

Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission suspends the International Committee of the Red Cross' operations African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies 7 February 2014 On 29 January Sudan's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC), the government regulatory body charged with monitoring the work of international and national non-governmental organisations in the country, notified the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) via an official letter that their activities would be suspended from 1 February 2014. The ICRC cited 'technical reasons' for the organisation's suspension. Negotiations between the HAC and ICRC are ongoing.

The HAC stated that the rationale for the suspension was that the ICRC had implemented activities outside of their country agreement. Country agreements are comprised of a series of directives and regulations governing the entry of foreign organisations into Sudan. News reports inside Sudan have also indicated that the rationale for the ICRC's suspension was on the basis that the ICRC had engaged with national organisations other than their official national partner in Sudan, the Sudanese Red Crescent.

Though the ICRC and UN are not required to register with the HAC, they are bound by the same principles.

The ICRC has stated that between January and September 2013, they have provided humanitarian assistance to over 1 million people in Sudan, and provided food and seeds to 721,000 people in Darfur. In its role as a neutral intermediary, it also facilitated the handover of 67 people, including prisoners of war, civilians held by armed groups, and members of the Sudanese Armed Forces who had been held by armed forces in the country.

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) condemns the HAC's suspension of the ICRC, and calls on the GoS to allow the ICRC to immediately resume its operations and to refrain from unjustified interference and harassment of NGOs operational in Sudan.

ACJPS calls on the GoS to allow full access to humanitarian NGOs operational in the country, particularly in the conflict and crisis-affected areas of Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The GoS has restricted humanitarian access to South Kordofan and Blue Nile since the outbreak of the conflict between the GoS and the rebel Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N) in 2011. The UN has estimated that there are over 1 million people in the two areas that have been displaced or severely affected by the conflict. The Government of Sudan has international customary law and human rights law obligations to facilitate impartial humanitarian assistance, especially in conflict affected areas.

Background

The HAC was created alongside the adoption of the Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act (VHWA) in 2006. It has been known to intimidate and harass independent civil society, and impede the access of humanitarian organisations to displaced populations. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) briefly suspended their work in North Darfur in 2012 when the HAC refused to allow the transfer of medical supplies.

ACJPS has long-standing concerns that the HAC has sought to impose severe restrictions on the operation of NGOs delivering humanitarian assistance in Sudan. The HAC has often accused humanitarian NGOs of partiality and intervention in the domestic affairs of the state. Article 5 of the VHWA states that humanitarian work should be governed by 'non-interference of foreign voluntary organisations in the internal affairs of Sudan in any such way, as it may affect the sovereignty of the country'.

Three national human rights organisations and 13 international humanitarian organisations were expelled in March 2009 following the International Criminal Court's issuance of an arrest warrant against President Omar al Bashir. Though no official statistics were ever published, it is estimated that international NGOs were responsible for roughly 60% of humanitarian aid in Darfur. In March 2012 seven international NGOs were expelled from eastern Sudan, and in January 2013 three civil society organisations were closed by the HAC and a literary forum was closed by the Ministry of Culture and Media.

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For more information on the HAC and laws governing Civil Society in Sudan, see African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies and World Movement for Democracy, "[Report on Laws and Regulations Governing Civil Society Organisations in Sudan](#)", 2011.

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