

Obama aims to avert Sudan crisis

Reuters
Washington

President Barack Obama on Monday said Sudan faces an immediate crisis over the government's decision to expel some aid groups from Darfur as he dispatched a special US envoy to the war-ravaged African nation.

President Obama spoke during a picture-taking session at the White House with envoy Scott Gration, a retired Air Force general who departed yesterday for Khartoum, southern Sudan and Darfur.

Obama said, "We have an immediate crisis prompted by the Khartoum government's expulsion of non-governmental organisations that are providing aid to displaced persons inside of Sudan."

Sudan expelled 13 aid groups after the International Criminal Court charged President Omar Hassan al-Bashir on March 4 with war crimes in Darfur, where 4.7 million people rely on foreign assistance for food, shelter and protection from fighting between

rebels and government-backed forces.

"We have to figure out a mechanism to get those NGOs back in place, to reverse that decision, or to find some mechanism whereby we avert an enormous humanitarian crisis," President Obama said.

The US would seek a way to restart talks between rebels

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and the Khartoum government that could help resolve the Darfur situation.

"We don't expect any solutions overnight to the long-standing problems there," President Obama said.

Gen Gration will try to reinvigorate the North-South Agreement, which ended two decades of civil war between north and south Sudan in 2005.