

Building a Better UNAMID

A joint NGO statement

Two years ago, the UN Security Council passed Security Council Resolution 1769 authorizing the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Since then, different actors within the international community – including the UN Secretary-General, various government officials, and global advocacy coalitions – have outlined innumerable deficiencies, struggles, and failures of UNAMID. These criticisms were intended to generate a sense of urgency and incite action.

Many of the present signatories have come together over the last two years to warn that UNAMID was on the brink of failure, outlining Sudanese government obstruction and highlighting unfulfilled international commitments and needed resources, not the least of them helicopters. **Although nearly 70 percent of UNAMID has been deployed, the international community still has an enormous amount of work to do in order to ensure that UNAMID can fulfill its mandate in Darfur.**

A year and half since the first blue-helmeted troops set foot in Darfur, one of the resources most necessary for fulfilling its civilian protection mandate remains uncommitted – transport helicopters. It is shocking that so many members of the Security Council – including members of the permanent five – have done relatively little to carry out their commitment to help protect the people of Darfur. At the same time, it is hard to be surprised when UNAMID was authorized only after the Security Council agreed to allow the Sudanese government to retain substantial control over the peacekeeping force, a situation that ultimately provided the international community with an excuse for failing to fulfill its obligations.

Yet despite its inadequacies, UNAMID has continued to plug along. Arguably, security in Darfur has improved since UNAMID began deploying, even if the gains have been marginal, pockets of the region have seen spikes in violence, and there are no signs of rampant banditry abating. The international community cannot resign itself to accepting a barely operational UNAMID. We now have an opportunity to identify the force's positive effects and build on them to truly provide security in Darfur.

UNAMID is not a failure. It is the battered product of an obstructionist Sudanese government and a neglectful and irresponsible international community. But that does not mean it cannot be strengthened and enabled to fulfill its mandate.

And it must be. **UNAMID is in Darfur for the long haul, and if the international community is truly committed to building sustainable peace in Sudan, it must be equally committed to an effective UNAMID.**

There have been several glimmers of hope over the last six months which illuminate the potential positive impact UNAMID can have on stabilizing security and fostering a positive environment for political negotiations. These include UNAMID's robust response to violence in Muhajeria and the force's beneficial role following the expulsion of humanitarian organizations in early March. Unfortunately, these instances remain the rare exception instead of the norm.

In January and February 2009, Muhajeria in South Darfur was the focal point of intense fighting between Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) forces and Sudanese Armed Forces, endangering tens of thousands of civilians. As the fighting escalated, the Sudanese government informed UNAMID that it was preparing to use "all means possible" to drive out JEM elements.¹

¹ United Nations Security Council, "Secretary-General Report on African Union-United Nations Operation in Darfur", S/2009/83, 10 February 2009, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/231/63/PDF/N0923163.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 23 July 2009).

The government then officially requested that UNAMID withdraw its troops from Muhajeria and the surrounding area in order to “prevent any unnecessary loss of life.”² In a rare move, UNAMID leadership refused to pull out its troops. High level diplomatic efforts ensued, and UNAMID did not concede to the government’s demands. **UNAMID’s refusal to abandon the civilians in Muhajeria no doubt prevented a large-scale attack which would have caused extensive casualties.**

Less than a month later, on March 4, 2009, the Sudanese government callously expelled 13 international humanitarian organizations and shut down three local human rights and humanitarian agencies in a flagrant rejection of international humanitarian principles. Less highlighted was the fact that the Sudanese government had already been systematically targeting humanitarian protection monitoring and reporting programs for many months, including closing down women’s centers and gender-based violence programs.

Following Khartoum’s March 4 decree, UNAMID stepped in to help fill the gaping hole in protection programming and re-establishing humanitarian access. A large gap still remains and there is substantially more UNAMID could do stabilize access and fill new gaps in human rights and security information-sharing in the wake of the expulsions. But the force notably increased its presence in some areas, making more consistent patrols to certain camps and proactively trying to secure humanitarian access in a heightened security environment. According to the Secretary-General’s June report, “UNAMID is currently providing 24-hour protection of four warehouses previously managed by an expelled NGO and 67 vehicles belonging to United Nations partners.”³ In early July 2009, UNAMID’s civilian Gender Advisory Unit worked to reopen women’s centers in Abu Shouk camp which were previously closed by the government. The centers will offer critical livelihood and literacy training, as well as raise awareness about reproductive health and sexual violence for the first time in almost a year.⁴

These instances highlight UNAMID’s potential to have a widespread and positive impact if provided with necessary resources and international support.

UNAMID’s performance at Muhajeria indicates that it is capable of protecting civilians and deterring large-scale violence. However, there have been numerous reports from the field that suggest that although UNAMID has the mandate to act under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in order to protect itself and prevent attacks on civilians, individual troops often express a misunderstanding of that role or indicate leadership has told them otherwise. If UNAMID is to protect civilians from future violent clashes, troops must be consistently trained to execute their full civilian protection mandate. This training must begin during their pre-deployment instruction, and be reinforced at every level of the force’s command and control structure.

