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Contact: Ken Bacon

Sudan: AMIS Needs New Resources for New Responsibilities

The Darfur Peace Agreement, reached under the auspices of the African Union, imposes difficult and significant tasks on an AU peacekeeping force that is already struggling to carry out its limited mandate in western Sudan.

Key security provisions of the accord will not be put into place unless the AU force receives more personnel, resources and a stronger mandate, or the United Nations takes over the AU's security functions. Each option faces significant obstacles.

Three months after it was signed, the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) looks like a series of failed promises. Much of Darfur has grown less secure; displacement is increasing, and the two signatories—the Khartoum government and the faction of the Sudan Liberation Army led by Minni Minawi—are cooperating to fight groups that refused to sign the agreement rather than working together as partners for peace. Government disarmament of the Janjaweed, the largely Arab militia supported by Sudan's military, has not begun, putting it more than a month behind the schedule in the peace accords.

In the midst of these developments, the AU appears paralyzed, demoralized and unable to provide the one condition that the two million displaced people in Darfur crave—security. “The AU is doing nothing but writing reports,” says a new arrival at a displaced persons camp in Tawilla, west of El Fasher in North Darfur. He is one of about 10,000 people to flee after attacks on surrounding villages by Minawi's forces.

Following the signing of the DPA, AU personnel and vehicles have been attacked in camps where most residents are Fur, Darfur's largest African tribe. Minawi is a member of the Zaghawa tribe, which accounts for about 8% of Darfur's population. Since the DPA, Minawi has stayed on

an AU base, and his lieutenants have been spotted driving AU vehicles, making the AU look like it is taking sides. “For me there is no difference between the African Union, the government of Sudan and the Minni Minawi faction,” says one person who recently fled attacks by Minawi's troops.

Part of the frustration with the AU reflects a lack of understanding of its mandate. The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) started as an observer mission to report on violations of a 2004 ceasefire; it was never given a mandate to protect civilians, which is what displaced Darfurians want it to do. Some 7,000 AMIS troops patrol an area the size of Texas. While AMIS complains about lack of resources, it actually has quite a few—more than 500 vehicles, 105 armored personnel carriers and 12 helicopters—stationed at well-secured American-built bases around Darfur. But AMIS deploys its assets in a very conservative, non-protective way. Rather than regularly patrolling outside the camps when women leave to collect firewood, thus exposing themselves to attack, or in the late afternoon, when many attacks take place, it tends to drive its patrols through the camps in the middle of the day, when the conditions are generally quiet. Investigations of security violations often start days late.

The DPA continues the responsibilities of AMIS to monitor a cease fire but adds a long list of new responsibilities. For example, AMIS is supposed to:

- ❑ Establish and maintain demilitarized zones around 65 camps for internally displaced persons in Darfur;

- ❑ Create and maintain demilitarized transportation routes over some 1,000 kilometers of major roads, many of which run through remote territories;
- ❑ “Develop a plan for the regulation of nomadic migration along historic migration routes” and “ensure the safety of nomadic migration;”
- ❑ Support government efforts “to completely eliminate the threat posed by the Janjaweed/armed militia to the civilian population;”
- ❑ Help set up and monitor demilitarized zones, buffer zones and redeployment areas designed to separate the various forces;
- ❑ Verify compliance with disarmament requirements;
- ❑ Establish a Logistics Co-ordination Committee to provide non-military support and communications equipment to demobilized rebel troops after the movements have “registered with AMIS the combatants and determined the number, age and gender of the combatants requiring support.”

These new responsibilities come when “we are barely able to do our previous taskings,” complains an operations officer at AMIS headquarters in El Fasher. The DPA provides no new support for AMIS, saying only that “the parties request the AU and its international partners to ensure that AMIS has the appropriate force levels and resources, including land and air capabilities, to fulfill its mandate.”

So far, donors have refused. In July donors pledged to keep AMIS going at its current size until the end of September. AMIS has a new concept of operations that calls for increasing its force to about 10,500 from the current 7,000 so it can assume its new responsibilities, but the U.S. and the European Union, who played an active role in drafting the DPA, are refusing to put up the resources necessary to help get the fragile peace deal off the ground. What’s more, AMIS has found it difficult to get all the technical assistance it wants. Shortly after the DPA was signed, AMIS asked for, but did not get, the quick deployment of a U.S. military information operations team to help it publicize and explain the agreement.

The U.S. and its allies want to replace AMIS with a 17,000-member UN force that will be better funded, better equipped, and, they hope, more determined to protect civilians. The AU wants to pull out and turn security over to the UN.

So far the government of Sudan is refusing to allow a UN force into Darfur, and the UN has said it won’t send a peace-keeping force to Darfur without Khartoum’s permission. Dr. Magzoub El Khalifa, an adviser to Sudan’s president and the man in charge of implementing the DPA, told Refugees International that a UN force would compromise Sudan’s sovereignty and undercut the AU. He said that the government of Sudan and AMIS, working together, are perfectly capable of maintaining law and order and providing security in Darfur. But many of the two million displaced people in Darfur don’t trust the government or AMIS to provide security. Many of them say that the government is responsible for their displacement in the first place.

Neither the government, nor anybody else, has met even one deadline set by the May 5th DPA, so it’s unclear what the government’s commitment to peace is. Although Dr. El Khalifa says that “peace will never be realized by force,” the government hasn’t, beyond one staged incident, started to disarm the Janjaweed, the first step in the demobilization process. Allowing in a UN force would help demonstrate Sudan’s commitment to peace.

Whether or not Khartoum ultimately admits a UN force, the AU needs money and support so it can fulfill its new mandate for peace.

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS:

- ❑ Donors fund a reasonable expansion of AMIS so it can carry out its DPA duties.
- ❑ Supporting nations provide stepped up technical assistance after consultations with AMIS.
- ❑ The U.S. and its allies ratchet up pressure on Sudan to accept a UN force to increase the chances that the DPA will succeed and that Darfur will be become secure enough to enable displaced people to return home.
- ❑ AMIS conduct regular meetings with displaced people to help rebuild trust in the AU.

RI president Ken Bacon, communications manager Megan Fowler, and Evelyn Thornton, advocacy and partnerships specialist at The Initiative for Inclusive Security, recently returned from Darfur.