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Sudan: Saving the Darfur Peace Agreement

Can the Darfur Peace Agreement be saved? The May 5th accord, so promising on paper, has been rejected in Darfur. Only one of the three major rebel groups signed the pact, known as the DPA, with the government of Sudan. Fighting among rebel groups has continued and in some places intensified.

Demonstrations against the DPA in large camps for internally displaced people have turned violent. The options for rescuing the DPA now are limited, but they are clear: parties must work together to improve security; the African Union must be supported so it can carry out its new duties under the agreement; the broad political discussion, called the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation, must start as soon as possible; and parties must be willing to add sweeteners to the agreement to attract more supporters and encourage all rebel groups to stop fighting.

Even though the DPA was signed by only two of four parties, it is an important step forward because it creates a framework that can end the brutal three-and-a-half year civil war. President Bush has accused the Government of Sudan of genocidal attacks against African villages, but Khartoum says the fighting is a series of tribal disputes.

Against this backdrop, it is remarkable that negotiations run by the African Union were able to produce a peace agreement that any rebel groups could sign with the government. Yet the DPA begins to address the economic and political marginalization of Darfur, which triggered the war in the first place, as well as the need to stop the fighting and bring security to Darfur. The four major sections of the DPA deal with security, power sharing, wealth sharing and the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue.

The **security section** imposes a ceasefire and requires the Government of Sudan to disarm the Janjaweed militias prior to the disarmament and demobilization of the rebel movement forces. This is the most vital section because people won't go home until the fighting ends. However, while the Government of Sudan has provided the African Union with a disarmament plan, little has been accomplished beyond a staged disarmament of 174

people. Instead, there are reports that the Government of Sudan is building up its armed forces in North Darfur in an effort to pursue a major military offensive.

The **power sharing provision** gives a representative of the rebel movements the fourth highest job in the national government in Khartoum and sets up a democratic process for choosing leaders in Darfur. As the only rebel leader who signed the DPA, Minni Minawi claimed and got the new job in Khartoum, thus further freezing out representatives from other factions. Minawi represents a small tribe and his acceptance of the DPA and rise to power has alienated many Darfurians from other groups.

The **wealth sharing provision** lays the ground work for the development and reconstruction of Darfur, an area with little modern infrastructure, commits the Government of Sudan to investing at least \$700 million in the region, and sets up a commission to review compensation claims by victims of the conflict. This is contentious because many Darfurians claim the DPA doesn't adequately compensate them for their losses. "To restart our lives, we have to have something to start with," said a sheikh in North Darfur. However, many displaced people indicate that security is more important to them. "If there is peace and our village is rebuilt, then we will go home," said a woman in Otash camp in South Darfur.

Finally, the DPA calls for a **Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC)**. Under this section, representatives of Darfurian groups are to discuss their ideas for reconciliation, conflict-resolution, reconstruction, and political representation. Many leaders believe that the DDDC will give Darfurians a sense of participation in the peace process that they never got from the DPA negotiations in Abuja, Nigeria. "In Darfur, they believe

this agreement was signed under pressure from America,” says a former wali of North Darfur. In addition, the DPA, which highlights the important role women must play in building a new, peaceful Darfur, rightly calls for the participation of women and youth in the process.

The agreement faced immediate trouble. Rather than seeing the DPA as an opportunity for peace, Minawi’s forces launched a series of attacks, both to consolidate his position in his own Zaghawa tribe and to punish the larger Fur tribe and other groups whose leaders didn’t sign the accord. This, plus the militarization of camps and an increase in banditry, has generated new displacement, particularly in North Darfur. The World Food Program reported that it was unable to deliver food to nearly a half million people in the month of July because of insecurity, and the UN says that more aid workers were killed in July than in the last two years. With violence increasing, the people of Darfur see no benefits from the DPA and have further hardened their stance against it.

The first step toward making the DPA work is restoring a sense of security. On Thursday, the US and Britain introduced a UN Security Council resolution to send 17,000 UN peacekeepers to Darfur, but the US call for the force to be deployed in October is unrealistic. The people of Darfur have lost confidence in the African Union force because it has not been able to protect civilians, and the AU itself agrees that a larger, more capable UN peacekeeping force is necessary. However, the Khartoum government is resisting, and has put forth a troubling plan “for the Restoration of Stability and Protection of Civilians in Darfur” that outlines the deployment of up to 10,500 troops after January 1 -- a clear case of the fox guarding the henhouse.

The AU says it will run out of funds by the middle of October, forcing it to withdraw and leave Darfur without any protection. For this reason, the UN must authorize Secretary General Annan’s recommendation to provide a short-term support package for the AU to maximize its ability to implement the DPA and protect civilians.

Adequate security would allow the launch of the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation, which if organized properly, could also increase the prospects for peace. Everybody agrees that the DDDC will produce demands for changes in the DPA, particularly in the areas of security guarantees, political representation for Darfur, and money for compensation and reconstruction. The government insists that it won’t reopen the agreement. However, Dr. Magzoub El Khalifa, the presidential adviser in charge of implementing the DPA, said that it might be possible to “enhance and strengthen the agreement, to enrich it” in the context of the DDDC. He wouldn’t speculate about what additions the government might accept. Many Darfurian leaders believe that

additions to the agreement may ultimately pave the way for getting other groups to sign.

The DPA gives the task of running the DDDC and implementing numerous other measures to the AU, which lacks both the staff and resources to organize such an undertaking. Although the government of Sudan must be involved, its participation in the violence should bar it from taking a leadership role. The logical partner for the AU is the UN, which has a large, Darfur-wide infrastructure already.

If the DPA is to survive, the US, the UN Security Council and other members of the international community must reinvigorate efforts to find creative solutions to the ongoing crisis. The people of Darfur want peace; now it is up to their leaders to show that they can produce it.

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDS:

- ❑ The international community pressure the Minni Minawi faction of the Sudan Liberation Army and Government forces to stop their attacks against other groups. If the signatories don’t honor the ceasefire, there is little hope that other factions will.
- ❑ The Government of Sudan fully disarm the Janjaweed militias as a sign of its commitment to reducing violence in Darfur.
- ❑ The Government of Sudan accept a UN force to help improve security in Darfur.
- ❑ Until a UN force is deployed, the UN must approve Secretary-General Annan’s recommendations to strengthen the African Union force by providing a support package of UN assets and personnel so that the AU can better protect civilians and fulfill its assigned roles under the DPA.
- ❑ The AU and the UN work together to launch an inclusive, transparent Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation as soon as the violence decreases and where security permits.
- ❑ The international community redouble its diplomatic efforts to reach out to new and old factions that have rejected the agreement. President Bush should appoint a special envoy to direct a more coherent and forceful US policy toward Sudan.

RI president Ken Bacon and communications manager Megan Fowler returned from Darfur in late July.