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The Crisis in Darfur

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I. Background Though Darfur, in the West of Sudan, has been embroiled in conflict since

2003, the roots of the crisis stretch back much further. Much like the other disputes in Sudan, the crisis in Darfur is [based](#) upon economic and political marginalization of non-Arabs (for more on other crises in Sudan, please see our separate [Crisis in Sudan page](#)).

Unlike the [Second Sudanese Civil War](#) in the South of the country, the conflict in Darfur has not been characterized by religious divisions. Grievances instead arose from a combination of economic and ethnic tensions. Beginning in 1972, a [series](#) of droughts and intensified desertification in Darfur led to disputes over land between non-Arab sedentary farmers (from the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit [tribes](#)) and Arab nomads. When a Libyan-sponsored Arab supremacist movement [emerged](#) as the major power in Sudan in the 1986 government of Sadiq al Mahdi, many non-Arab Darfuri farmers felt that their interests were being sidelined. The regime that formed after a [coup](#) led by Omar al-Bashir in 1989 continued to [rely](#) on Arab networks to extend its control over the country through the use of identity politics to mobilize support, driving a deeper wedge between the communities in Darfur.

Over the next two decades, these feelings were exacerbated by [policies](#) of the government, which seemed to intentionally segregate non-Arabs and split Darfur into three separate regions [to break the unity](#) of Darfuri tribes. As the Second Sudanese Civil War began to move towards a [peace](#) process in 2002-2005, the prospect of being left out of comprehensive peace talks heightened the Darfuris' sense of governmental neglect. Members of the marginalized Fur and Zaghawa tribes began to form rebel groups. Khalil Ibrahim, of the Zaghawa tribe, [founded](#) the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) in 2001 and the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) [formed](#) in 2001 as an alliance between Fur and Zaghawa tribes.

In March 2003, as these rebel groups became better organized and staged [ambitious attacks](#) , the Government of Sudan (GoS) was taken by surprise. The GoS responded by recruiting militias to fight the rebels, with support from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#) , among others, reported that these militias [engaged](#) in an ethnically-targeted campaign of mass killings, forced displacement, destruction of property

and the use of

[rape](#)

as a weapon of war. According to United to End Genocide, the conflict has

[claimed](#)

300,000 lives, internally displaced 2.7 million people and forced another 250,000 to flee abroad, mainly to Chad. A combination of civil society and governments advocated for action to protect the people of Darfur from genocide and following international pressure, a hybrid UN-AU mission was deployed to the country to monitor the 2006

[Darfur Peace Agreement](#)

(DPA) and subsequent 2011

[Doha Document for Peace in Darfur](#)

(DDPD).

However, the initial violence had already [claimed](#) almost two-thirds of its current total victims before international attention had turned from the North-South war to Darfur in 2005. The conflict today has morphed into an inter-ethnic battle between militias over the spoils of this campaign. The government has failed to keep these militias in line, due to dwindling resources following the reallocation of assets after the secession of South Sudan. The current violence along the Sudan-South Sudan border is also spilling into Darfur.

II. Conflict as Genocide On 25 April 2003, two rebel groups, the [Sudan Liberation Army \(SLA\)](#) and the [Justice](#)

[and Equality Movement \(JEM\)](#)

, began a major offensive against the GoS by attacking and capturing a number of government installations, including El Fasher airport. They had the backing of the

[Sudanese People's Liberation Army \(SPLA\)](#)

, another major rebel group fighting mainly in the South of the country in the Second Sudanese Civil War. In the opening days of the conflict, rebels were able to score some quick gains by taking advantage of the fact that GoS forces were already thinly-stretched between fighting the SPLA in the South and fighting Eritrean-sponsored

[rebels](#)

in the East.

In response to the rebel attacks in Darfur, the Sudanese government [began](#) aerial bombardments in Darfur and

[enlisted](#)

the support of a nomadic militia,

[the Janjaweed](#)

, which originated in the 1980s during the

[civil war](#)

in neighbouring Chad. In 1985, the GoS

[began arming](#)

Arab nomads in Darfur to defend the Chadian border from potential invasions. Together, the armed Arab nomads formed the basis of the Janjaweed. Despite a

[calming](#)

in relations between Chad and Sudan in 1990, the Sudanese government

[continued](#)

to supply the Janjaweed to fight in the Second Sudanese Civil War. During the 1990s, the Janjaweed also

[raided](#)

villages along the Chad-Sudan border near Darfur. The failure of the GoS to stop this added to the grievances of Darfuri farmers. When violence broke out in 2003, the government

[directed](#)

the Janjaweed in a counter-insurgency campaign against the aforementioned rebel groups.

