

STAND

Darfur Digest March 2009

I. Executive Summary

Canadian Politics and Darfur: Foreign Affairs issued statements condemning the recent upsurge in violence in Darfur and expressing concern regarding the expulsion of a Canadian journalist from Sudan. In the House of Commons, Paul Dewar introduced Bill C-298 pertaining to corporate social responsibility for Canadian mining companies, which would apply to Darfur. Irwin Cotler called on Canada to work with American President Barack Obama regarding Darfur and several petitions supporting greater Canadian action on Darfur were presented.

Security in Darfur: The Government of Sudan and a rebel group signed a declaration of intentions in hopes for discussions to end fighting; however, doubts remain over the success of this declaration. As part of their discussions, the government and the rebel group agreed to engage in a prisoner exchange. The government also announced new investigations into past abuses. A leader of a Darfur rebel group has asked Israel for support against President al-Bashir. Clashes caused the deaths of nearly 30 Darfuris in the Northern region, while United Nations peacekeepers look to plan a no-fire zone in one volatile area. This comes after a United Nations helicopter was shot down and bombings occurred.

Negotiations and Engagement in Darfur: In mid February there was confusion over the status of the International Criminal Court's decision about Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir, after media outlets released articles about an arrest warrant being issued. The Court will announce its decision on March 4. Officials from the GoS and the Justice and Equality Movement met in mid February for peace talks and signed a bilateral agreement of good will. However, one day later rebels accused the Sudanese government of attacking their forces, thereby violating the agreement. Due to logistical difficulties the UN-AU hybrid force is not expected to deploy all of its troops by the end of 2009.

The Humanitarian Situation in Darfur: In Darfur, the violence in one town has simmered but the resulting chaos will take a while to sort out. While the United Nations reports that the situation is calm in Muhajiriya, aid groups are still scrambling to provide emergency aid to displaced people affected by the fighting. At a separate site of recent battles, local residents showed UN officials a mass grave in what appears to have been a deliberate attack on civilians. In February, two Sudanese aid workers were killed in a brazen attack on their vehicle. The Government of Sudan also announced it will release 24 Darfur prisoners in an act of good will towards the rebel group it fought throughout the month.

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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. The Canadian government should pursue targeted divestment from Sudan conditioned on the Sudanese government's cessation of atrocities in Darfur and active engagement in the peace process.
3. Canada’s mission to the UN should 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.

Please forward this to other people interested in making a difference for the people in Darfur.

III. Canadian Politics and Darfur

Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon conveyed Canada’s commitment to Darfur to the heads of the African missions to Canada and issued a statement condemning the recent upsurge in violence in Darfur. A Foreign Affairs spokesperson expressed concern regarding the expulsion of a Canadian journalist from Sudan. In the House of Commons, Paul Dewar introduced Bill C-298 regarding corporate social responsibility in developing countries, Irwin Cotler called for Canada to work with American President Barack Obama regarding Darfur, and MPs presented several petitions for Canadian action on Darfur.

Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon reiterated Canada’s commitment to peace and security in Africa, particularly in Darfur, in his address to the heads of the African missions to Canada on January 20. Cannon highlighted Canada’s support for the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan “through critical projects that strengthen the rule of

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law, security-sector reform and good governance” and contributing “over \$514 million for peace and basic human needs in Sudan.” Cannon also noted Canada’s involvement in Darfur, including “providing up to \$40 million in equipment and training support to African countries that are contributing troops and police to the joint UN-AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur.”¹

Furthermore, on February 2, Cannon issued a statement condemning the recent upsurge of violence in Darfur. Cannon asserted that ongoing military activities amongst both the Government of Sudan and rebel forces “are seriously undermining prospects for peace in Sudan and impeding humanitarian efforts in the region.”² Noting that the Government of Sudan has failed to implement the ceasefire it announced in November, Cannon called on the government and all rebel forces to cease hostilities and resume AU-UN-led negotiations.³

A spokeswoman for the Department of Foreign Affairs also noted its concern with the expulsion of Canadian journalist Heba Aly from Sudan. After spending the holidays in Canada with family, Aly returned to Sudan in January but was denied a new press identification card and work permit and was subsequently given an ultimatum to leave by Sudanese authorities. The Foreign Affairs spokeswoman stated that officials have contacted Sudanese authorities to express concern about this and get an explanation. The spokeswoman noted that his case, “along with the harassment suffered by Sudanese journalists, reveals that the international community must continue to monitor Sudan's commitment to respect human rights.”⁴

