

To the League of Arab States

Your Excellency,

We are writing to you in advance of your attendance at the meeting of the League of Arab States due to take place in Khartoum on 30-31 October 2007. We are encouraged by this initiative to discuss the crisis in Darfur, which is clearly of global concern.

We understand that the conference is dedicated to discussion of the provision of humanitarian assistance in Darfur, and post-conflict reconstruction and development. In considering this, it is vital that the conference consider the human rights issues that are directly endangering the provision of humanitarian assistance, and which contribute to the continuation of the crisis. If these issues are not addressed, there can be no hope of lasting peace and security, which are vital prerequisites to effective reconstruction and development.

We urge you to consider the following points and take the specific steps outlined below in order to make a real difference in the lives of the people of Darfur.

Specifically, we recommend that the governments of the League of Arab States:

- Ensure that AMIS and UNAMID have adequate personnel, equipment, technical expertise, and other resources, noting that improved security in Darfur will be contingent upon their rapid response capabilities and patrolling activities.
- Call on all parties immediately to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law including:
 - (1) Ending attacks on civilians and the unlawful use on aircraft of UN and AMIS colors or markings,
 - (2) Ending support to abusive militia/Janjaweed and initiating militia/Janjaweed disarmament programs,
 - (3) Ending impunity and promoting accountability through full cooperation with the International Criminal Court, and undertaking legal reforms and other steps to strengthen Sudan's justice system,
 - (4) Facilitating the expeditious deployment of AMIS and UNAMID and ensuring they can carry out their mandate unhindered, including having freedom of movement throughout Darfur

Attacks on Civilians

After almost 5 years of conflict in Darfur, more than 2 million people are living in camps and temporary shelters, having been forced to flee their homes and unable to return. In many areas people continue to be displaced by renewed fighting and direct attacks on villages and towns.

Meanwhile throughout Darfur civilians remain at risk of violence each day. Thousands of women have been subject to rape and other forms of sexual violence; they risk further attacks

each time they leave their camp or village to collect firewood or travel to market. The few civilians who try to return to their land to farm are attacked and driven away. Even within camps civilians are not safe. On October 18 and 19 2007, at least two civilians were killed in fighting between former rebels and militia that culminated in an attack by Sudanese police on Kalma camp, the largest displaced persons camp in Darfur. On October 20 there were also civilian casualties reported in Hamidiya camp in Zalingei when Sudanese Armed Forces fired on the camp.

Humanitarian workers and peacekeepers too are increasingly at risk. The African Union Mission (AMIS) has repeatedly come under fire, and on September 29, 2007, 10 AMIS peacekeepers were killed in an attack, reportedly carried out by rebel forces, on their base in Haskanita, North Darfur. Government forces quickly took control of the area, and on October 4, the entire town was burned to the ground and at least 10 civilians were killed.

According to the United Nations Panel of Experts report (October 2, 2007) there was a 25 percent increase in attacks on humanitarian workers and equipment in the first half of 2007 compared to the first half of 2006, and access to affected populations has declined significantly over the year.

The conflict has become increasingly complex, with the government, government-backed militia, ex-rebels and rebel factions all engaged in a violent scramble for power and resources. It is the civilians in Darfur that bear the brunt of this violence. Despite assurances by the government of Sudan, it has failed to bring an end to the widespread attacks on civilians and massive violations of human rights carried out with impunity. The UN Panel of Experts reported on October 2, 2007 that the government of Sudan had used white planes for more than 60 aerial attacks, and in at least one case had used a "UN" marked plane in an offensive operation. The government has also failed to rein in or disarm the Janjaweed militia. Rebel and former rebel factions too have carried out violent attacks and other abuses of civilians.

We look to the governments of Arab States to use your influence -- and the opportunity of this meeting -- to insist that all parties immediately comply with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, including ending attacks on civilians and the unlawful use on aircraft of UN and AMIS colors or markings. The government of Sudan must also immediately end support to abusive militia/Janjaweed and initiating militia/Janjaweed disarmament programs.

Impunity and Justice

These abuses have been carried out with near total impunity. The government has refused to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC), refusing to hand over the two individuals subject to arrest warrants by the court. One of the suspects, Ahmed Haroun, remains State Minister for Humanitarian Affairs for Darfur, and was recently appointed to a committee whose mandate includes the hearing of complaints of human rights abuses. The other, Ali Kosheib, was in custody in Sudan but according to the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was recently released. This is a stunning affront to the international community, given that the matter was referred to the ICC by the UN Security Council. The government has also failed to prosecute the most serious atrocities on a national level, or to carry out promised reforms of the national legal system. The League of Arab States should urge the government of Sudan to cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court, and undertake legal reforms and other steps to strengthen Sudan's justice system.

The United Nations/African Union Hybrid Peacekeeping force (UNAMID)

In this violent and complex environment where civilians remain continually at risk, an effective peacekeeping force is critical. The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously in July 2007 to authorize deployment of a much strengthened peacekeeping force. It is vital now that the force receives all possible financial, logistical and technical support to ensure that it is able to fulfill its mandate to protect civilians; improved security in Darfur will be contingent upon their rapid response capabilities, and patrolling activities. While there are currently a large number of troops pledged, there remain critical gaps in terms of air and ground transport, which will be vital to effective protection. The League of Arab States should provide any support necessary to fill these (and any other) critical gaps, and in the meantime should continue to provide support to the AMIS force currently in place.

Despite consenting to UNAMID, the government of Sudan has failed to facilitate deployment of the force, including allocating land urgently needed to begin construction of bases, and has been prevaricating over the composition of the force. The League of Arab States should insist that the government of Sudan actively facilitate the expeditious deployment of AMIS and UNAMID and ensure they can carry out their mandate unhindered, including having freedom of movement throughout Darfur.

The governments of the League of Arab States have played a vital role to date in ensuring that the current African Union Mission to Sudan (AMIS) force is funded and in securing the consent of the government of Sudan for the UNAMID force. However, until all parties end deliberate attacks on civilians and other human rights abuses, and concrete steps are taken to facilitate deployment of the hybrid peacekeeping force, civilians will continue to suffer brutal attacks - to live in fear, trapped in camps, unable to return to their homes.

Yours sincerely

Human Rights Watch

La Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH)

The Arab Program for Human Rights Activists

The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement

Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights

The Centre for Trade Unions and Workers Services

The Arab Network for Human Rights

Committees for the Defense of Democracy, Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Bahrain Centre for Human Rights

Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Nadeem Centre for Psychological Therapy and Rehabilitation of the Victims of Violence

Damascus Centre for Human Rights Studies

Arab Sisters Forum for Human Rights

Arab Organization for Penal Reform

The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights

The National Organization for Human Rights (Syria)

Sudanese Organisation Against Torture (SOAT)

STAND Sierra Leone

Darfur Alert Coalition

West African Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Network (WARIPNET)

Rencontre Africaine Pour la Defense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO)
Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project
Bahrain Coalition for the International Criminal Court
The African Women Development Communication Network (FEMNET)