



THE DARFUR CONSORTIUM
An African and International
Civil Society Action for Darfur

Putting People First: The Protection Challenge Facing UNAMID in Darfur

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‘Protection of civilians and bringing peace to Darfur define the main purpose of UNAMID’s mandate.’ Henry Anyidoho, UNAMID Deputy Head of Mission, 30 June 2008 ¹

For five years, Darfurians have been asking for protection from devastating violence and attacks. The international community has repeatedly promised this protection but has failed to deliver. Now, the new United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) is in danger of becoming the world’s latest broken promise.

While recognising that a long-term solution to the conflict can only come through negotiations, the African Union agreed to provide protection and deployed a peacekeeping force (the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)) in 2004. Four years later, an under-funded and under-supported AMIS proved incapable of protecting people.

The civilian population now looks to the first United Nations-African Union ‘hybrid’ mission to help improve security. But six months after initial deployment, UNAMID has failed to provide adequate protection. The force lacks critical resources, leaving the people of Darfur, humanitarian agencies and even its own peacekeepers vulnerable to ongoing attacks and extreme violence. In UNAMID’s first six months,

violence has displaced an average of 1,000 persons a day and attacks against humanitarian agencies have escalated. On 8 July 2008, unidentified militia attacked a UNAMID police and military patrol in North Darfur. This was the deadliest attack on UNAMID, killing seven peacekeepers and wounding over 20.

Various bodies shoulder the responsibility for the shortcomings of UNAMID. The Government of Sudan has effectively stalled deployment and the United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council have allowed it to do so. While supporting the mission with their voice and votes at the United Nations, donor countries have not fulfilled their pledges to support the mission. It seems donor nations are allowing UNAMID to follow the same path as its predecessor, AMIS. With African nations providing the bulk of the deployed forces on the ground, on 21 July 2008 the African Union Peace and Security Council once again called on the international community to provide the necessary “logistics and other equipment to enable UNAMID to carry out its mandate more effectively”.² It also urged the Government of Sudan to extend “unreserved cooperation” to the mission and ensure the security and safety of UNAMID personnel.

While waiting for the Government of Sudan and the international community to keep their promises, the peacekeeping force could be doing much more to protect civilians even with its limited capacity in terms of its military deployment. Although there are additional measures that UNAMID could undertake in relation to the work of human rights offices and other civilian elements of the mission, this report focuses on the primarily military protection aspects of the mission, a critical component of the civilian protection that is needed in Darfur. The report calls on the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the African Union’s Peace and Security Directorate and UNAMID commanders to prioritise the immediate protection of civilians or the people of Darfur will continue to suffer the consequences.

INTRODUCTION TO DARFUR AND UNAMID

More than five years since the beginning of the crisis, the situation in Darfur remains dire. Over 4 million people continue to live in fear and are subject to regular attacks by militia, splintering rebel groups, and government forces. The peace process has stalled and continuing violence has displaced 190,000 civilians in the first half of 2008. The urgency of the situation is compounded by daily attacks on humanitarian workers and growing insecurity and lawlessness. There have been more hijackings of humanitarian vehicles in the first half of 2008 than in the whole of 2007, making it increasingly difficult for humanitarian agencies to address the overwhelming needs of the displaced and conflict-affected population. The difficulties of delivering food safely, combined with a particularly poor harvest, have led to a precarious food situation this year. The longer the conflict drags on without adequate civilian protection and security, the more devastating the impact will be on millions of innocent lives.

UNAMID, a joint African Union and United Nations peace support mission, replaced its predecessor AMIS on 1 January 2008. The creation of the mission had been agreed unanimously under UN Security Council Resolution 1769 in July 2007. At full strength, it is set to have 26,000 military, police and civilian personnel, making it the largest peacekeeping mission in the world. UNAMID was authorised by a United Nations Chapter VII mandate to protect civilians.³ This reference to Chapter VII

allows the use of force under certain circumstances.⁴ UNAMID is also responsible for carrying out the same duties for which AMIS held responsibility, including promoting the re-establishment of confidence, deterring violence, providing security through patrolling, and deploying police forces in areas where internally displaced persons (IDPs) are concentrated.

