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Sudan Democracy First Group

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Walking the talk or fleeing the scene:

The pressing need for an effective role of UNAMID in Darfur



Sudanese Democracy First Group
Contact us: Info@democracyfirstgroup.org
www.democracyfirstgroup.org

Summary:

Since November 2014, there is increased demand from the Sudanese government for the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) to leave Sudanese soil. This demand came to light following the involvement of UNAMID in exposing the mass rape crime in Tabit. While the Sudanese government justifies its demand with claims of peace and stability in Darfur, the reality on the ground shows a steady increase in violence. For UNAMID to leave would exacerbate the severe protection and humanitarian crises in the region. Instead, discussions must focus on increasing the effectiveness of UNAMID through:

- **Committing to a continued presence in support of peacebuilding and stabilization. Recognising the falsity of, and rejecting, the Sudanese government's current claims of peace and stability in Darfur.**
- **Ending the de facto blockade and restrictions of humanitarian access to Darfur imposed by the Government of Sudan. Through putting serious pressure on the government to allow full and unrestricted access and delivery of humanitarian aid by the internationally recognized agencies.**
- **The inclusion of all parties in the coordination of the mission, including political forces and leaders from the victim communities.**
- **Improving the mission's equipment - particularly with aircraft. The UN and AU also need to express strong political will in supporting UNAMID to fully execute its mandate.**

Introduction:

On 31 July 2007 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed [Resolution 1769](#) that formally established the United Nations / African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) as a peacekeeping mission to support the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement of 2006 (the Abuja Agreement). The mission formally replaced the troops of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) that was founded in 2004 to originally protect ceasefire monitors who were sent by the African Union (AU). The AMIS mandate was later expanded to peacekeeping operations under the threat of sanctions against the Sudanese government according to the [UNSC resolution 1564](#). AMIS was poorly equipped with lack of sufficient funding and logistical challenges to the extent that [it never achieved its authorised size](#) of 7,731 soldiers and police. Accordingly, it was not able to contain the violence in Darfur, therefore replacing it with a more sizable, better-equipped United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force was proposed. The failing mission was fully merged into UNAMID on 31 December 2007.

A horizon of hope:

The justification for the new international mission was the indisputable need for a more effective and stronger mandated mission on the ground to support peace and security and help restore stability to Darfur. The mission - that was established for an initial period of twelve months and extended repeatedly up until today – with [a budget of \\$106 million per month and a force of about 26,000 personnel](#) (19,555 military personnel, 3,772 international police and 19 special police units with up to 2,660 officers) in addition to international and local supporting civilian staff, was considered the largest peacekeeping mission in history. It was also the **first time for the UN to share the command of a peacekeeping mission with another international body in such a “hybrid” model**. It was agreed in response to Sudanese governmental pressure that the mission would have an African character with troops sourced from African countries while other countries would provide logistical and financial support.

The [mandate of the mission](#) was sufficiently strengthened to include among other tasks: supporting the implementation of the 2006 peace agreement and assisting the political process to ensure its inclusivity; the restoration of necessary security conditions for the safe provision of humanitarian assistance and to facilitate full humanitarian access throughout Darfur; and the permission to use military force to protect civilians, mission members and aid workers. The duty to

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monitor, investigate and report on instances of violence in Darfur was also included in the mission mandate.

The tragedy of UNAMID:

Despite all this preparedness, UNAMID was, and still is, being criticized in the course of implementing its mandate. The lack of sufficient equipment affected the efficiency of the mission; particularly the lack of aircraft given the complex topography of Darfur and the use of aerial bombardments as a major tool of violations by the Sudanese government. **The lack of the political willingness to back the use of military force resulted in the catastrophic failure to perform the civilian protection part of UNAMID mandate.** The permission to use force for this particular aspect is clearly stated in the mission mandate but is still not happening. One [senior observer labelled UNAMID](#) of producing “more lessons learned” regarding collaboration in commanding hybrid missions than performing “best practices”. The current UK National Security Adviser, Sir Mark Justin Lyall Grant, former British Permanent Representative to the UN and a four-time president of the UNSC, [pointed to the hybrid nature of the mission](#) as one difficulty towards meeting the expectations of UNAMID in addition to **the bureaucratic obstacles created by the Government of Sudan**. Inter-AU coordination in addition to the coordination between the AU and the UN proved to be difficult. The bureaucratic need to have the government permission for every action – even those stated in the mandate – created further obstacles in the way of the mission. Moreover, the Sudanese government is continuously imposing heavy arbitrary restrictions on the movement of UNAMID personnel and delaying its supply shipments.

