

BBC News

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International stateswomen have made a joint call for an end to rape and sexual violence in Sudan's conflict-torn region of Darfur.

Peacekeepers must be sent to protect women there, the group said in a letter published by newspapers worldwide.

Signatories include former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the Irish former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson

The letter says rape is being used "on a daily basis" as a weapon of war in Darfur.

The main signatories were joined by other prominent women including: Veteran Palestinian politician Hanan Ashrawi; Graca Machel, wife of Nelson Mandela; Edith Cresson, former French prime minister; Glenys Kinnock, a UK member of the European Parliament; Carol Bellamy, former head of the UN children's fund.

'Constant fear'

Published on the eve of the Global Day for Darfur, the letter says that "women and young girls live in constant fear of attack".

Sudan's government is accused of being "unwilling or unable to protect its own civilians".

The international community is called upon to "deliver on its responsibility to protect these civilians".

Events to mark Darfur Day are due to take place in more than 40 countries and will include women-led protests outside Sudanese embassies...

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