Despite the unanimous Security Council agreement on the need for UNAMID, the force still lacks resources and capacity to operate at full strength. To date, it has just over 9,479 uniformed personnel, most of whom are ex-AMIS forces. The Government of Sudan continues to delay agreement with troop- and police-contributing countries, and since January, only 600 troops have been added to the ex-AMIS forces.⁵ Approximately 70 per cent of the police donated to UNAMID are assigned to local community policing centres in the IDP camps. But there is a shortage of international police and Formed Police Units (FPUs) (which are armed and have greater powers to arrest perpetrators) thus leaving the mission overstretched. As of 18 June, 1,661 police officers and only one formed police unit were deployed.⁶ Without adequate police support, troops are left to assume the roles of both soldiers and policemen, conducting patrols inside camps and communities without the proper training to do so.

The mission also continues to face serious deployment and logistical challenges including difficult terrain, the extreme remoteness of Darfur and a lack of basic equipment such as helicopters and armoured vehicles. Former AMIS soldiers have had to tie blue plastic bags over their helmets or paint them blue to denote they were with UNAMID. Customs delays by the Government of Sudan continue and the lack of a unified peace process in Darfur looms large over the fate of this peacekeeping force. Senior UN and AU officials warn that in its current state – particularly without vital equipment from donor nations – the force will fail to provide any meaningful protection to the people.⁷

UNAMID'S FIRST SIX MONTHS

Unfortunately, hopes began to fade just weeks into its deployment as UNAMID failed to live up to its promises in some areas, and the mission began to sustain attacks by armed actors. In places such as Abu Shouk and Shangil Tobai, civilians expected to receive protection through firewood and market patrols by UNAMID immediately upon deployment. Six months on however, many IDPs express outrage because UNAMID has conducted few or no patrols in their area. Some IDPs are losing confidence in UNAMID altogether and now refuse to report any activities to the mission.

'When UNAMID first came we wanted to give them a chance – surely they must improve on the AMIS. But after a few weeks it was clear that there was no difference. They would prefer to stay in their base and pretend nothing is happening. We need troops who will protect us – who will leave their base and chase the janjaweed, escort women when they collect wood, and stop the bandits attacking the aid workers.' **M. A. Mohammed**⁸

'We want troops who have a strong mandate to protect civilians. This means they do patrols, catch criminals, collect weapons from janjaweed, make peace between rebels and government, compensate us for our stolen properties, and secure the area of cultivation because the WFP food ration is not enough.' **IDP in Shangil Tobai**

In a few areas of Darfur there have been welcome signs that UNAMID is willing and able, to increase protection activities and improve relations with communities. However, a review of UNAMID's pre-deployment training, troop readiness, and performance on the ground reveals a series of missed opportunities and failed efforts to protect the people when they needed it most. The following sections set out examples of that experience, followed by recommendations for how UNAMID could be improved to protect civilians more effectively, as additional critical assets and a peace process are awaited.

TRAINING AND MANDATE INTERPRETATION

To ensure troop readiness, most troop- and police-contributing countries (and the UN) require their forces to undergo basic military and peacekeeping training prior to any UN deployment. This includes understanding the mission's rules of engagement, mandate, protection responsibilities and being aware of gender issues, human rights, and conflict resolution techniques. (International police are already equipped with basic training to maintain law and order from their respective countries and generally do not receive nor require additional training for peacekeeping operations).

For UNAMID, this pre-deployment training has been provided to the new incoming battalions by a number of donor countries and peacekeeping training centres such as the United States' African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) programme and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Ghana. Additional training is also expected for ex-AMIS peacekeepers, but it is impossible to undergo such training without leaving their field posts. Many commanders are forced to decide between redeploying their troops for new training or managing battalions who are expected to carry out new responsibilities without ever having been trained on the new rules of engagement. The result has been inconsistent interpretation of UNAMID's rules of engagement and standard operating procedures.

RESPONSE TO ATTACKS

'I live near the UNAMID compound. Recently there were three incidents in one single night. A woman got raped, a man got shot and wounded, and another man was kidnapped while he collected firewood. This was so close to the UNAMID base, yet they did nothing. Incidents like this happen all the time, but we don't hear about them in the media. Nobody is listening to us.'

A. Osman

UNAMID has limited capacity to respond to large-scale attacks; but its mandate requires forceful response and strong measures to protect civilians where possible. While commanders know the mandate and newly-deployed troops are trained to take action, UNAMID has failed to do so numerous times over the past six months as illustrated by the following cases in Seleia, Tawila, and El Geneina.

