

Darfur Update

30 November 2003

1 Introduction

On 4 November, after talks between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) in Abache, Chad, the cease-fire agreement signed on 3 September 2003 was renewed for one month.

Despite this renewal of the cease-fire, a serious escalation of the conflict has occurred which the Government seems unable or unwilling to address or ameliorate. Apart from humanitarian consequences, there is a risk that the conflict will negatively affect the overall peace process between the Government and the SPLM/A. It is, therefore, imperative that the international community exert the strongest possible political pressure on the Government to take urgent steps to reduce violence and killing in Darfur. In view also of the role of Chad and ad hoc political role for the United Nations in a co-ordinated international effort should not be excluded

The international community has been pressing for a humanitarian annex to the extension of the agreement, and a draft text for an annex was prepared for the negotiating parties. Little of this text can be found in the Joint Statement on the extension by the Government and the SLM/A. Point 5 simply states that agreement was reached to: 'permit national and international humanitarian organizations to enter the areas which had been affected by war, under the guidance of the Sudanese Humanitarian Affairs Commission and with the knowledge of the Tripartite Committee'.

However, even this has little or no meaning in practice. This is largely due to the upsurge in militia activity since the extension of the cease-fire, with major attacks on villages near the town of Kulbus and on Fur villages around Zalingi in West Darfur State, making large areas of the State inaccessible. In addition, the SLM/A leadership is currently in disarray and divided, with at least one faction deciding to confront the militia militarily. Complicating the situation even further is the fact that, over the past

two months, a rival rebel movement – the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which is not party to the cease-fire – has been rapidly gaining strength in West Darfur State.

Below, the upsurge in militia activity, the rift in the SLM/A leadership and the rise of the JEM are described briefly.

2. SLM/A

From 11 till 14 October, the SLM/A held a conference in their stronghold in Kornoï in North Darfur State. Changes in the leadership were discussed and a clear division was proposed between the political and military leadership. At present the position of well known SLM/A leaders like Minni Minawi and Abullah Bakr is unclear. The Fur leader Abdel Wahid Mohammed Nur did not attend the conference and he is no longer coordinating with the Zaghawa faction of the SLM/A. As a consequence, it is no longer clear with whom one should be dealing in the SLM/A.

3. Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)

In the past two months, the JEM has been expanding its force in West Darfur State and it now controls most of the north. Several factors have contributed to this expansion:

- The release in September of a number of political leaders, including Abubaker Hamid and Suliman Gamous of the Islamist Popular National Congress Party. The leader of the PNC, Dr Hassan Abdallah al Turabi, has a considerable following in Darfur. After their release, these leaders returned to Darfur and mobilized their political allies to join the JEM.
- The increasing support for the Islamists may also be related to the fact that, in its manifesto, the SLM/A advocates a secular Sudan. This may have alienated many people in Darfur, which is known as a religiously conservative state.
- A number of SLM/A commanders and rank and file members, who felt that the September agreement was a sell out, left the movement to join the JEM;
- The increased militia activity caused people to join the JEM.

Sources close to the JEM have stated that it intends to launch an attack on Geneina, so as to gain control of the border area between Chad and Sudan.

Sources close to the SLM/A and the JEM claim that there is increased military cooperation between the two movements, despite their ideological differences. After the SLM/A conference in October, there were meetings with the JEM in Kornoï, at which a committee was established, comprising two members each from the SLM/A and the JEM, to coordinate military operations.

4. Militias

Far from diminishing, Janjaweed (Arab militia) activity has grown rapidly in past months, especially in West Darfur State. For example, in early September, organized attacks were carried out on over forty villages in Wadi Saleh, while in early November, a large number of villages were burnt in the Zalingei area.

The Government is increasingly trying to normalize the Janjaweed militias by absorbing them into the People's Defence Forces (Al Dif'aa Al Sha'abi), and providing them with uniforms and identity cards. Observers have stated that this only compounds the problem, because it gives the militias greater authority. It has also been observed that the control the authorities can exert over the militias differs from one locality to another, even if they have been absorbed into the People's Defence Forces. There is, for example, some level of control over the militias in Geneina, but much less so in Zalingei, where most of the recent militia activity has taken place.

4. Conclusion

The crux of the current problem in Darfur is the militias, the rapid growth of the SLM/A and of JEM having been generated and accelerated by militia activity. To date international attention has focused on the SLM/A and the Government. It is however now essential to take cognisance of the reality that multiple actors are operating in Darfur, not only the SLM/A and the Government. The JEM is playing an increasingly significant role in the State and in the direction of unfolding events. Leadership of both the SLM/A and the JEM is now very unclear which makes working with them complex and subject to delay. However since the violence caused by the militias is the immediate cause of the widespread displacement and war casualties in Darfur, it is

clear that the primary focus of international attention should be on the militias, since they lie at the root of the present crisis (The structural causes of Darfur's problems of course are to be found in decades of political marginalization and economic underdevelopment.) Any strategy to solve the problem in Darfur should include strong international pressure on the Government of the Sudan to control the militias as a prelude to disarmament. International attention should therefore be focused on a political solution, in parallel with further and more intensive humanitarian interventions, using bilateral channels like the upcoming visit of the British Secretary of State for International Development and the EU troika or possibly a mission from the UN led by a political envoy of the Secretary General. The visit of Ambassador Vraalsen should be used to push a solution on Darfur with the Government. There are indications of widespread support amongst the international community for the UNSG despatching a high level UN mission led at undersecretary level with a group of eminent persons to address the situation in Darfur.

