

STAND

Darfur Digest February 2009

I. Executive Summary

Canadian Politics and Darfur: The confluence of American President Barack Obama's inauguration and the return of Canadian parliament may create new opportunities for Canadian action on the Darfur crisis.

Security in Darfur: Tensions in Sudan are growing as the possibility of an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, looms on the horizon. The last two weeks of January saw an upswing in violence as rebel groups in Darfur jostled with each other and government forces for land and power. The Government of Sudan (GoS) broke the unilateral ceasefire it announced in November by bombing positions of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the largest rebel movement in Darfur. Meanwhile, the joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) continues to try to make a difference but remains overstretched and ill-equipped.

Negotiations and Engagement in Darfur: The International Criminal Court (ICC) continued to examine the evidence against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to determine whether or not a warrant should be issued for his arrest. While China maintained its support for the Government of Sudan (GoS), the new American administration made a number of strong statements on the crisis in Darfur. The Qatar-based Arab-African Committee on Darfur, whose main function is to discuss Arab-African action to restore peace in Darfur, finally met after a number of delays. An increase in rebel factions over the past year and new friction between rebel groups is stalling the peace process.

The Humanitarian Situation in Darfur: The resiliency of the aid community in Darfur is apparent as they continue to plan long-term operations in the face of uncertainty. If an arrest warrant is issued for Sudan's President, a backlash restricting access to the United Nations mission and to humanitarian relief work could be damaging for Darfur's civilians. Tension is mounting in the country as the UN makes contingency plans. Sudan's government has sent a team of traditional leaders from Darfur to address the International Criminal Court in favour of Omar al-Bashir. Yet aid work continues as NGOs begin to plan in advance of the rainy season.

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II. Policy Recommendations

1. Build on Canada's recent commitments to Darfur by appointing a Special Envoy to the region. A Special Envoy could strengthen Canadian policymaking on Darfur in three key ways: 1) providing the world with a public face for Canada's efforts on Darfur, 2) providing a presence on the ground in Sudan, and 3) coordinating an integrated "all of Sudan" approach to Canadian peacebuilding. Specifically, a Special Envoy could play a key role in assisting efforts of the Darfuri rebel groups to form a unified and coherent bargaining position, a critical success factor for renewed negotiations.
2. Form an all-party parliamentary special committee on Darfur whose goal it will be to determine viable actions for the Canadian government to undertake to lead in ending the crisis in Darfur. The committee should 1) exist for a specified period of time, 2) travel to Sudan to collect facts, 3) be fully resourced by the Canadian government and 4) have equal party representation.
3. Engage more actively with the Obama administration to identify new opportunities for collaboration and cooperation on Darfur.
4. Engage more actively in multilateral diplomacy at the UN to bring renewed prominence to the Darfur issue internationally and rally greater international support for conflict resolution efforts.

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III. Canadian Politics and Darfur

The confluence of American President Barack Obama's inauguration and the return of Canadian parliament could create new opportunities for Canadian action on the Darfur crisis. According to Errol Mendes, a professor of constitutional and international law at the University of Ottawa, Obama's inauguration ushers in a new era of Canada-US relations and offers "great opportunities in key areas for traditional Canadian foreign policy to dovetail with the emerging foreign policy of the new administration."¹ Both President Obama and Vice-President Joseph Biden have been advocates for Darfur and have stated their willingness to use any available

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sanctions or levers, even limited military involvement, to stop the genocide in Darfur.

Mendes argues that, given Canada's military engagement elsewhere, substantive Canadian military assistance for Darfur is unlikely. Canada can, however, assist the US in Darfur "by working with regional and Western allies to offer more civilian and limited peacekeeping resources to the UN and foreign aid missions in these conflict zones."² Though Canadian foreign aid policies under the Harper governments seem to have focused on Latin America over Africa, the resumption of parliament on January 26 creates the potential for a new direction on Canadian foreign policy regarding the Darfur crisis.

IV. Security in Darfur

Tensions in Sudan are growing as the possibility of an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the President of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, looms on the horizon. The last two weeks of January saw an upswing in violence as rebel groups in Darfur jostled with each other and government forces for land and power. The Government of Sudan (GoS) broke the unilateral ceasefire it announced in November by bombing positions of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the largest rebel movement in Darfur. Meanwhile, the joint United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force (UNAMID) continues to try to make a difference but remains overstretched and ill-equipped.