Seleia, West Darfur

In February 2008, Sudanese forces and armed militia attacked and bombed civilians in Seleia, Sirba and Abu Surug, West Darfur. Around 40,000 people were displaced and at least 115 people killed as a result of the clashes. Witnesses say four days

passed before UNAMID sent a patrol up to the Seleia area. Militiamen were seen looting the town and a UNAMID patrol drove past without taking action. It is reasonable to observe that the capacity of UNAMID at the time prohibited an adequate response to such major violence. The question remains however whether UNAMID could have intervened in the looting that ensued. The mission consequently did increase its patrolling and investigation activities in West Darfur and worked to strengthen its capacity and verification of incidents in the area. However, banditry and carjackings are still prevalent and militia movements and attacks continue.

Tawila, North Darfur

In May 2008, hostilities erupted between rebel forces and Sudanese government troops in Tawila, which hosts three camps with a total of about 34,000 IDPs. After rebel forces fled, government police went into one of the camps and set fire to shelters and attacked civilians. Thousands were displaced and there were reports of sexual violence against civilians. Witnesses recall UNAMID peacekeepers staying in their base during the violence, just meters away, and failing to respond to direct attacks on civilians as they were occurring.

UNAMID has 140 soldiers plus military observers and police advisers in the Tawila area. News of this attack spread rapidly and IDPs throughout North Darfur have cited this example as they begin to take stock and seriously question UNAMID's ability to protect them. UNAMID has subsequently increased patrols in and around the camp, but complaints of UNAMID inaction elsewhere continue.

El Geneina, West Darfur

In June 2008, a long convoy of militia on camels, horses and in pick-ups entered the town of El Geneina and stopped just a few metres from UNAMID's main base. They abducted, beat and robbed one UN staff member and stopped a UN vehicle to rob its passengers of their possessions. They eventually left after negotiations with Government of Sudan National Security personnel. UNAMID did not respond to the attacks and, according to witnesses, was not involved in any of the subsequent mediation efforts. A few weeks later, in Zam Zam IDP camp in North Darfur, 38 UNAMID peacekeepers were detained and held hostage for five hours by the Minni Minnawi faction of the Sudan Liberation Army.

PRESENCE AND PATROLS

The failures of the international community have left UNAMID without capacity to respond forcibly to large-scale attacks, such as in Seleia. The mission should nevertheless be able to do more to protect civilians from violence within camps and when they leave camps to go to market or collect firewood. It should also be able to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian supplies. While UNAMID has undertaken efforts to improve its presence across Darfur, in many areas where it is present, patrols are not occurring on a regular basis. Patrols vary from camp to camp and from community to community, but many Darfurians consider them short, infrequent, and inconsistent.

Rural communities near Kebkabiya report facing regular harassment during firewood collections, burglary and random shootings at night, but say UNAMID has yet to conduct any patrols since January. Women in particular, who are often targets of sexual violence and attacks during firewood collection, have also complained to UNAMID on the lack of protection outside the camps.

'They (UNAMID) told us they do not have enough troops to patrol, and they will patrol when they get more soldiers and equipment. What good is that to us? We women are getting attacked now. Last week the janjaweed took my friend while she collected wood. If UNAMID do patrols next year when they are ready, that will not bring her back. We need them to patrol now.' **S. M. Ahmed**

'We go out to collect firewood two or three times a week. It's very dangerous and I'm scared all day when I go out. But there is no alternative. I wish UNAMID would come with us – even just once a week. Sometimes armed men on camels and horses come and threaten us. Sometimes they rob us or beat us. Some women have been raped or killed. Usually it is only two or three men. If UNAMID came with us, these men would not dare to attack us.' **H. Abdelmahmoud**

Where UNAMID has initiated firewood patrols there has been some success. Women in Kalma camp in South Darfur report that when they are accompanied by UNAMID patrols they feel much safer and the number of attacks falls considerably. However, they also note that patrols are currently too short and sporadic to meet all their needs, and when they have to go out unescorted they are often attacked.

Such patrols must be conducted on a regular basis. Consistent patrolling throughout the day and night are needed for the civilians to feel safe when they are gathering firewood or food from the market. Troops must also take additional measures to ensure women are protected from gender-based violence.

Patrols are also needed to facilitate humanitarian access. Many roads are too unsafe for humanitarian agencies to use, given the prevalence of hijackings, which means that they are unable to reach large areas of Darfur. UNAMID has escorted some convoys so that they can deliver food safely. However, given the enormous quantity of aid that needs to be delivered in Darfur, UNAMID should prioritise its patrolling of main roads and access routes. Currently, such patrols occur infrequently, if at all. UNAMID has also enhanced its visibility inside some camps. For example, it conducts daily foot patrols in camps in El Daein, where peacekeepers speak directly with the IDPs and make their presence known to the community. Darfurians in Mornei have also recognized the troops' commitment to improve security and relations with them. In fact, one IDP even expressed gratitude for the soldiers' willingness to leave their vehicles and introduce themselves personally to the community.

