

Bashir visits Darfur

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NGO expulsion orders irreversible - Sudan

Donkey with an Ocampo mask roams streets

Reuters
El Fasher, Sudan

Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir flew into Darfur yesterday to rally supporters in defiance of criticism for his shutdown of aid agencies running a huge humanitarian relief effort.

'Without these (expelled) organisations much of the aid operation literally comes to a halt,'

Statement
UN aid agencies in Sudan

Sudan expelled 13 foreign aid groups and shut down three local organisations saying they helped the International Criminal Court (ICC), which last week issued an arrest warrant for Bashir over charges he masterminded atrocities in Darfur.

Before the expulsions, the United Nations and aid groups were running the world's largest humanitarian operation in Darfur where, international

experts say, almost six years of fighting has driven more than 2.7 million people from their homes.

Gen. Bashir arrived in north Darfur's capital El Fasher as officials said the expulsion orders were "irreversible".

Thousands of people waved banners and flags to greet Bashir, who rode in the back of a pick-up truck. The crowd taunted ICC Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo, releasing a donkey with an Ocampo mask to roam the town.

Foreign Ministry undersecretary Mutrif Siddig told the state *Suna news agency* that the aid groups' cooperation with the ICC had been "proved by evidence".

UN agencies in Sudan on Saturday released a statement saying it would be impossible to fill the gap left by the expelled organisations which made up around 40 percent of the humanitarian workforce in Darfur.

"While some 85 interna-

tional NGOs (non-governmental organisations) operate in Darfur, without these organisations much of the aid operation literally comes to a halt," the statement said.

Aid officials have warned the expulsions will hit other turbulent areas of northern Sudan, particularly in areas along the contested border with the country's semi-autonomous south.

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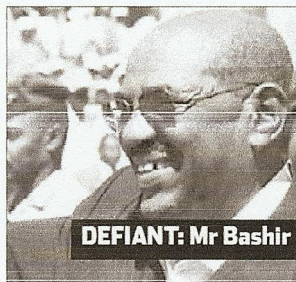
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DEFIANT: Mr Bashir