Though Chad brokered a [ceasefire](#) between the parties in September 2003, this agreement quickly broke down in December 2003. The Government's renewed counter-insurgency campaign in 2004 began to systematically target ethnic groups,

[according](#)

to a Human Rights Watch report, 'Darfur Destroyed'. Members of the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit tribes became the

[targets](#)

of massacres, summary executions of civilians, burnings of towns and villages, forcible depopulations, rape and sexual violence. The report documents 14 incidents of large scale killings in Dar Masalit alone between September 2003 and February 2004, attacks which left 770 dead. Populations were emptied in repeated attacks on hundreds of villages, in half of which there were reports of rape. By the spring of 2004,

[reportedly](#)

30,000 people had been killed, 1.4 million people had become internally displaced and another 100,000 had fled across the border into Chad.

In March 2003, just ahead of the tenth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan, Mukesh Kapila, [warned](#) of the similarities between the situation in Darfur and that of Rwanda. Tom Eric Vraalsen, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs in Sudan,

[called](#)

the situation "one of the worst in the world". In April 2003, the U.S.

[reported](#)

to the UN Commission on Human Rights that atrocities, such as rape and ethnic cleansing, were taking place in Darfur. They also noted that humanitarian access and government services had been blocked from non-Arab villages while they continued in Arab villages nearby. This was followed by a

[report](#)

in May by Human Rights Watch, which stated "there can be no doubt about the Sudanese government's culpability in crimes against humanity in Darfur

", and called on the International Community to act. On 9 July 2004, the houses of the US Congress

[referred](#)

to the situation in Darfur as genocide, a claim that was repeated in September in a

[report](#)

by the US state department and US Secretary of Defence. On 16 September 2004, the

European Parliament

[called](#)

the actions of the GoS “tantamount to genocide”. On 1 June 2005, U.S. President George W. Bush

[labelled](#)

the situation in Darfur as genocide.

The African Union refrained from using the term in November 2004, [stating](#) that “there is mass suffering, but it is not genocide.” Similarly, the League of Arab States

[announced](#)

that it could not find “any proof of allegations that ethnic cleansing or the eradication of communities had been

perpetrated”. On 18 September 2004, the UN adopted

[Resolution](#)

1564, which called on Sudan to meet its obligations to protect civilians set out in

[Resolution](#)

1556 of July 2004, threatened sanctions, and established for the first time an inquiry based on the

[Convention on the prevention and punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#)

On 25 January 2005, the

[United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Darfur](#)

determined that while “no genocidal policy has been pursued and implemented in Darfur by the Government authorities, directly or through the militias under their control”, they did warn “international offences such as the crimes against humanity and war crimes that have been committed in Darfur may be no less serious and heinous than genocide”.

III. Peace Agreements During the opening stages of the crisis in Darfur, international focus on Sudan was placed on negotiations to settle the Second Sudanese Civil War. International Crisis Group

[believes](#)

that the GoS purposefully drew out these talks, hoping that the international community would not force action on Darfur and thereby risk jeopardizing the fragile peace process between the North and South. On 9 January 2005 the GoS finally

[signed](#) a [Comprehensive](#)

[Peace Agreement](#)

(CPA) to end the Second Sudanese Civil War. International attention turned to the situation in Darfur.

During the conflict, numerous [ceasefires](#) were signed and broken. The [Darfur Peace Agreement \(DPA\)](#)

also known as the Abuja agreement, was

[signed](#)

on 5 May 2006 by the GoS and one faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army,

[\(SLA-MM\)](#)

, led by

[Minni Minnawi](#)

. A regional governing body, the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA), was

[established](#)

with a mandate of power-sharing, wealth-sharing and compensation. The agreement did little to curb the violence, in part because it had failed to secure endorsement by other key rebel factions, such as the JEM and an opposing faction of the SLA (the

[SLA-W](#)

, led by

[Abdel Wahid](#)

.)

IV. International Response

i. [African Union](#) Sudanese President Al-Bashir agreed to allow the African Union (AU) to deploy a mission (AMIS) to monitor a ceasefire agreement

[signed](#)

on 8 April 2004, a mission endorsed by UNSC

[Resolution](#)

1556. The AU initially deployed 150 troops in August 2004 but had

[increased](#)

that number to 7,700 troops by April 2005. African leaders resisted efforts to widen the intervention to non-African countries. These voices included South African President Thabo Mbeki, who

[stated](#)

“

we have not asked for anybody outside of the African continent to deploy troops in Darfur. It's an African responsibility, and we can do it

”

.