In the House of Commons, NDP MP Paul Dewar introduced Bill C-298, An Act respecting Corporate Social Responsibility for the Activities of Canadian Mining Corporations in Developing Countries. The Act would require Canadian companies working abroad in extractive industries to apply principles of corporate social responsibility in their work.⁵ Liberal MP Irwin Cotler urged Canada to “work together with the American president to combat the genocide by attrition in Darfur and invoke the responsibility to protect principle under the rubric of the rule of law.”⁶ NDP MPs Jean Crowder and Brian Masse, Conservative MP Colin Mayes, and Liberal MPs John McKay and Borys Wrzesnewskyj each presented petitions to the House of Commons urging Canadian action on Darfur.⁷

IV. Security in Darfur

The Sudanese government and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel group agreed to meet for peace talks and both sides committed to support the protection of refugees.⁸

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However, other rebel groups were not willing to participate in these peace talks, making the likelihood of peace and stability fragile. Some also suggest that JEM will benefit largely from the agreed upon prisoner swap, and that Khartoum was only interested in positive publicity in light of the International Criminal Court's (ICC) upcoming decision on whether to issue an arrest warrant for the Sudanese President.⁹ The government has also announced that it will be conducting new investigations into alleged abuses during the period of 2003-2004. This will include looking at victim's graves, interviewing witnesses, and the appointment of a special prosecutor to make monthly reports on the findings.¹⁰

Abdel Wahid al-Nur who is the head of the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) met with Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilad, of the Israeli government and asked for their support. al-Nur specifically requested support for his insurgency in fighting against the government forces. This comes at a time when other parties (including China, the African Union, and the Arab League) say that the ICC's upcoming decision on the arrest warrant for al-Bashir could destabilize the region and increase violence.¹¹

Violence in North Darfur caused the death of 28 citizens and wounded an additional 25. The fighting occurred between civilians of the Wadaa' area and two SLM factions.¹² Fighting also occurred in South Darfur, near Muhajiriya, which had previously been the scene of weeks of violence. Because of the strategic location of Muhajiriya, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is working to secure a no-fire zone around the peacekeeping base there to help protect civilians. Sudanese armed forces asked for the removal of the peacekeeping unit ahead of planned attacks, which UNAMID denied.¹³ JEM praised UNAMID for turning down requests to evacuate the area and announced they will remove their fighters from the area as a result of this decision.¹⁴

The fighting between the government and JEM has increased in this area in the lead up to the ICC indicting President al-Bashir. The Sudanese government has accused JEM of increasing forces to mark the event by conducting a major attack on a city or oil field.¹⁵ UNAMID reported bombings three kilometers east of Muhajiriya by Sudanese planes.¹⁶ A UN helicopter was attacked while reportedly transporting aid, but was able to return safely to its base.¹⁷

V. Negotiations and Engagement in Darfur

There was confusion in February over whether the International Criminal Court (ICC)

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had issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir after media outlets released reports that the warrant had been issued.¹⁸ However, on February 12, the ICC responded with a press release clarifying that no decision had been made about whether an arrest warrant would be issued against the Sudanese President.¹⁹ Later in the month the ICC announced that they would release their decision regarding the potential warrant on March 4.²⁰

Officials from the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) met in Doha, Qatar on February 18 for peace talks. They concluded the meeting by signing the "Agreement of Good Will and Confidence Building for the Settlement of the Problem in Darfur." After the signing, Qatar and other regional actors were called upon to assist in humanitarian relief and rebuilding in the Darfur region. The meeting was the first between the GoS and JEM in over two years and signaled improvement.²¹ However, on February 19, JEM accused the Sudanese government of attacking their forces by an air raid as well as a ground attack, thereby violating the agreement one day after it was created. Government officials reportedly confirmed the attacks with AFP while the Sudanese military denied them.²²

The UN-AU hybrid mission is experiencing delays in deployment of the rest of the peacekeepers required for the mission due to "logistical issues" brought up by the potential ICC arrest warrant for President al-Bashir. The UN's Undersecretary-General for Field Support reported that the mission will not reach its intended capacity by the end of 2009. The mission has deployed approximately 60 percent of its personnel at present.²³

VI. The Humanitarian Situation in Darfur

Fighting in the South Darfur town of Muhajiriya has impacted a lot of civilians and the aid agency's ability to help them. At the beginning of February, internally displaced people (IDP) in the town were too scared to move, as Sudanese government warplanes continued to drop bombs on the town in their attempt to dislodge the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).²⁴ Asked to leave ahead of a government attack, a UNAMID force of 196 peacekeepers chose to remain in Muhajiriya to protect the people – some 30,000 civilians, half of them residents and the other half displaced persons.