However, in some other locations, IDPs complain that UNAMID presence is infrequent, ineffective and short. The lack of a 24-hour presence in most camps is a key concern, especially as IDPs frequently report shooting and intimidation by armed men after dark. In Kalma camp, South Darfur, UNAMID personnel often arrive in mid-morning and leave by dusk. In the El Fasher camps, North Darfur, patrols are inconsistent and very short – usually a two-hour drive through the camp during the daytime. Foot patrolling is the exception and not the norm.

'The bad things do not happen so much in the daytime. At night is when the problems begin. The militias and criminals see that there is nobody here to protect us at night and they can do whatever they want.' **IDP in Kalma**

The United Nations Secretary General's report of 9 May asserts that, 'UNAMID police entered its second phase of a three-phase patrolling plan for the camps for internally displaced persons, expanding the duration of its daily patrols from 8 AM to 8 PM to cover the period from 8 AM to 12 AM. The Police Commissioner is working to achieve a 24-hour patrolling schedule by July.'⁹ According to the UN, to have 24-hour patrolling in any given location, at least two Formed Police Units (FPUs) are required. Currently, it appears the mission has decided that as FPUs are deployed, they will be posted in separate locations, and thus 24-hour patrolling in certain locations will have to wait until all 19 FPUs are deployed. With only one FPU on the ground, and eleven more awaiting approval by the Government of Sudan, it appears to be highly unlikely that UNAMID will meet its patrolling schedule on time.

The international community must ensure that the Government of Sudan approves the eleven FPUs so that UNAMID can provide a 24-hour presence as soon as possible.

CONFIDENCE BUILDING

'When the AU soldiers were here, they could not protect us. Now it is the same with UNAMID. We are all living in danger, yet we do not even expect that they can protect us. In the last three years, civilians have suffered enormously – women have suffered most of all. There has been a lot of rape, a lot of killing. We have to go out to survive – to look for wood, or food, or jobs. Yet whenever we go out, people get beaten, or threatened, or killed. There is nobody protecting us. When we report it to UNAMID, nothing happens.' **I. A. Suleiman**

Many Darfurians have requested that UNAMID attend their weekly meetings and meet directly with the people as well as with the *Omda*, or head sheikh of the camp. This is occurring in some, but not enough, locations. If UNAMID were to more vigorously engage with communities, their fears and misperceptions would be greatly alleviated. For example, despite civilians' general criticism of UNAMID's inaction in the town of Kebkabiya, residents there have expressed appreciation for the force commander's efforts to meet with the local community members and inform them on the progress in Darfur. His regular inquiries and updates have helped to alleviate their concerns and build a stronger relationship with the community. Duplicating this effort throughout Darfur would help win the hearts and minds of the people and provide assurance of UNAMID's responsibility to protect them.

CONCLUSION

While a protection force will not solve the situation in Darfur, failure to provide protection will condemn millions to violence - until the parties to the conflict decide to lay down their weapons and solve their disputes non-violently. UNAMID can only do so much to protect civilians while parties to the conflict are still attacking each other and civilians, but it must do what it can. The world has promised as much to the people of Darfur. It must make good on that promise now.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The world seems dangerously close to repeating the same mistakes it committed with AMIS, when African Union troops were deployed but left short of funds, equipment, and personnel. Although AMIS made some positive progress early on, the mission was ultimately unable to protect civilians. UNAMID cannot be left to suffer the same fate.

While it is running out, there is still time. Although it is clear that in its first six months, UNAMID has failed to provide adequate protection for civilians, it has shown some small examples of the positive impact it could have in improving lives in Darfur. But the international community must have the political will to make it succeed. The Government of Sudan must not be allowed to stall deployment and the international community must ensure that UNAMID is given the equipment and troops that it needs to provide adequate protection for civilians. After so much time and diplomatic effort spent negotiating UNAMID's deployment, it would be tragic if world leaders fail to equip the force with the strength to do its job.

UNAMID could be doing much more with the resources it has. Force commanders and UN headquarters staff must work to increase UNAMID presence across Darfur, expand patrols inside and outside of camps, and work to build relations with communities. Most importantly, while UNAMID does not have the capacity to respond to large-scale fighting, it must begin to respond forcibly to the daily, smaller attacks on civilians. UNAMID may not have all the resources it needs to provide protection to all the people of Darfur immediately, but it can and must do more with what it has.

