

Bluntly telling the Security Council that its peace strategy in Sudan's Darfur region has failed, United Nations top envoy for the country called for a well-armed, quick-moving UN peacekeeping force to disarm the marauding militia and provide security to the area to allow over two million refugees to return home.

Jan Pronk, who briefed the Security Council later talking to reporters yesterday, conceded that the ethnic cleansing campaign by Arab Janjaweed militias in 2003 and 2004 has been successful and said a mobile, well-armed force was required to counter attacks by militia groups of 500 to 1000 people on horseback and camels.

Troubles in the area began when the Sudanese government sought help from Arab Janjaweed militia to suppress a rebellion by ethnic Africans protesting discrimination against them, a charge that Sudan denies.

Militia have killed some 180,000 people systematically raped women and burnt dozens of villages and crops to ensure that villagers do not return and they continue their attacks despite the sanctions imposed by the Council.

"Looking back at three years of killings and cleansing in Darfur we must admit that our peace strategy so far has failed," he told the Council.

Currently, the African Union has a peacekeeping force but it is plagued by lack of funds, personnel and equipment. Voluntary contributions fund the force and the African Union says it would be forced to shut down its mission after March, when its funds would run out.