UNAMID’s mandate includes facilitating humanitarian access and monitoring, investigating, and reporting on the human rights and security situation. UNAMID’s quick response following the expulsions was a step in the right direction. However, the last two months have seen a considerable crackdown on UNAMID’s work by the Sudanese government. UNAMID’s freedom of movement has been restricted by Sudanese forces, Khartoum has held up hundreds of visa applications and detained and tortured UNAMID national staff in direct violation of the status-of-forces agreement. The Secretary-General expressed concern in his June report, saying “When taken together, these incidents signal a negative trend with regard to the Government’s cooperation with UNAMID.”⁵

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Women’s centres re-open in Darfur with help from AU-UN mission,” UN News Centre, 2 July 2009, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31359&Cr=darfur&Cr1=> (accessed 23 July 2009).

⁵ United Nations Security Council, “Secretary-General Report on African Union–United Nations Operation in Darfur”, S/2009/297, 9 June 2009, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/363/65/PDF/N0936365.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 23 July 2009).

Just a month later, the Secretary-General softened this statement by noting a “considerable improvement” in the Sudanese government’s behavior with respect to UNAMID.⁶ He implied that although Khartoum was cooperating by supporting the work of UNAMID at the national level, non-implementation of its agreements locally was the real problem. **This shows that, rather than taking responsibility for the protection of its own citizens, the Sudanese government has shifted the blame to paint a false picture that disassociates itself from the main drivers of continued instability in Darfur.**

The other major factor hindering UNAMID’s success has been the dearth of continually requested, but never provided, resources to make the force mobile and self-sustaining. Chief among these are the 18 transport helicopters, as well as several other key enabling units, which would vastly improve the force’s ability to quickly move troops to hot-spots throughout Darfur.

If UNAMID is to protect civilians in a meaningful and effective way, it must be able to monitor and verify events on the ground, rapidly mobilize troops, and sustain itself in the field. UNAMID’s ineffectiveness stems from a lack of strong leadership and training, a shortage of critical resources, and an obstructionist Sudanese government which has rarely been confronted.

The fact that these challenges exist two years after the mission’s authorization is an embarrassment to both the UN system and the individual member-states of the UN and AU, particularly those sitting on the Security Council. The challenges we highlight have been brought up time and again – and can no longer be ignored. The international community must seize the moment to build upon what the force is doing effectively and enable UNAMID to fulfill its mandate.

Recommendations

Mandate interpretation

- The United States, United Kingdom, France, and Canada must ensure lead train-equip-deploy efforts which ensure that UNAMID troops and police at all levels understand their mandate, and that such training be included in pre-deployment instruction.
- The U.S., UK, France, Canada and other militaries with relevant capabilities must contribute personnel to leadership positions within the mission – including military observers, military staff officers, civilian police and personnel – to reinforce the mission’s command and control structure.

Sudanese government obstruction

- Key actors, including the African Union, Arab League, China, the U.S., UK, and France must demand the unhindered deployment and free movement of UNAMID at every opportunity when engaging the Sudanese government.
- All UN and AU member states, and particularly the U.S., UK, and France, must insist that that Sudan cease its obstruction of UNAMID, at both the national and local levels, as a necessary precondition to any discussion of improving bilateral relations.
- The African Union, United Nations Security Council, and Troop Contributing Countries must pressure Khartoum to adhere to its international obligation to refrain from harassing UNAMID personnel, and publicly outline and enact specific penalties if Sudan refuses to do so.

Outstanding resources

⁶ United Nations Security Council, “Secretary-General Report on African Union–United Nations Operation in Darfur”, S/2009/352, 13 July 2009, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/396/03/PDF/N0939603.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 23 July 2009).

- UN member states with the ability to contribute vital assets to the force – including transport helicopters, two medium transport convoys, and an aerial reconnaissance unit – must work to do so without further delay.
- Donors, especially the Friends of UNAMID grouping led by the U.S., must give or help procure the necessary equipment and resources to ensure that troops pledged by African Troop Contributing Countries can deploy rapidly and self-sustain in the field.
- Friends of UNAMID and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations must immediately secure the required equipment for the final multi-role logistics unit contributed by Ethiopia so that it can swiftly deploy and effectively operate in the field.

To its credit, UNAMID has overcome incredible obstacles to effectively protect civilians over the last two years. Unfortunately these instances have been all too rare.

The need for effective protection is too great for the world to resign itself to a second-rate civilian protection force in Darfur. There is an urgent need for a clear demonstration of political will from the international community backing UNAMID. It is the necessary ingredient to ending Sudanese obstructionism and providing the essential resources. The international community must muster the will to fulfill its promises with regard to UNAMID and support the achievement of peace in Darfur.

ORGANIZATIONS ENDORSING THIS STATEMENT

Action de la Jeunesse Guinéenne pour l'Aide au Développement
Guinée

Action pour les Droits Humains et l'Amitié
Sénégal

Africa Action
USA

African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
Uganda

Africa Internally Displaced Persons Voice
Zambia

American Jewish World Service
USA

Amnesty International USA
USA

ARI Movement
Turkey

Bahrain Coalition for Darfur
Bahrain

Centre for Human Rights
Sierra Leone

Collectif Urgence Darfour
France

Genocide Intervention Network
USA

Human Rights First
USA

Jewish Council for Public Affairs
USA

Jewish World Watch
USA

International Commission of Jurists
Kenya

Investors Against Genocide
USA

Kenya Human Rights Commission
Kenya

Religious Action Center
USA

Save Darfur Coalition
USA

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project
Nigeria

West African Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Network
Sénégal