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Darfur Briefing September 2012

“The security situation has deteriorated compared to 2011”
US Special Envoy to Sudan, 19th September 2012

- **The Darfur conflict is escalating without scrutiny in the absence of humanitarian assessment and reporting, coupled with international media neglect.**
- **Daily local reports indicate Sudan is once again using forms of repression it employed during the height of the conflict in 2004. These include:**
 - **Concerted and sporadic violence**
 - **Gang rape**
 - **Aerial bombardment of civilians**
 - **Obstruction of vital aid**
- **Existing UN resolutions must be enforced to stop aerial bombardment and to ensure humanitarian access.**

Executive Summary

In 2003, the Government of Sudan (GoS) under President Omar al-Bashir began its campaign of attacks on Darfur, an area inhabited mostly by ethnically black African tribes. The UN estimates 300,000 people have been killed and over 2.7 million displaced by the conflict to date. In 2010 three counts of genocide were added to the International Criminal Court’s indictment of President al-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Although it commanded global attention at the height of atrocities, Darfur has become a chronically under-reported region, with the international media spotlight shifting north to Arab uprisings and south to Sudanese border disputes. Both UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations are effectively censored by the Government of Sudan (GoS) who threaten obstruction or expulsion, meaning their reports are no longer published. In 2009, threats became a reality when 13 NGOs were expelled from Darfur. Two divergent accounts have emerged to fill this silence on Darfur.

The first, advanced by the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), seeks to portray contemporary Darfur as a relative success story. UNAMID points to the drop in violence from its 2004 zenith and to the declining numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Spokesman, Chris Cymanick, described the security situation in Darfur as ‘relatively calm’ during a May interview. This outlook is used to justify upcoming cuts of over 4,000 security personnel, which, in the words of the Head of UN Peacekeeping, Herve Ladsous, will better ‘reflect the reality on the ground’.

The credibility of UNAMID’s assessments has however been called into question. In a leaked 2011 report, three former members of a UN expert panel accused UNAMID of overlooking GoS violations whilst emphasising those committed by rebels. In one case, the panel exposed UNAMID’s omission of a GoS sponsored massacre in east Darfur that even a GoS-commissioned report cited.

The second emerging account starkly disputes, and casts further doubt on, UNAMID’s sanguine portrayal. Comprising mounting evidence, in the form of local eyewitness and news agency reports, this version of events indicates that many of the repressive strategies that characterised Darfur at its worst continue to be perpetuated by GoS security apparatus and affiliate militia. These are: escalating violence, gang rape, aerial bombardment and aid obstruction.

Repression and sporadic violence

Darfur remains a dangerous and lawless region, governed by repressive state security forces and militiamen. **In the past week (10th-17th September) alone, there have been 22 civilian deaths in eight separate incidents across Darfur.** Other recent examples include: security forces opened fire on protesters in Nyala, on 31st July, leaving 12 dead and wounding many others; Janjaweed militia, notorious for their former role in the GoS' outsourcing of genocide, pillaged the market town of Malliet on 15th August, entirely unchallenged by local security forces, killing seven and injuring 17.

Aside from random acts of terror, IDPs are specifically targeted by Arab settlers who have seized their pre-conflict lands. IDP leaders are routinely assassinated, as on 18th May when gunmen mowed down one and critically injured another at Hamidiya camp. Many IDPs who have attempted to return to their farms find themselves repulsed by threats and violence. This happened to farmers in West Darfur on 13th July who were attacked by pro-government militia, their farms were razed and their land subsequently appropriated by Arabs for grazing. Such incidents put into context the success claimed by UNAMID regarding IDP repatriation.

Gang Rape

In the early years of the Darfur conflict gang rape was identified by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) as a weapon employed by GoS security forces and affiliate militiamen.

Numerous reports in 2012 indicate this brutal practice continues. The same pattern is followed: men on horse- or camelback kidnap IDP women outside camps, then gang rape them at gun-point. As in 2005, when MSF found that 'the majority (82%) were raped while they were pursuing their ordinary daily activities', women today are preyed on when collecting firewood or water, not during fighting. This resurgent endemic was grimly exemplified in West Darfur on 17th July when **a group of gunmen kidnapped and raped eight women working in the fields outside Arminkol IDP camp.** Held captive for 24 hours, **three of the victims were minors.**

Moreover, perpetrators appear to operate with near impunity. Despite detailed Radio Dabanga articles or promptly filed police reports, investigations are seldom carried out and prosecutions are rarer still. Reacting to this injustice, a female activist in Kassab IDP camp recently (22nd June) charged UNAMID with failing to step in, thus leaving victims unprotected and violators unaccountable.

