

MEDIA RELEASE: EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 8 JANUARY 2011

DETERIORATING SITUATION IN DARFUR OF GREAT CONCERN WARN NGOS

UN must step up reporting on humanitarian and human rights situation in Sudan

(8 January 2011) A coalition of human rights and advocacy NGOs has today warned of rising levels of violence in Darfur during and after the referendum on southern self-determination, scheduled to begin tomorrow. The coalition, including Human Rights Watch, African Centre for Peace and Justice Studies and The Enough Project has urged the UN Security Council to insist on regular public reports on the humanitarian and human rights situation in Darfur and throughout Sudan in order to adequately monitor the situation on the ground.

“There are clear signs that the situation in Darfur is getting worse,” said Jehanne Henry, Sudan researcher at Human Rights Watch. *“But the international community is failing to properly monitor and respond to the situation in Darfur.”*

The situation in Darfur has deteriorated in the weeks leading to the referendum, with a resumption of conflict between Sudanese government forces and Sudan Liberation Army rebels loyal to Mini Minawi, a signatory of the now-defunct 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, in several locations in North and South Darfur. Clashes and attacks on civilians by government forces in Khor Abeche, Shearia and Shangil Tobayi caused the displacement of 32,000 people.

Despite the presence of the United Nations/African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur (UNAMID), civilians remain vulnerable to attacks and human rights violations. In Khor Abeche, South Darfur, government forces even prevented civilians from taking refuge with peacekeepers. Meanwhile, human rights violations including sexual violence continue to occur both inside and outside displaced persons camps across Darfur.

“An important first step to improving protection of civilians is to ensure public reporting on the human rights and protection needs,” said Souhayr Belhassen, President of the International Federation for Human Rights. *“The UN should at the very least provide regular, thorough and independent public reports on the humanitarian and human rights situation in North Sudan, including Darfur and in Southern Sudan.”*

Information about security in Darfur and the impact of violence on civilians is largely unavailable despite the large presence of UN peacekeepers and civilian staff in Darfur. The UN’s human rights office has not issued public reports on human rights issues in Darfur for two years. The UN’s humanitarian coordination office stopped publishing humanitarian needs profiles for Darfur from late 2009 and UNAMID has only recently started releasing basic humanitarian reports. The coalition is calling on UNAMID to expand the geographical scope and detail of their reports.

Government authorities and rebel groups have prevented UN and other agencies from accessing tens of thousands of displaced people living in many locations in Darfur. The government’s arrest of Darfuri journalists and activists late October and early November, together with its expulsion of 13 NGOs in 2009, have contributed to the information vacuum.

“The international community must not repeat the mistakes of the past and allow conflict to flare up in Darfur when its attention is elsewhere. By accepting this information blackout, it is turning its back on its commitment to protect civilians from the violence in Darfur” said Dr. Monica Serrano, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

The coalition also calls on Sudanese parties to respect international humanitarian law and allow unfettered humanitarian access to populations in need regardless of ethnicity or location and calls on the UN Security Council to insist on the same.

Sudan is host to the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) in northern and Southern Sudan, and the AU/UN hybrid peacekeeping mission in Darfur.

ENDS.

EDITORS NOTES (NOT FOR PUBLICATION):

The coalition includes the following organisations:

- Aegis Trust
- African Centre for Peace and Justice
- Arab Coalition for Darfur
- Darfur Consortium
- The Enough Project at the Center for American Progress
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
- Human Rights First
- Human Rights Watch
- International Refugees Rights Initiative
- Italians for Darfur
- Johanniter Unfall Hilfe
- Save Darfur/GI-Net
- Society for Threatened People
- Sudan Advocacy Forum
- Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM)
- Waging Peace

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