Specifically, the international community must urgently:

INCREASE CAPACITY AND SUPPORT

- The UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council must give the force its full political backing and take the steps necessary to overcome any delays in UNAMID's full deployment and operation.
- The Government of Sudan must quickly approve all equipment and troops donated to UNAMID.
- Troop contributing countries must fulfil their pledges and work with the Government of Sudan to quickly deploy their troops.
- Donor countries must provide the necessary basic equipment, including 18 transport helicopters, at least 4 more tactical helicopters, and 6 transport vehicles.
- The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and donor nations must ensure that UNAMID troops and police are adequately trained and understand their protection mandate.

RESPOND TO ATTACKS AND ENSURE CIVILIAN PROTECTION

- UNAMID commanders and DPKO must focus on providing urgent and immediate civilian protection by responding rapidly to attacks and protection violations.

- UNAMID must respond to threats of violence and take stronger action to deter future attacks.
- UNAMID commanders must prioritise the implementation of essential protection measures including:
 - Setting up a permanent presence in the main camps;
 - Conducting regular patrols in villages and rural areas, and along main roads; and
 - Accompanying women when they go to collect firewood and attend markets.

MAINTAIN PRESENCE AND PATROLS

- UNAMID must conduct more firewood, market, crop and other patrols outside camps and in villages to provide adequate protection.
- UNAMID should provide a 24-hour presence in camp perimeters, as soon as capacity allows.
- In remote camps or areas, peacekeepers must work more closely with the local police and IDPs to improve security in the area.
- Peacekeepers must pursue additional measures to ensure women are protected from gender-based violence, especially at night and in remote areas.
- UNAMID must increase patrols along main roads to secure safe humanitarian access

MANAGE DARFURIAN EXPECTATIONS AND BUILD CONFIDENCE

- UNAMID personnel at all levels must work quickly to build trust and address people's high expectations and grievances.
- UNAMID community liaisons should conduct a series of outreach efforts including:
 - Attending weekly community meetings to introduce the mission and its mandate capabilities;
 - Meeting local community members during patrols;
 - Hosting regular sessions in UNAMID compounds to discuss recent developments; and
 - Conducting public affairs programming via radio and local outreach programmes.

NOTES

¹ United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Press Release, 'SLA/Minni Faction Commanders Obstruct UNAMID Peacekeepers Movement', 2 July 2008.

<http://unamid.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=36&ctl=Details&mid=376&ItemID=153> (last visited on 4 July 2008).

² Communiqué, African Union Peace and Security Council, 21 July 2008, PSC/MIN/COM (CXLII)

³ UN Security Council Resolution 1769, 31 July 2007, S/Res/1769 (2007).

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9089.doc.htm> (last visited on 28 June 2008).

⁴ United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Press Release, 'SLA/Minni Faction Commanders Obstruct UNAMID Peacekeepers Movement', July 2, 2008.

<http://unamid.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=36&ctl=Details&mid=376&ItemID=153> (last visited on July 4, 2008).

⁵ 'Rebels could hit Chinese oil interests in Sudan: US activist', AFP, 17 June 2008.

⁶ Report of the Secretary General on the Deployment of UNAMID, 7 July 2008.

⁷ Statement by Jean-Marie Guehenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to the Security Council, 9 January 2008 and Statement by the AU/UN Joint Special Representative, Roldophe Adada, 22 April 2008.

⁸ Names have been changed to protect identities.

⁹ Report of the Secretary General on the Deployment of African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, S/2008/304, 9 May 2008

ABOUT THE DARFUR CONSORTIUM

The Darfur Consortium is a coalition of more than 50 Africa-based and Africa-focused NGOs dedicated to working together to promote a just, peaceful and sustainable end to the ongoing humanitarian and human rights crisis in Darfur.

The Consortium came together in September 2004 as concerned NGOs gathered on the fringes of the third extraordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Pretoria, South Africa. The Consortium reflects the unique perspective of African civil society and provides a forum for unified action, particularly through sustained engagement with the institutions of the African Union

Research for this report was conducted by Darfur Consortium partners through interviews carried out in 2008 with internally displaced and/or conflict-affected Darfur civilians, humanitarian workers based in Darfur and UN/AU personnel based in Darfur, Khartoum and New York.