On January 15, the Government of Sudan announced that it had bombed positions of the JEM rebel group in South Darfur, therefore breaking the unilateral ceasefire it declared in November.³ JEM asserted that the government had attacked targets throughout the country, including North Darfur, and had not limited its assault to areas where JEM forces were present.⁴ A JEM spokesman also made the claim that the government is re-arming its proxy militias, often referred to as the Janjaweed, who are accused of carrying out the most brutal acts of genocide.⁵

The fiercest fighting in January, however, occurred between JEM and a former rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi (SLM-Minnawi), who signed a peace treaty with the government in 2006. JEM fighters and defectors from Minnawi's group took hold of Muhajeriya in South Darfur after heavy fighting with SLM-Minnawi. The town was a stronghold of Minnawi's group. The UN reported dozens of deaths and injuries in the fighting and increased suffering among the 30,000 or so civilians in the region.⁶ As the fighting between

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the two groups intensified late in the month, the government also entered the fray, bombing the area in support of the SLM-Minnawi on the weekend of January 23-25.⁷ At least 1,000 people have fled the area so far to escape the violence, while at least one child was killed in the government air strikes.⁸

Reflecting the fractious and complicated nature of the violence in Darfur, JEM and SLM-Minnawi generally represent the same ethnic group, the Zaghawa, and have been allies in the past.⁹ The recent violence, however, may be indicative of the rising tensions throughout the country as the possibility of an arrest warrant against the Sudanese President becomes more likely. In fact, the violence is likely to continue into February and may spread across Darfur, even as reports indicate a build up of government and militia forces in the region, including near camps for displaced people (IDPs).¹⁰

During the fighting near Muhajeriya, UNAMID sought to make itself useful by protecting civilians, evacuating aid workers, and providing medical care to wounded civilians.¹¹ They continue to investigate reports of attacks and monitor the situation. According to UN officials and others, UNAMID is receiving more troops and equipment, including equipment and vehicles airlifted into the region as one of the last acts of the US Administration of George W. Bush.¹² Should fighting increase following the ICC's decision, the arrival of further troops and equipment will be of particular importance.

V. Negotiations and Engagement in Darfur

The International Criminal Court (ICC) continued to examine the evidence against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to determine whether or not a warrant should be issued for his arrest. China, Sudan's most significant ally, spoke out against the warrant stating that if it is issued there would be "disastrous consequences." China has also stated that the Government of Sudan (GoS) is working seriously towards peace.¹³ Meanwhile, newly appointed US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, said that the US will "sound the alarm" over the situation in Darfur as well as "end hostility toward the ICC and look for opportunities to encourage effective ICC action in ways that promote US interests by bringing war criminals to justice."¹⁴ Incumbent US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Susan Rice, has also come out strong on the topic of Darfur saying that it is "patently unacceptable" that the peacekeeping mission has only half of the

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resources it requires.¹⁵

While the GoS has reached out to the new US administration calling on President Obama to lift the sanctions placed on Sudan after it was classified as a state sponsor of terrorism under presidents Clinton and Bush, senior Sudanese government officials continue to accuse the US, alongside Britain and France, of directing the ICC against President al-Bashir.¹⁶

The Arab-African Committee on Darfur met in Qatar on January 14, 2009 after the meeting was postponed because the Prime Minister of Qatar was in New York attending a UN Security Council meeting on the war in Israel and Gaza. The Committee is tasked with discussing Arab-African action to restore peace in Darfur and pushing forward the negotiations between the GoS and Darfur rebel groups.¹⁷ At the meeting it was decided that the Committee would send a delegation, consisting of members of the AU and Arab League, to New York to approach Arab and African Security Council members to help build regional and international support for the Committee's objectives.¹⁸

On January 6, 2009 Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Mohammed Taha restated the Sudanese government's intentions to carry out the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA).¹⁹ In 2006, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) signed the DPA with the GoS. Following the agreement, the leader of the SLM, Minni Minnawi, was appointed to be Senior Assistant to President al-Bashir. On January 17, 2009 Minnawi accused the Arab-African Committee on Darfur of sidelining the SLM in their negotiation efforts. He also accused a number of countries of trying to make the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a rival rebel group, the key player in the peace negotiations.²⁰ In line with Minnawi's accusations, Sudan's Foreign Ministry criticized the former US administration for meeting with a JEM delegation in Washington. A spokesperson for the Sudanese Foreign Ministry said that such meetings give a sense of false strength to rebel movements and encourage "them to stick to their positions [and] not to participate in [the] peace process or to respond to the international efforts for peace."²¹ However, the US embassy in Khartoum responded that the visit was taking place "within the context of US government efforts to encourage all parties to participate in the Darfur peace process."²² The increase in rebel factions over the past year has resulted in complaints from the Arab-African Committee in Qatar that they are having trouble knowing with whom they should be speaking.²³

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VI. The Humanitarian Situation in Darfur

A backlash following an ICC indictment could threaten the aid work that millions of Darfur's civilians count on. As the Government of Sudan waits to hear if the International Criminal Court (ICC) will seek an arrest warrant for President al-Bashir, the United Nations (UN) is developing contingency plans. John Holmes, the UN's emergency relief coordinator, said in an interview to *Newsweek*, "Ultimately, they could throw everyone out. It will leave them with a terrible mess and they won't be able to feed their own people." The UN relief effort has about 1,000 international staff and 14,000 Sudanese staff providing aid to more than four million people, along with two peacekeeping operations of almost 30,000 personnel in Sudan.²⁴

