



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

Briefing on the greater Darfur Region

30 November 2003

Introduction

1. The humanitarian situation in the Greater Darfur Region of western Sudan may emerge as the worst humanitarian crisis in the Sudan since 1988 and is among the worst in Africa. Insecurity continues, humanitarian access is in some cases non-existent, and there are few aid workers in the area. Recent conflict between nomadic and settled communities and between the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Government of Sudan (GoS), which escalated in March 2003, has resulted in more than 600,000 IDPs as well as an estimated 70,000 refugees in neighboring Chad. In addition, some 200,000 IDPs who arrived from Bahr el Gazal in 1988, 1992 and 2001 currently live in South Darfur. Thousands have died as a direct result of the conflict and many more of related diseases – for instance, 299 deaths were registered in one week alone in mid-September among IDPs in Kebkabiya (out of 30,000 IDPs).

Background

2. The three Darfur States (North, South and West Darfur) cover a total area of 548,000 sq. km. The three States have a population of about 6 million people, half of which live in South Darfur.

3. On 3 September 2003, a cease-fire agreement between the SLA and the GoS, which went into force on 6 September, was signed in Abeche, Chad. The agreement was on 4 November extended for an additional month until 4 December following further talks in Abeche. A weakly-worded clause on humanitarian access has been included in the agreement. The SLA has been demanding the presence of international observers in Darfur, which however was not agreed. Although the cease-fire has, so far, been holding, armed conflict between the Government and one faction of the SLA, which did not sign on to the ceasefire agreement and is led by the Justice and Equality Party, has continued. In addition, irrespective of the cease-fire agreement, which commits the parties to “controlling the irregular armed forces”, attacks have continued against sedentary civilian populations, mainly by the allegedly government-aligned Janjaweed militia. This mainly Arab militia has allied itself with nomadic communities in search of grazing areas, and was supported by the Government during its war with the SLA. It is claimed by some that the Janjaweed still is receiving some Government support or that the Government, after having armed and trained them, is now either unable or unwilling to stop them.

4. The cease-fire agreement resulted in significantly improved humanitarian access in the region, which had been virtually closed off to the humanitarian community since March 2003. A number of interagency assessment missions have since taken place, which helped reveal the scale of the humanitarian needs, which are far greater than

what can currently be addressed given the limited operational capacity of the humanitarian actors on the ground.

5. On 15 September 2003, the United Nations launched the Greater Darfur Special Initiative, which aims at providing accelerated humanitarian relief while also addressing the underlying causes of the conflict through peacebuilding, rehabilitation and development. Of the \$22.8 million requested by the United Nations for this initiative, pledges and contributions have so far been provided by France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom in the amount of \$6.5 million.

Latest Developments

Security and access

6. The security situation continues to be tense, hampering the delivery of humanitarian aid. Commercial trucks were, during the last two weeks, attacked near Kebkabiya and North of Korma, North Darfur. Villages were attacked in Dimo, South Darfur and in Baida, West Darfur, the latter reportedly resulting in 30 deaths on 21 November. On 22 November, a commercial bus was reportedly attacked by Janjaweed South of Nyala, South Darfur, killing five. In Zalengi province in West Darfur some 46 villages were reportedly burnt to ashes this month and 74 villages looted. A report from local authorities in Zalengi states that a total of 164,565 people have been identified as conflict affected in that province alone. An attack on a commercial truck convoy carrying WFP food took place on 19 October about 180 km from Nyala close to Mershing (also South Darfur) killing 9 people. Clashes between Janjaweed and SLA have been reported north of Kutum. Four staff members of the international NGO Medair and a Government official that had been reported missing on 11 November in West Darfur were only this week scheduled to return to Geneina, West Darfur, after having been held by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) that did not sign on to the Government/SLA ceasefire.

7. The issuance of travel permits, which are still required for Darfur, remains an issue of major concern. Some NGOs which had expressed interest in joining the relief efforts in Darfur had to wait several months for their travel permits and visas for their expatriate staff intending to be posted in Darfur. Some key donors have also reported major problems in obtaining travel permits, and international media representatives have so far been refused access. UN agencies, on the other hand, have had a relatively easier time obtaining travel permits, although the Government is still far from following the 24-hour procedures that it promised starting on 1 October 2003. In North Darfur, agencies have recently reported difficulties in receiving Government permits for delivering humanitarian aid to various locations outside of El Fasher and similar conditions have been reported in South Darfur.

Humanitarian situation

8. The humanitarian situation in Darfur continues to be extremely serious. The humanitarian needs of many IDPs still remain unmet, partly due to access problems related to the worsened security situation, lack of operational capacity on the ground to deliver the necessary supplies, and lack of supplies/funding. Recent attacks on commercial trucks in the Darfur region and difficulties in obtaining permits to deliver relief in North Darfur are hampering the supply of relief to needy conflict affected populations. The supply of relief items in West Darfur has almost come to a standstill.

9. Fortunately, new NGOs are expressing interest in supporting the humanitarian efforts in Darfur. The German Red Cross is now providing assistance in South Darfur and MSF-Holland, MSF-France and Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) are planning to join the efforts as well. MSF-H recently undertook a needs assessment mission in the southern part of West Darfur.

10. Reference is made to the summary contained in the Darfur Humanitarian Needs Profile, which provides an overview of the humanitarian needs and the humanitarian response so far, highlighting remaining gaps in humanitarian assistance provision. In addition, the following may of interest:

11. El Intefada IDP camp, Nyala, South Darfur: This camp reportedly has 1,061 under-five children, of which 134 (12.6%) are moderately malnourished and 27 (2.5%) severe. A programme of supplementary and therapeutic feeding is ongoing. Water availability reportedly remains below standard, resulting in poor personal hygiene. There are still plans by the State Government to move the camp away from town.

Seminars

12. The Humanitarian Aid Commission is jointly with the NGO Al-Zubair Foundation organizing seminars in Darfur with a focus on peace and development to take place in Nyala or El Fasher in the second half of January 2004. UNDP had originally planned to organize similar seminars in all three Darfur States in October, but two State Governments insisted on their postponement. UNDP will instead provide assistance to HAC/Al-Zubair's joint efforts.

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