However, according to Human Rights Watch, AMIS

[struggled](#)

to function, due to an uncooperative Sudanese government and a lack of resources.

ii. [European Union](#) On 6 April 2006 the European Parliament [called](#) on the UN “to act on its responsibility to protect civilians

” in Darfur. On 28 September 2006, the Parliament

[stated](#)

that Sudan “has failed in its ‘responsibility to protect’ its own people” and called on the GoS to accept a UN mission under UN

[Resolution](#)

1706. On 15 February 2007, the European Parliament

[called](#)

on the UN to “

act in line with its "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine (. . .) even in the absence of consent or agreement from the Sudanese Government

”. On 12 July 2007 the Parliament

[called](#)

on the UN to act “basing its action on the failure of the Government of Sudan (GoS) to protect

its population in Darfur from war crimes and crimes against humanity”.

iii. United Nations On 24 March 2005, the UNSC authorized a UN mission (UNMIS) in [Resolution 1590](#) to support the implementation of the CPA. On 31 August 2006, UN Security Council [Resolution 1706](#) aimed to expand the mandate and force size of UNMIS. Resolution 1706 was the first to make reference in a country-specific situation to paragraphs 138-139 of the 2005 World Summit, by which governments endorsed unanimously the Responsibility to Protect. In the face of [opposition](#) from the GoS, the UN instead proposed the transition from AMIS to a joint UN-AU mission (UNAMID) of 25,987 personnel in [Resolution 1769](#) on 31 July 2007, whose deployment was delayed until 31 December 2007. UNAMID’s mandate was extended in [Resolution 1935](#) in 2010 and again in [Resolution 2113](#) in 2013, although the mission’s strength was set at 26,167 personnel in 2012 by [Resolution 2063](#).

iv. International Criminal Court On 31 March 2005, the UNSC [referred](#) the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and on 14 July 2008, Luis Moreno Ocampo, Chief Prosecutor of the ICC, [requested](#) an arrest warrant for President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan, the first time the ICC had indicted a sitting Head of State.

On 4 March 2009, the ICC issued an arrest [warrant](#) for Al-Bashir on five counts of crimes against humanity (murder, torture, rape, extermination, and forcible transfer) and two counts of war crimes (intentionally directing acts against civilians and pillaging). While the ICC judges [said](#) they did not have sufficient evidence to support charges of genocide, they did find that Al-Bashir had played an “essential role in (the) . . . coordinating . . . design (and) implementation” of a counter-insurgency campaign in which the attacks were “widespread” and “systematic” and followed “a similar pattern” to genocide. On 12 July 2010, after [judging](#) that the standard of proof for genocide had been set too high in the previous investigation, the ICC issued a second arrest [warrant](#) for al-Bashir on **three counts of genocide** committed in Darfur (genocide by killing, genocide by causing serious bodily or mental harm

and genocide by deliberately inflicting on each target group conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction), the

[first time](#)

an arrest warrant for the crime of genocide was issued by the Court. The

[GoS](#)

, the

[Arab League](#)

, and the

[AU](#)

denounced the warrants. The AU Assembly, at its 16

th

annual summit,

[called](#)

for the UN Security Council to defer proceedings against President al-Bashir in accordance with

[Article 16](#)

of the 2005 Rome Statute. The UN Security Council has so far not acted on this request and the warrants remain in force.

Many of the [139 state](#) signatories of the Rome Statute of the ICC, of which [122](#) are State Parties to the Court, have ignored their obligation to act on these arrest warrants. Al-Bashir freely travelled to

[Chad](#)

in 2009, 2011 and 2013,

[Eritrea](#)

in 2009 and 2013,

[Kenya](#)

in 2010,

[Djibouti](#)

in 201,

[Egypt](#)

in 2012,

[Kuwait](#)

and

[Nigeria](#)

in 2013, and the

[Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

in February 2014 for a regional trade summit, prompting the Coalition for the International Criminal Court to

[call](#)

for Al-Bashir's arrest. He has also travelled to non-signatory states including,

[China](#)

in 2011,

[Saudi Arabia](#)

in 2012, and

[Ethiopia](#)

in 2013 among others. In July 2013 UK Minister for Africa, Mark Simmonds, [stated](#) that visits, such as the one to Nigeria, “undermines the work of the ICC and sends the victims a dismaying message that the accountability they are waiting for will be delayed further”

