

# JustComment

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## Crisis in Dafur: The hidden war of Sudan

**T**he Darfur is a large region in the Sudan near the border of western Sudan and eastern Chad, in north-west Africa. Recent conflict in this western region of the Sudan has exacerbated an ongoing political struggle over power and resources that has seen more than 2 million people die since 1983.

Over a million people have been displaced by violence since 2003 fleeing to refugee camps inside Sudan. Up to 140,000 have recently fled over the border into neighbouring Chad. Unrest continues throughout the Sudan and many more people are looking for safe refuge from the violence.

For more than 21 years the Sudanese Government and rebel groups from the South have been engaged in Africa's longest running civil war. In 1983 the National Islamic Front (NIF), gained power and attempted to introduce Sharia Law (a form of Islamic law) throughout the country. Rebel groups from the South, particularly Christian, Animist (traditional religions) and non-Arab Muslim, accused the Government of favouring the ruling Arab elite (*BBC World News*). Some rebel groups formed the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and they demanded a greater share in Sudan's power and wealth in their struggle for self-determination. In 1989 the current President Omar Hassan al-Bashir seized political control of the NIF. Following a state of emergency in 2000 Bashir was re-elected in dubious presidential and parliamentary elections boycotted by all major opposition parties. Opposition groups demanded inclusion in the developing peace negotiations.

### The Peace Process

The Kenyan Government and other nations through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have continually played an active role in supporting the peace process (*US State Department*). The Government and the SPLA signed the historic Machakos Protocol in July 2002 following many unsuccessful peace attempts. The Protocol set down an interim period of six and a half years of self-determination culminating in a referendum concerning independence for the South.

The SPLA negotiated for a large share of Sudan's oil revenues, with oil fields mostly situated in the South, and for employment opportunities in the oil industry and other government jobs. By October 2002 both parties had signed a Memorandum of understanding calling for an end to hostilities and humanitarian access to all areas of the country. Disagreements over control of the central region and the distribution of government jobs have continued to fuel unrest, with widespread reports of continuing violence.

### The Darfur Region

Despite the peace process between North and South Sudan various militia groups have emerged expressing their political views amid escalating violence. In the drought ridden arid Darfur region in the west, nomadic groups have reportedly killed hundreds of the pastoral and sedentary populations since 2000. The situation in the Darfur has been described by the UN as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today.



In early 2003, Sudanese authorities reportedly armed and provided horses to the Janjaweed, a pro-government western nomadic tribe, and tasked them with patrolling Sudan's 850 mile (1,400km) border with Chad. The growing presence of these government supported armed patrols raised fears among already terrified Darfurians, contributing to the growing tension between Darfur's marginalised population and the government. The tensions soon escalated into sporadic violence... and then into recurrent and systematic Janjaweed raids against civilian populations.

(Media release:  
<http://www.refugees.org/news/>)

As the violence escalated Darfurians organised themselves into two key groups, the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) which have become formidable forces intensifying militia offen-

## In the Mornay camp 80,000 people

come from 111 villages. Their villages have been destroyed by mainly pro-government militia. Large scale killings targeted men leaving traumatised women and girls to care for the sick and elderly. Militia responsible for scorched-earth attacks on villages continue to control the periphery of Mornay camp. Women who venture beyond the camp to gather firewood risk beatings, rape and death. 200 people die a month in Mornay from violent acts, starvation and disease. The recent arrival of aid has provided some relief from starvation but the rainy season has promoted the outbreak of disease. In Mukjar camp 13,000 people live in "pathetic shelters made of sticks and plastic sheeting which offer little protection against the heat, wind and rain"  
*MSF Darfur Briefing Paper, 1/12/04*

sives and attacks on civilian populations. Throughout Darfur hundreds of towns and villages have been decimated by Sudanese Government aerial bombings, militia offensives and sustained Janjaweed raids. SLA and JEM retaliatory attacks have added to the violence, destruction and massive displacement ([www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)).

### A Massive Humanitarian Crisis

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported large scale killings, abductions, rape and destruction of villages. The violence in Darfur has internally displaced as many as 1.5 million people with another 200,000 now living as refugees in Chad.

Nearly 400,000 Darfurians remain sheltered in some 20 displacement camps scattered throughout the Darfur states, including nearly 10 camps with more than 50,000 residents each. An estimated additional 300,000 internally displaced Darfurians remain dispersed in remote mountains, in the desert near the Sudan-Chad border, and with relatives and others in host communities

*(www.refugees.org).*

Poor security is prohibiting Aid teams from accessing the region and government forces have continued to obstruct humanitarian assistance. Local human rights Nongovernmental Organisations (NGO's) have been routinely harassed and arrested (US State Department). Extensive violence and discrimination against women and children has been documented by refugee groups and Aid agencies. Government security forces and militia groups have been reported involved in discrimination of religious and ethnic minorities, forced labour including child forced labour, the abduction of women and children, torture, slavery and the forced military conscription of underage young men. Anti-government militia forces are also reported in committing human rights violations with the SPLM/A responsible for killings, beatings, rape and the military conscription of underage young men (*US State Department*).

UNICEF reports that approximately 2,021,000 were affected by the conflict in Darfur by late 2004. During the month of September alone 100,000 people were newly displaced. Those within refugee camps are unable to leave them to harvest crops or plant for next year so food shortages are expected well into next year. The wave of attacks last spring has left many people destitute and solely dependant on international aid ([www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)). MSF (Medecins Sans Frontieres) has declared that "a famine resulting entirely from political causes was imminent" (*Darfur Briefing Paper, 1/12/04*).

Of major concern have been recent reports of police and militia throughout the Sudan increasing pressure for the relocation of internally displaced people in camps such as Kalma in the South ([www.reliefweb](http://www.reliefweb)). New arrivals were increasing the pressure on all camps and food and water supplies are expected to be exhausted in many camps by the end of the year.

### UN Security Council Nairobi Meeting

The UN Security Council meeting for a two-day session in Nairobi in November

challenged all parties in the Sudan to stand by commitments to reach a comprehensive peace agreement before the end of 2004. A memorandum of understanding was signed on November 19 between the Government of Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/ Army. The Council declared its support and readiness to establish a United Nations peace support mission but demanded "that government and rebel forces immediately cease all attacks, refrain from forcible relocation of civilians and cooperate with humanitarian relief efforts in accordance with earlier agreements..." Norwegian Minister for International Development, Hilde F Johnson "strongly condemned the continued killings and attacks on civilians taking place in Darfur". Of particular concern is the high incidence of sexual violence and rape with women and girls continuing to be at serious risk ([www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf](http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf)). The mission has since reported that the situation remains critical with heavy eruptions of fighting in violation of ceasefire accords and aid workers not able to enter many "no go" areas (*UN News Service: 2/12/02*).

### Just Action

- Write to members of Parliament asking that Australia become more involved in the crisis in the Sudan and speak out against the human rights violations.
- Check media sites for updates: BBC World News, UN News Service etc.
- Keep informed as to what aid organizations are doing in the region by going to : [www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf](http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf); or Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) [www.msf.org](http://www.msf.org)
- Find out about the programs of Australian non-government organizations (NGOs) [www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au) [www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au) [www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au) [www.caritas.org.au](http://www.caritas.org.au)

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