For a time, United Nations (UN) officials were also barred from entering the town. On February 3, a team of UN and African Union (AU) officials were kept waiting at the El Fasher airport, the capital of North Darfur, before they were told they could not fly to Muhajiriya. It is

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unclear whether the incident was an intentional obstruction by Khartoum or a breakdown in communications between authorities.²⁵ As violence continued, IDPs chose between two options for fleeing – the UN base in Muhajiriya or to towns and IDP camps in north Darfur. The Al Salaam IDP camp received 520 new arrivals, while Zam Zam camp took in 1,400 people, with 90 per cent of these being women and children.²⁶

The withdrawal of the rebel group, however, allowed aid agencies to filter back into the town. Just three days after the JEM withdrew on February 3, aid workers from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Solidarities, UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs arrived back into Muhajiriya after a three week gap. Agencies moved quickly to supply food, medicine and water to the 5,000 people in the town who were severely lacking.²⁷

While several dozen civilian deaths were reported because of the attacks, UNAMID said that the situation remained calm. The UN-AU Joint Special Representative for Darfur, Rodolphe Adada, visited the town on February 8 to see first-hand the conditions following the violence.²⁸ To a gathering of local leaders he said, “UNAMID is here to stay,” and would be until “lasting peace is achieved in Darfur.” The UN – AU mission has received praise for its decision to remain in the town during the fighting.²⁹

Although access to the town is no longer a problem, aid agencies are still dealing with the people who were displaced from Muhajiriya and surrounding localities. Residents are beginning to filter back but northern IDP camps are still seeing new arrivals, as the UN Joint Logistics Centre dispatched emergency non-food items like blankets and sleeping mats.³⁰ An unconfirmed report by the *Press Trust of India* stated that an aerial bombing over Muhajiriya on February 23 sent at least 5,000 people seeking safety to the UN base again for a second time this month.³¹

In a separate incident of violence, a United Nations team was shown mass graves after a scene of recent fighting between Government forces and armed groups in Wada'ah, a town 90 kilometres south of El Fasher in North Darfur. On February 13, local residents showed UN civilian and military officials a grave which they said held 45 people, while many others remain unaccounted for. A UNAMID assessment team confirmed that the damage did not seem attributable to combat, but was rather intentionally inflicted. Upon arrival at the site, they found smoldering buildings after alleged looting had taken place, including medical supplies, water pump equipment and 2,000 cattle. The scene will now be stabilized as the UN provides

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emergency aid and tries to determine what exactly happened.³²

On February 23, two Sudanese workers for a French aid organization were shot and killed by unknown gunmen while traveling on a remote road in South Darfur. Earlier in the day there had been reports that 24 gunmen held up and looted a truck, and then opened fire on the aid worker's Land Rover as they drove past. Four civilians were also wounded in the shooting.³³ A UN peacekeeping vehicle was also hijacked in North Darfur's capital. While no one was injured this time, it highlights the increased number of carjackings.³⁴ In his latest report to the Security Council, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon listed figures for 2008 that show almost a doubling in each category in comparison to statistics from 2007. In all, 277 vehicles were hijacked, 218 personnel were abducted, 192 premises attacked, 36 staff wounded and 11 staff were killed, with four still missing.³⁵

A new initiative by the peacekeeping mission began this month with the start of the first night patrols by police units at a new community policing centre (CPC). Constructed between two large IDP camps, Abu Shouk and El Salaam in North Darfur, UNAMID blue helmets will patrol the area in a continuous 24-hour operation. Meant to increase protection for the thousands of IDPs, another CPC is set to be built at Zam Zam. A delegation of people from El Salaam camp also praised UNAMID Police for helping to secure the release of several displaced persons from under the detention of Sudanese intelligence.³⁶

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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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