It seemed that the world was looking for an experiment of international collaboration rather than outcomes of a peacekeeping mission in Darfur. It was becoming obvious more and more that **the mission was designed to keep a peace that does not yet exist, and it does not have the capacity to make it happen.**

In April 2014, a former UNAMID employee accused the mission of being involved in a [conspiracy of silence](#) to deliberately and systematically cover up crimes committed by the government and the militias in Darfur. According to Dr. Aicha Elbasri who served as UNAMID spokesperson between 2012 and 2013, [UNAMID troops just stood watching](#) while civilians were being attacked and shot

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by para-governmental militias. She further added that in some incidences the mission took photos and documented assaults against civilians but never reported them. Failure to report the widespread government bombing campaigns of populated areas, and the involvement of the government in the 2012-2013 conflict over gold mining in Jebel Amer in which hundreds were killed and more than one hundred thousand people were forced to flee their homes, were also among Elbasri's accusations.

Elbasri leaked thousands of diplomatic cables, police reports, military investigations and emails to the Foreign Policy magazine evidencing her accusations after **the UN repeatedly declined her demands for investigation.** In an unanticipated turn following the leak, the International Criminal Court [demanded the UN to investigate](#) these accusations of cover-up and wrongdoings in Darfur. **Refusing any independent investigation, the UN launched instead an internal "major strategic review of its operation in Darfur"**. The report of this review – [although being secretive and not inclusive to all incidences](#) - found five instances in which UNAMID stonewalled the media and withheld from UN Headquarters some critical evidence incriminating Sudanese government forces in crimes against civilians and peacekeepers. **UNAMID leadership kept the Security Council in the dark in addition to its failure in implementing its mandate.** Although member countries of the Security Council demanded [taking actions against senior UNAMID officials](#) who contributed to this scandal, **the UN never held UNAMID leadership accountable.** However, in September 2014, the head of UNAMID [announced his will to leave the mission](#) following these events without declaring whether this decision was related to the results of the review or not.

The price of silence:

On 30 November 2014, the **Sudanese President Omer Albashir** [demanded UNAMID to leave.](#) He described the mission as being a "[security burden](#)" rather than support, and accused it of protecting rebellions and not citizens. The Government of [Sudan formally asked the mission to prepare an exit strategy](#) and held a first meeting of the high-level tripartite coordination mechanism of UNAMID - that includes the UN, AU, and Sudanese government - in New York for that purpose. This demand for UNAMID to leave Sudanese soil by the Sudanese government came to light after the involvement of UNAMID in the revelation of the [mass rape crime that took place in Tabit during 2014.](#) The mission [was prevented by governmental security agents from freely and](#)

[fully investigating the incidence of Tabit](#). This led the mission [to announce its concerns publically](#). The Sudanese government's insistence that UNAMID exit continued over the course of 2015 and became its regular discourse when addressing UNAMID-related matters.

The call on UNAMID to leave was recently repeated by the Sudanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Ibrahim Ghandour who claimed that Darfur witnesses a [state of peace and IDPs return that requires UNAMID to leave](#). In a similar vein, on 28 December 2015 Sudanese Vice-President, Hassabo Abdulrahman, announced **the intentions of his government to [dismantle all IDP camps during 2016](#)**. He gave two options for the displaced citizens; accepting resettlement or return to their original areas in a period of 50 days from his announcement. He further reiterated his government's commitment to take all necessary measures and do the needful to achieve this goal, stressing that "the year 2016 will see the end of displacement in Darfur".

The insatiability of the beast:

The African summit of 2016 includes a meeting for the high-level tripartite coordination mechanism, in which the **Government of Sudan [announced its intention to move forward on the issue of the UNAMID exit strategy](#)**.

