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MONITOR



Updates for The Situation in Sudan and the Conflict in Darfur June 2008

SUDAN UPDATE

Clashes Between North and South Sudanese Forces

In late May, fighting between the Northern Sudan Armed Forces and the Southern Sudan People's Liberation Army forced tens of thousands of people to flee the border town of Abyei. While the Sudanese government blames Southern forces, Southern and UN officials, witnesses, and those who have fled say it was a systematic campaign by the Sudan Armed Forces to take the oil-rich region by force. Many of those who fled had only recently returned after 20 years of civil war between the North and the South.

Analysts have long held that if the North-South civil war were to resume, it would most likely begin in Abyei. According to the 2005 peace deal, residents of Abyei are to decide whether to join the North or the South in a 2011 referendum, when Southerners are to vote on secession. Southern officials claim that President Omar al Bashir is implementing a plan to clear Abyei of its pro-Southern population.

The implications of a resumed North-South civil war could be far-reaching. Fighting would likely involve rebels from the Darfur region, as well as from Chad and Uganda. In addition, the United States and China could be affected by any resumed large-scale fighting. The United States invested heavily in the 2005 peace deal and has supported Southern forces with military training, while China is deeply invested in Sudanese oil. In response to the attacks on Abyei, the U.S. halted talks aimed at restoring diplomatic relations with the

government of Sudan, saying that leaders were not serious about ending fighting.

As of June 8th, President al Bashir has signed an agreement with Southern Sudan leader and Vice-President Salva Kiir. The agreement calls for the creation of an interim administration for the Abyei region, the return of displaced people, and an interim border. Northern and Southern troops are still in a stand-off in the region, but are to be replaced by a 'joint integrated unit' made up of soldiers from both sides.

Prosecution of War Crimes Committed in Darfur

The chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC), Luis Moreno-Ocampo, announced that he will present a new case in July that will implicate 'the whole state apparatus' of Sudan in crimes against humanity in Darfur. Last year the ICC issued arrest warrants for Ahmed Haroun, Sudan's state minister for humanitarian affairs, and Ali Kosheib, a militia leader. Moreno-Ocampo suggested that next month's case will be brought against officials of an even higher rank. Sudan's ambassador to the United States denied the accusations, saying, "Sudan is a government and it has to provide security, and it has used its forces for security. The government is exercising its right to protect the civilian people."

First Joint United Nations-African Union Peacekeeper Killed

On May 28, Inspector John Kennedy Okecha of the joint United Nations–Africa Union peacekeeping mission (UNAMID) was found dead two kilometers from ZAM ZAM in North Darfur state. Okecha is the first UNAMID peacekeeper to be killed since UNAMID took over peacekeeping efforts in the beginning of 2008. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno used the incident to appeal for further support, saying, “The question has always been whether we have enough resources to protect ourselves as well as the people we are mandated to protect, and frankly – as I’ve told you before – in Darfur, we don’t.”

Obama, Clinton, and McCain Release Joint Statement on Darfur

On May 29, John McCain, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama released a joint statement condemning the “genocide” in the Darfur region of Sudan. Vowing to make peace in Darfur a top priority, the three wrote, “If peace and security for the people of Sudan are not in place when one of us is inaugurated as president on January 20, 2009, we pledge that the next administration will pursue these goals with stinging resolve.” None of the candidates, however, has proposed a tangible plan for addressing violence in the region, though the candidates pointedly used the word “genocide” in describing the conflict in Darfur. The Bush administration was one of the first to use the term “genocide”, while the United Nations continues to refer to the situation in Darfur as “crimes against humanity”.

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