In contrast to fears regarding government reactions, the Government of Sudan is suggesting that the aid community should fear anger among the people of Sudan. In a meeting between the North Darfur State Governor and the UN, the governor warned that "the government would not be able to forecast or control the popular reactions throughout the country." He stated that the Sudanese government understood the difference between the ICC and UN, and would not hold the UN responsible for the actions of the ICC. While the Government is currently saying it will maintain the safety and security of UNAMID, its stance has oscillated. Last July a presidential adviser said a warrant would probably lead to the expulsion of UNAMID, which was quickly followed by the government's denial. Then just a month later, the president himself told a TV network that he would not allow the UN mission to stay if the judges approved the charges against him.²⁵

The Government of Sudan is not about to give up the fight. In an attempt to persuade the ICC not to issue a warrant, Sudan's government has sent a delegation from Darfur to the Hague-based court. The group of 36 people, most of them traditional leaders from the states of Darfur, will deliver a petition to the court. The spokesman of the Internally Displaced People in Darfur and its Refugees in Chad, Hussein Abu Sharati said the petition "does not reflect the conviction of Darfur people or represent them." Abu Sharati also accused the government authorities of blackmailing and pressing people to force them to sign it.²⁶

In a separate incident this month, the Government denied a UN report that looked into the deaths of 33 civilians at Kalma IDP camp in August, which accused Sudan government security forces of violating international human rights law. In the incident, Sudanese forces entered the camp to raid suspected weapons but were met by a group of camp residents who wanted them

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out. The Sudanese forces fired shots in the air before firing on the crowd, in which 108 people were also injured. The UN report concluded that the use of lethal force was in “an unnecessary, disproportionate and therefore unlawful manner.”²⁷ A Sudanese spokesperson denied the facts and said that the forces told the UN mission about the weapons in the camp and made the decision to get rid of the weapons after the information was confirmed.²⁸

In West Darfur, UN peacekeepers saved refugee women from an attempted kidnapping when a UNAMID patrol was dispatched after being alerted to the abduction. Six women from Hassa Hissa camp in West Darfur were taken while collecting firewood, but upon seeing the approaching UN patrol the kidnappers released the women.²⁹ Statistics released from the United Nations show that the number of attacks against UN staff around the world is down from a year ago. In 2008, thirty-four UN personnel were killed that year as compared to forty-two deaths in 2007. Violence in Sudan has contributed to one-half of these deaths with ten peacekeepers killed in Darfur last year, while several drivers for the World Food Programme were shot and killed.³⁰

Good news came out of Darfur in January as 500 new teachers completed their training thanks to UNICEF. One hundred of these teachers will work in the camps where internally displaced children can access education. Educating and promoting HIV awareness is also underway in communities, while in another school nearly 800 children will benefit from the completed construction of a new theatre – the only one in the area.³¹ Other organizations are trying something new. The International Committee of the Red Cross held a five-day workshop in Khartoum to teach the basic principles of international humanitarian law to the Sudanese armed forces. This was completed with army commanders who came from army training colleges across Sudan, so that they can pass on how the law should be incorporated into the army’s doctrine, training and operations.³²

Other countries continue to help the humanitarian process as well. The African Union-United Nations peacekeeping mission will receive a boost of military equipment, courtesy of the United States government. One of the last acts of former US President George Bush was to authorize the airlifting of military equipment to Darfur for the UN mission. The delivery is set to be 240 containers of heavy equipment ranging from 75 tons of water tankers, fuel tank trucks, forklifts and other over-sized cargo. Aircraft will begin to transfer the equipment from Rwanda to Darfur sometime in February 2009.³³

Transportation of equipment in Darfur is complicated due to unsafe roads, poor airfields

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and the fact that Darfur is thousands of kilometres from the nearest seaport.³⁴ The same holds true for the delivery of food aid. Since August 2004, Libya has enabled safe passage for UN World Food Program (WFP) trucks through their country. The WFP Country Director in Chad called it a “race against the clock,” as convoys have five months to deliver aid before the rainy season blocks the roads. Convoys travel 2,800 kilometres through the Sahara desert from the WFP’s logistics hub in the south of Libya to refugee camps in eastern Chad. A set of trucks that left at the end of December is due to reach the refugee camps before the end of January.³⁵

Health care in Darfur is a vital part of aid work. In its’ weekly report the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that in January there were no major incidents but the situation in West Darfur remained tense and inaccessible. Some children in western areas had not been vaccinated for the last three weeks. And across Darfur, WHO’s surveillance system reported in the last week of 2008 that acute respiratory infections accounted for a quarter of all conditions among children under five. The World Health Organization works in the camps to test water quality, provide health supplies, conduct disease surveillance and train others in health services.³⁶ In January WHO also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sudanese government to conduct a household survey in fifteen Northern states, in order to produce a National Health Account. This information will be used by policy-makers as evidence to make more informed decisions on resource allocation and health spending, making this a vital tool for health services in Sudan.³⁷

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Stand is a national advocacy organization that aims to make stopping genocide a cornerstone of Canada's foreign policy. Stand makes it easy for Canadians to act against genocide by providing simple and effective ways for people to take action. Learn how you can start making a difference for Darfur by visiting www.standcanada.org

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