



OFFICE OF UN RESIDENT AND HUMANITARIAN CO-ORDINATOR
FOR THE SUDAN

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RCHC/SUD/Note 25

NOTE TO MR. EGELAND

Humanitarian Access in Darfur, Sudan

1. Further to my Note no. 23 of 25 January, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Acting Minister of Humanitarian Affairs convened a meeting on 26 January with the UK Ambassador, NGOs and UN agencies, to discuss access and security in Greater Darfur. This was the first time the Government initiated a joint meeting with the international community on the politically sensitive issue of Darfur. The atmospherics were reportedly peaceful and friendly, despite the fact that the Government reiterated its frustration about the UN "unilateral" decision to relocate staff from Geneina, "which had wrongly led the public to believe that Geneina was unsafe".
2. During the meeting, the authorities promised to provide travel permits for humanitarian agencies to Nyala and Geneina, the state capitals of South and West Darfur, conditional upon a UN written security clearance of Geneina. (Please note that UN Security had declared Geneina safe on 31 December 2003, and had informed the Government accordingly). Participants agreed on the prompt establishment of a joint mechanism, comprised of HAC (including Military Intelligence) and the UN, tasked with assessing risk levels throughout Darfur.
3. The Minister of Foreign Affairs invited the UN and NGOs to attend a follow-up meeting two weeks later, "in order to monitor progress" on these issues. This meeting would include Military Intelligence and National Security, in view of the key role they play in issuing or denying travel permits. In the meanwhile, the humanitarian community will test the GoS' commitment regarding issuance of travel permits to Nyala and Geneina.
4. UN Security is currently assessing 10 locations in North Darfur, including the town of Kutum, which hosts some 60,000 IDPs. UN Security has also cleared the El Fasher-Kutum road, which had been closed since November last year. Agencies are expected to obtain travel permits and resume aid delivery in this area in the very near future. However, delivery of assistance may be hampered by fuel shortages, due to recent GoS restrictions on fuel purchases in El Fasher.
5. Over coming days, we shall see if Government assurances of greater access, as indicated above, materialize. Meanwhile the overall situation remains that the large majority of IDPs are inaccessible throughout Greater Darfur, due to continued fighting and banditry, strengthening of the military, and stalled peace talks between the GoS and the rebels.
6. Please note that I have agreed to send one of our staff, Ms. Guadalupe de Sousa, to Eastern Chad to assist the UN Coordinator in handling the current refugee crisis.
7. As requested, I am attaching a draft overview of the access situation in Darfur since 1 December last year, as prepared by OCHA-Sudan. This is work in progress and I have requested colleagues here to flesh out details as well as to institute a more systematic monitoring of access requests and outcome.

Mukesh Kapila