A second strategy, one less likely to yield positive results, is securing the intervention of Idriss Deby. The President of Chad is a long-standing ally of the Government of Sudan. President Deby could exert considerable influence on the JEM and SLM/A. Deby is himself a Zaghawa, and many of the SLM/A and JEM troops have fought alongside him in the past. Deby's close ties on security with the Government of Sudan, however, may limit his effectiveness in intervening between the warring parties.

A third strategy could be a combination of the first and the second and have an envoy of the UNSG talk to both the Government of the Sudan and the Government of Chad. This would imply a de facto internationalization of the conflict in Darfur and provide as such a legitimate basis for UN involvement. This could be, however, also a reason for the Government of Sudan not to cooperate with this approach.

Annex I

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Unofficial Translation

AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN (GoS) AND THE SUDAN LIBERATION ARMY (SLA)

Being keen to cool down the situation and stabilise the security situation in Darfur states; in order to avoid further destructive developments resulting from the war; based on the interest of the two parties in bridging differences in visions in order to achieve reconciliation, the Government delegation (First Party) held a meeting with the Sudan Liberation Army Delegation which has presence in the following five areas:

- a. Dar Zaghawa Area
- b. Jabal Si Area
- c. Jabal Maidob Area
- d. Jabal Mara Area
- e. Morni Area

referred to thereafter as the Second Party.

The two parties (list of names attached) held a meeting under the supervision of the Chadian Government (Third Party), through the good offices of President Idris Deby, and agreed on the following:

Point One:

Cease-fire between the two parties, cessation of operations and hostilities which may result in further developments in the situation.

Point Two:

Controlling the irregular armed forces in areas of military operations.

Point Three:

Releasing all prisoners of war (POWs) and all those who have been arrested by the two parties in connection with this problem.

Point Four:

The forces of the SLA shall be relocated to areas to be agreed by the two parties.

Point Five:

Commitment by the two parties to lay down the foundations for a lasting and comprehensive peace in the area in order to achieve economic and social development.

Mr. Abdel Rahaman Mousa
Minister of Public Security and Immigration for the Government of Chad

Commander General Abdallah Abakar Basheer for the Sudan Liberation Army

Appendix 1:

The Sudanese Delegation:

Major-General (PSc) Issmant Abdel Rahman Zain al Abdeen, Head of Delegation
Brig. (PSc) Ibrahim Mohamed al Hassan, member
Colonel Omer Abdel Mutalib Mohamed, member
Consul General Khalid Abas Ahmed al Naiem, member
Babikir Omer Abdel Gadir, member

Sudan Liberation Army Delegation:

Abdallah Abakar Basheer, Head of Delegation
Yahia Sin al Neel, member
Omer Suliman Dhahia, member
Adam Suliman Basheer, member
Abdallah Hasaballah al Doumi, member
Mustafa Mahmoud al Tayeb, member
Ustaz Osman Mohamed Basheer, member

Annex II

Unofficial translation

Text of the Joint Statement between the Sudanese Government and SLA delegations.

During the period from 26 October – 4 November 2003, the second round of Peace Negotiations between the Sudanese Government Delegation and the SLA Delegation took place in the Chadian town, Abechi, under the auspices of the Chadian government. The negotiations were an extension to the Abechi agreement signed on the 3rd of September 2003 between the two parties, an implementation of Article No. 7, and based on the report of the Tripartite Committee responsible for field operations which reflected SLA's non-commitment towards providing the Annexes within the deadline. Under the purpose of proving good intentions and the sincere desire for peace between the two parties, the following was agreed upon :

1. Continuation of cease fire between the two parties and to cease all hostile activities, including press statements, which could lead to the escalation of conditions.
2. Granting the SLA a period of 30 days, starting from this agreements' date of signature, for providing the above-mentioned annexes related to the 3rd of September Agreement.
3. Renewal of trust in the tripartite committee, consolidating it between the three parties and the supervision of the field implementation of the contents of this statement.
4. The two parties are to guarantee freedom of movement for individuals and possessions.
5. To permit national and international humanitarian organizations to enter the areas which had been affected by war, under the guidance of the Sudanese Humanitarian Commission and with the knowledge of the Tripartite Committee.
6. The legal framework for the next negotiations concerning the annexes is the 3rd of September Agreement signed between the two parties, and the basis for the next negotiations will be the final draft agreement concerning the annexes and which was presented by the mediating party, enclosed herewith for amendments to be made by the two parties.
7. In case a dispute occurs or the articles of this statement are not respected by one of the parties, the other party should refer to the Chadian mediator.
8. The two parties should be fully committed to this statement.
9. This statement has been issued in French and Arabic and both have the same legal power.

Issued in Abechi Town on 4 November 2003.

Signed by:

On behalf of the Sudanese Government : Osman Mohamed Yousif Kabr, Wali of North Darfur State

On behalf of the Chadian mediator: Dr. Adam Diar Mougoudi, Minister of Animal Resources.

On behalf of the SLA: Abdullah Hassab Alla Doumi, Chairman of the Liberation delegation