Security Council members should reiterate that all parties to the conflict have a binding obligation to cooperate with the court."*

**The report was produced by:**

Human Rights First

Human Rights Watch

Save Darfur Coalition

Action pour les Droits Humains et l'Amitié Sénégal

Arab Coalition for Darfur

Arab Program for Human Rights Activists

Cairo Institute for Human Rights studies

Centre for Human Rights Sierra Leone

Cercle de Réflexion et d'Action pour le Développement Economique et Social Mali

Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre

Fédération Internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme

International Refugees Rights Initiative

L'Action de la jeunesse Guinéenne pour l'Aide au Développement et à la Prospérité

Guinea Conakry

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