The reality on the ground contradicts all government claims of current peace and stability in Darfur. The past few weeks have witnessed an escalated wave of continuous assaults against civilians in different areas of Darfur. [SDFG's recent update on 'Dismantling IDP camps in Darfur, a New Crime in a Saga of Calamity'](#) has illustrated this picture of increasing waves of violence in Darfur. On 15 January, the Sudanese military and Rapid Support Forces backed by aerial bombardments launched **joint attacks in Darfur's Jebel Marra leading to an unaccounted number of casualties** and wide displacement from the area.¹ Earlier in the month, **government security forces attacked a peaceful sit-in of IDPs in the city of Algenina** in West Darfur and killed 14 of them.² The sit-in was demanding governmental protection to their villages from the repeated attacks by para-formal militias. In one week of December 2015, UN-OCHA reported persistent **attacks on 34 civilian villages** in Kutum locality in North Darfur.³

¹ Statement from UNAMID dated 17 January 2016.

² Statement from UNAMID dated 11 January 2016.

³ UN OCHA Sudan: Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 51 | 14 – 20 December 2015.

As well, last year saw a steady increase in military violence that led to **the displacement of 233,000 civilians during the year** according to UN-OCHA reports. Rapid Support Forces and other governmental and para-formal militias focused on **burning crops and looting the livestock** of local citizens during 2015, **threatening an imminent famine in the region**.⁴ In November 2015, several aid agencies including the UN-WFP announced their inability to continue the provision of dietary support to over 122,000 IDPs in Darfur due to the escalation of violence.

The proclamations by the Sudanese government of its intention to [dismantle IDP camps in Darfur](#) and the ongoing discussion of [UNAMID exit strategy](#), coupled with widespread “Darfur fatigue” by international actors, raise further concerns about the fate of civilians in the region. **Whether the international community is just suffering from “Darfur fatigue” or seeking to evade its humanitarian obligations in Darfur, it cannot bury the reality of the inhumane situation in the region and participate in paving the way for further crimes by the government and its allied militias.**

Another threat of UNAMID exiting is revealed by the recent announcement from the Sudanese government to conduct a [referendum on the administrative status of Darfur](#) in April 2016 for Darfur to continue as divided states or to become one region. The exit of UNAMID will allow – in the absence of international oversight - the Sudanese government to alter the demographic map of the region by imposing its plan to dismantle IDPs camps and forcibly relocate IDPs in order to manipulate the results of the referendum. The demand of one administrative region for Darfur is a popular demand among Darfurians that is adopted by most of the genuine political entities. The Sudanese government prefers to divide the region into states on ethnic bases and to settle newcomers who supported the government. This approach maintains the government influence in the region at the cost of preventing the implementation of any comprehensive development plan in the region.

⁴ UNICEF Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report, December 2015.

Recommendations:

In the light of these factors and scale of the still growing humanitarian suffering, SDFG asks that the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council consider the following recommendations:

- **An effective role of UNAMID is crucial in Darfur; as a peacekeeping mission, facilitator for peace making in the region and as suitable tool for protection of civilians.** Although repeated criticisms have been raised with regards to the capacity and effectiveness of UNAMID to fully execute its mandate, its absence will lead to some catastrophic impacts on the protection of civilians.

Increasing the effectiveness of UNAMID includes **improving the mission equipment - particularly with aircraft.** The UN and AU also need to express strong political will in supporting UNAMID to fully execute its mandate.

- **The phantom peace and stability in Darfur is a groundless myth made by the Government of Sudan.** These claims contradict the reality and the numerous recognized reports made by independent observers – including UN organizations - on the deteriorating situation in Darfur over the past two years. **Such claims are paving the way to committing further crimes against civilians in Darfur in the absence of international oversight.** Any realistic prospect of achieving just and lasting peace does require the presence of a peacekeeping mission in its initial stages, which the situation in Darfur is not even approaching yet.
- **The inclusion of all parties in the coordination of the mission is very essential for the mission's success.** The current tripartite coordination mechanism does not include representation for the political movements engaged in the region nor does it include inclusion for the victims groups – specifically the IDPs. Such lack of representation is a major downside that affects the direction of opinion and decisions within the coordination mechanism. **The engagement of the political forces and leaders from the victim communities (with the latter as the main beneficiaries of the mission) should be a priority in any efforts to enhance UNAMID's performance.**

- **Ending the de facto blockade and restrictions of humanitarian access is a pressing need.** Since 2008, after the Government of Sudan expelled multiple international humanitarian aid agencies that were providing 80% of the relief in the region, the humanitarian work was left completely under the strict control of the government's security apparatus. **The new massive waves of displacement this week after the government's attacks in Jebel Marra and threat of the wide spread famine in Darfur this year necessitates all parties to put serious pressure on the government to allow full and unrestricted access and delivery of humanitarian aid by the internationally recognized agencies.**