Aerial bombardment of civilians

Recent years have also seen a resumption of one of the previous decade's most devastating forms of warfare: the bombing of civilian areas.

A spate of airstrikes by GoS Antonov and MIG aircraft, proscribed under UN Security Council Resolution 1591 (2005), were ordered by Khartoum in 2012. On 10th May, two shepherds were hospitalised, and 80 sheep in their flock killed, in an area devoid of rebel presence. In Jebel Marra, North Darfur, where there is a rebel outpost, **several bombs hit a school, injuring 13 students** on 15th July. The following month a sustained campaign of airstrikes killed scores of civilians and forced hundreds of others to flee their homes and sleep in the relative safety of the mountains, without access to food or medicine.

In this regard, as with gang rape, UNAMID has proved inept. Very rarely has it followed up leads to confirm credible reports of aerial assaults on civilians, of which there have been over 400 since UNAMID took up its mandate in 2008. Additionally, UNAMID has readily accepted Khartoum's stringent restrictions on their movements due to supposed 'insecurity' (a pretext which, ironically, contradicts the 'calm' security evaluation both actors argue for).

Aid Obstruction

Entangled in red tape and harassed by security forces, the work of many aid organisations in Darfur is becoming impossible.

Insurmountable bureaucratic barriers forced Médecins Sans Frontières to suspend all operations in North Darfur on 22nd May, leaving 110,000 people without access to life-saving healthcare, from vaccination to caesarean sections. Equally, a spate of arrests (e.g. three Norwegian relief workers on 6th May), abductions (e.g. International Red Cross employees on 2nd May) and expulsions (e.g. all aid workers of South Sudanese origin on 29th April) have severely impeded vital aid efforts. Recently, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has issued a warning that ‘criminal acts targeting humanitarian staff in Darfur are on the rise’.

The cumulative effect of these obstructions has been to exacerbate the hardship faced by an already extremely vulnerable Darfuri population, 30% of whom the UN World Food Programme believes to be suffering food insecurity and in urgent need of aid (a number of IDP camps have not received food aid for six months).

Conclusion

This briefing has highlighted just a few recent examples from a compendium of violations which go unseen in an international media and NGO information blackout. The steady stream of accounts coming out of Darfur reveal a security situation that shares a number of the hallmarks of 2004. Many people who were most gravely affected then, namely IDPs, are once more forced to endure them anew.

The ‘reality on the ground,’ of which Mr Lasdous so optimistically speaks, is that gang rapists roam freely; the ‘relative calm’ trumped by Mr Cymanick is disturbed daily by the explosions of indiscriminate bombing. UNAMID appears to be failing its mandate to protect civilians, whilst appeasing a government headed by the world’s only acting president who is wanted by the ICC. Such deficiencies are all the more troubling from the UK perspective, given that this government has been a consistent donor to UNAMID and contributes millions of pounds through the UN’s Common humanitarian fund. <http://iwpr.net/report-news/funding-false-hopes-darfur>

Recommendations

Waging Peace joins with other international NGOs in recommending that the UK use its leverage to support efforts for a comprehensive peace in Darfur, including:

- Demanding the enforcement of existing UN resolutions e.g. an end to aerial bombardment, attacks against civilians, and the state of emergency in Darfur.
- Requiring UNAMID to demand immediate access to all areas in which civilians are in need of protection, and for UN agencies to regularly publish comprehensive data on the humanitarian and human rights situation.
- Insisting on unfettered humanitarian access throughout Darfur, and for there to be no shift to a returns and recovery policy until the conditions on the ground are suitable and root causes of the conflict are addressed.
- Ensuring a genuinely inclusive peace deal is agreed, without unduly pressuring any stakeholders.
- Renewed efforts at peace talks which include civil society and brings together various factions in a neutral environment outside Darfur.