However, there have also been numerous examples of states declining to allow Al-Bashir entry, refusing to host international and regional summits Bashir intended to attend, or Bashir cancelling trips on the grounds that states would act to enforce the ICC arrest warrant. Pressure has come from many sources, including [state governments](#), [state courts](#), [neighbouring states](#), [the ICC](#)

, and civil society. Bashir was refused entry to or cancelled trips to [Botswana](#)

, [France](#)

, [Uganda](#)

, [South Africa](#)

, [Botswana](#)

and

[Turkey](#)

in 2009,

[Central African Republic](#)

, [Kenya](#)

, [South Africa again](#)

and

[Zambia](#)

twice in 2010,

[Malaysia](#)

, [Kenya again](#)

and

[Nigeria](#)

in 2011,

[Malawi](#)

in 2012. In addition, the

[US](#)

refused to give Al-Bashir a VISA to attend a UN summit in 2013. On 4 March 2014, over 30 NGOs

[called](#)

for the UNSC and State Parties to the ICC to end impunity for Al-Bashir.

V. DDPD & Latest Developments *Doha Document for Peace in Darfur* In December

2010, talks began between the GoS and an umbrella organization for rebel forces, [the Liberation and Justice Movement \(LJM\)](#)

. Both the LJM and JEM (the largest single rebel group) agreed to attend talks in Doha. On 14 July 2011, the GoS and the LJM

[signed](#)

the

[Doha Document for Peace in Darfur \(DDPD\)](#)

. The Agreement proposed power-sharing, a more equal distribution of wealth and committed to the work of the Darfur Regional Authority. At the third meeting of the DDPD in February 2014, further

[discussions](#)

were held on the integration of LJM battalions into the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Police. However, little progress has been made in implementing the deal. The main rebels groups which refused to sign have joined the

[Sudan's People's Liberation Movement-North](#)

(SPLM-N) and formed a loose alliance known as the

[Sudan Revolutionary Front \(SRF\)](#)

, formed in November 2011 with a national agenda. This has made it difficult to engage parties on the DDPD, which only focuses on Darfur.

Recent Developments From 2010, government-sponsored militias began to act independently in response to declining financial support from the GoS and began fighting among themselves. The Enough Project has [highlighted](#) how commercial interests in the region are now fuelling the conflict. The GoS's loss of revenue from oil reserves

[ceded](#)

to South Sudan in 2011 has

[led](#)

to conflicts over sharing the spoils of land and loot captured by the Janjaweed in Darfur. Such groups continue to be

[engaged](#)

in activities such as land grabbing, extortion, smuggling and robbery. The gold mining area of Jebel Amer in North Darfur has become a

[locus](#)

for fighting since January 2013 as it represents an

[alternative](#)

source of revenue for the militias. Most notable about this new phase of violence is that there are now inter-Arab attacks, breaking from the earlier narrative of an Arab versus non-Arab conflict. A report by the Small Arms Survey

[found](#)

that Arab militias are now joining rebel movements such as the JEM and even fighting government forces in some cases. The UN

[reported](#)

that 400,000 people were displaced in 2013 alone, reversing a

[trend](#)

which had seen 100,000 people return home from refugee camps in 2012.

On 6 April 2013 the [JEM-Sudan/JEM-Bashar](#), a splinter group of JEM, [signed](#) the DDPD and [resume](#) the [d](#) the process in January 2014 after a brief freeze in implementation. Although more rebel groups have [signed](#) the DDPD, the peace processes' main achievement, the Darfur Regional Authority, is [due](#) to wind up in 2015 with modest accomplishments, giving the remaining rebels little incentive to invest in it. This suggests that fighting will continue, and the [surge](#) in violence during 2013 is evidence of this.

In November 2013, Sudanese officials [announced](#) that they would be launching "a dry season campaign for the final elimination of all armed movements". In December 2013, a Border Guard Commander, 'Hemeti', [rec](#) [ruited](#) Janjaweed forces into a 'Rapid Support Troops' (RST) force to fight alongside the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the neighbouring region of South Kordofan. These forces were expelled from their bases in North Kordofan in mid-February 2014 and have launched a summer campaign against the rebels in Darfur in [coordination](#) with SAF. The recent [expulsion](#) of the RST by the governor of North Kordofan has highlighted the increasingly complicated relationship between the government, local populations and the militias.

The Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre [reported](#) on a destructive military operation against the civilian population in South Darfur by the SAF and RST in the final days of February 2014 while the SLA-MM, which [withd](#) [rew](#) from the DPA in February 2011, and the SRF continued to capture towns in [South](#) and [North](#) Darfur in March 2014. UNAMID [expressed](#) concern on 3 March 2014 over the growing violence in South Darfur and the Sudanese authorities' refusal to allow the UN mission access to affected areas. On 4 March 2014 the World Food Programme [reported](#) that 20,000 people had been displaced by fresh fighting. On 12 March 2014 US Ambassador Samantha Power [reported](#) to the UN that 120,000 people had been displaced in Darfur since January 2014.

VI. Civil Society Response

Civil Society has been involved in raising awareness of the situation in Darfur from the earliest days of the crisis. Amnesty International and International Crisis group were among the first to draw attention to the developing situation in [July](#) and [December](#) of 2003 respectively, noting the violence and calling on the government to protect the people of Darfur. The [mass movement](#) which developed around the issue of Darfur later would depend on the analysis and reporting of these groups. In February 2004, the Washington Post was one of the first major newspapers to [report](#) on the crisis in an op-ed “Un-noticed genocide”.

In July 2004 political, religious and human rights groups formed ‘[The Save Darfur Coalition](#)’ and in October ‘[The Genocide Intervention Network](#)’ was established, with the crisis in Darfur and the emerging norm of ‘Responsibility to Protect’ at its core. The Save Darfur Coalition has played a significant [role](#) in shaping the [US response](#) to the crisis in Darfur and building the case for Genocide. The group also had an [influence](#) in the appointment of a Special Envoy for Sudan, and the Genocide Intervention Network worked to boost media coverage of Darfur which [doubled](#) in 2007-2008. In 2011, these organizations merged to form ‘[United to End Genocide](#)’.

The Save Darfur Coalition was also [credited](#) with raising awareness of China’s involvement in the crisis, which the [European Parliament](#) and [Amnesty International](#) reported included the delivering of weapons. These groups also pointed to China as the main provider of income to the GoS and are [seen](#) to have played a part in altering China’s stance on Darfur. At first, China [abstained](#) from a vote authorizing a UN mission to Sudan, but subsequently supported the resolution which set up the hybrid UNAMID force.

Since 2006, NGOs concerned about the situation in Darfur, such as The Save Darfur Coalition, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Aegis Trust, International Crisis Group and STAND Canada [began](#) holding the ‘Global Day for Darfur’. In Africa, the Darfur Consortium (now the [Sudan Consortium](#)) formed a coalition of 50 African-based NGOs to raise awareness about the conflict. In 2009, the GoS

[expelled](#)

13 NGOs from the country, in response to the indictment of Al-Bashir by the ICC. These NGOs [accounted](#) for almost half the humanitarian aid in Darfur.

Groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International continued to [report](#) on the destruction of villages by militias in 2013 and

[called](#)

on the government to investigate the attacks. Such reports also highlighted instances where Sudanese authorities have blocked UNAMID's access to certain areas. International Crisis Group released a

[report](#)

in January 2014 noting the failures of the implementation of the DDPD and called on the UNSC to refocus UNAMID towards the protection of civilians.

VII. Conclusion

Looking forward, many voices, including that of International Crisis Group, argue that piecemeal deals on local and regional levels are no longer appropriate. Instead, solutions need to reflect the national nature of the crisis. The conflicts across the country are becoming increasingly intertwined, as rebels in Darfur have [joined](#) those fighting in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions, further diminishing the chances of success for locally-negotiated settlements.

International attention on Darfur has been in a continuous ebb and flow since the outbreak of violence. Human Rights Watch [believes](#) this was due to a combination of geography, limited media access to Darfur, and the mixed relationship the international community has with the GoS. The international community has at times

[mu](#)
[ted](#)

its condemnation of the conflict in Darfur to ensure successful negotiations on the CPA,

[cooperation](#)

with the US 'War on Terror', a peaceful

[secession](#)

of South Sudan in 2011, and most recently focus has drifted to the conflicts in Abyei and the South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions. The Enough Project

[illustrated](#)

that throughout the crisis, the international community has only responded "to put out the worst fires as they arose", however, in 2014 a more comprehensive approach is needed to ensure that Darfuris are finally protected from the four RtoP crimes and violations.

Read more about other related conflicts in Sudan on our ["Crisis in Sudan"](#) page, and be sure to check out our

["Crisis in South Sudan"](#)

page as well.

Special thanks to Neil Dullaghan for his work in compiling this page.