

To
Heads of State and Government
26th Ordinary Session of the African Union Summit
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Addis Ababa

25th January 2016

Petition on Renewed Violence in Darfur

Excellences,

We write to you while you are celebrating 2016 as the African Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the Rights of Women. On this solemn occasion, we regret to draw your attention to the tragic human rights and humanitarian situation in Sudan. The rights of women are particularly precarious, especially in areas of the country that face armed conflicts where women are victims of heinous crimes, including sexual violence. Since 15 January 2016, the Government of Sudan (GoS) has renewed its scorched-earth military campaign in Darfur and deployed a large military force using heavy military equipment, including military jets and artillery.

Indiscriminate aerial bombardment is intensively used against civilian areas in Jebel Marra (Central Darfur State) followed by ground attacks by the army and the Janjaweed militia groups which has been re-baptized as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF have been committing massive human rights abuses as well as war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and all other forms of atrocities against the civilian population. The exact number of casualties due to the ongoing military offensive is not yet known due to lack of access to the region by independent agencies. At least 100 villages were destroyed or abandoned in whole or in part and thousands of livestock and other civilian properties were looted. Sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war is rampant, especially around major town such as Nertiti and Rokoro.

In West Darfur State violence, destruction of properties and displacement of civilians were reported on 9, 10 and 11 January 2016 when government armed pastoralists attacked more than seven villages around Molie area – about 8km south of El-Genena capital of West Darfur State. On 10 January 2016, about 1,000 civilians who were forced to flee Molie staged a peaceful protest in front of the State's Governor office asking for protection and end to militia activities in their area. The demonstration subsequently turned violent when the security forces dispersed the protesters killing at least 12 people and the number of casualties increased to over 50 civilians in the following days. The newly displaced persons have now settled in Abu Zar internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in El-Genena. In 2015, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded 809 security events (instances of armed conflict, killings, riots, recruitment activities by parties to the conflict, protests and violence against civilians, and non-violent events) in Darfur which accounted for 68 per cent of all security events in Sudan.

The humanitarian situation in the IDP settlements is aggravating by the day and the numbers of IDPs is in steady increase. According to conservative UN estimates, Darfur is host to an IDP population of over 3,000,000. They live in precarious humanitarian conditions lacking basic needs. Meanwhile, the government continues to suspend or deport international humanitarian agencies and relief organizations from the region and the country. On 20 January 2016 GoS expelled Tearfund – an international aid organisation – which has been working in Sudan for more than a decade. In March 2009, GoS expelled 13 major international humanitarian organisations that catered for more than 50% of the basic needs of IDP populations.

Excellences,

Armed conflict, violence and forced displacement in Darfur during the last 13 years have left

immense sorrow and agony among millions of innocent victims. Information we gathered indicate that at least 500,000 million people lost their lives due to fighting or war-induced reasons while more than 4,000,000 have lost their land and properties and now live in miserable IDP camps. Despite Africa's efforts, the situation has not yet improved which requires Africa and the world to redouble their efforts and action. Failure to do so amounts to abandoning the victims of the humanitarian tragedy in Darfur and represents a scar on Africa's collective conscience.

We respectfully call on you – in cooperation with the international community – to take immediate measures to:

1. Pressurize GoS to put an immediate end to military operations, including aerial bombardment of civilian targets and residential areas in Darfur.
2. Protect the civilian populations in Darfur by establishing a no-fly zone all-over the region and by enacting the existing measures to curtail the inflow of weapon in Darfur.
3. Strengthen the mandate of the African Union and United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and provide it with additional means and powers to protect the civilian population and ensure timely reporting of incidents of violence and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
4. Further pressurize GoS to allow UN relief agencies and humanitarian aid organizations unhindered access to the affected populations.
5. End the massive violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Darfur and hold accountable all individuals accused of the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.
6. Arrest and handover all individuals accused by the International Criminal Court of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Darfur, including President Omar Al-Bashir.