

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY STATEMENT

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SUDAN: UN AND AU MUST PRIORITIZE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN DARFUR

- On 29 May, the UNSC will vote on whether to authorize a new Special Political Mission for Sudan. The UNSC and AUPSC will also discuss whether to close the UNAMID peacekeeping mission when its mandate expires on 31 October 2020.
- Violence continues in Darfur. The withdrawal of peacekeepers would create a security vacuum and expose civilians to brutal tactics of Sudanese security forces and allied militias.
- UNSC must include protection of civilians (PoC) and human rights monitoring in the mandate of the Special Political Mission, and the UNSC and AUPSC must ensure that UNAMID remains in place until the SPM is fully staffed and operationalized, and the Government of Sudan has proven itself willing and able to protect and ensure human rights, especially of vulnerable populations in Darfur

Amnesty International calls on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to authorize a new Special Political Mission (SPM) with a mandate to protect civilians in Darfur and to monitor and report on human rights throughout Sudan. The organization also calls on the UNSC and the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) to extend the mandate of the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) for an additional year until the SPM is fully staffed and operationalized.

On 29 May, the UNSC will vote on the mandate of a new Sudan-wide political mission, which will reportedly include governance and peacebuilding support for Sudan's transitional government; however, according to a [report](#) by the Chairperson of the AU Commission and Secretary-General of the UN, the "follow-on" political mission will not include the physical protection of civilians (PoC), which the UN argued is "the responsibility of the Sudan." The UNSC and the AUPSC will also discuss whether UNAMID peacekeepers will withdraw from Darfur on 31 October when the mission's current [mandate](#) expires.

UNAMID must not withdraw until a follow-on political mission, with a mandate to do physical protection in Darfur, is fully staffed and operationalized and until Sudan's new transitional government has proven itself willing and able to protect and ensure human rights, especially of the most vulnerable populations in Darfur, the organization warned ahead of the crucial votes.

[Civil-society groups](#), representatives of [conflict-affected populations](#), and conflict-resolution [experts](#) have all rejected the UN's call for the protection of civilians to be excluded from the mandate.

TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT IN SUDAN

In December 2018, a popular uprising began in Sudan, which led, in April 2019, to a military coup and the arrest of President Omar al-Bashir. After the coup, the Transitional Military Council (TMC) took power until August 2019 when it was dissolved and a new transitional government was appointed, with [Abdalla Hamdok](#), an economist and diplomat, becoming the Prime Minister.

Former President al-Bashir is now in prison in Khartoum, after being found guilty of money laundering and [corruption](#). The International Criminal Court (ICC) has outstanding [warrants](#) for his arrest for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Darfur.

The transitional government – the Sovereignty Council of Sudan – includes senior commanders of the al-Bashir-era security forces, including the Council's Chairman, Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan of the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and his deputy, General Mohamed Hamdan "Hemeti" Dagalo, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The SAF and the RSF are responsible for [crimes against humanity](#), [war crimes](#), and other serious human rights abuses in Darfur. The RSF is also responsible for a [bloody crackdown](#) on protesters in Khartoum in June 2019, which killed over 100 people.

Amnesty international believes that a decision to remove the few remaining peacekeepers from Darfur at this time would recklessly and unnecessarily place the lives of Darfur's most vulnerable populations at the mercy of the same security services who have committed crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur and other parts of Sudan.

UNAMID'S PLANNED WITHDRAWAL FROM DARFUR AND SUDAN'S REQUEST FOR A FOLLOW-ON MISSION

In [2017](#) and [2018](#), the UN and AU decided to dramatically reduce the number of UNAMID troops, close the majority of its bases, and reconfigure the remainder of the mission to focus on the protection of civilians in the Jebel Marra region of Darfur, where the human rights and protection concerns were greatest. In 2019, the UN and AU intended to close the mission, despite continued [violence](#), an ongoing political crisis, and the fact that its bases were being [handed over](#) to the RSF; however, after a [request](#) by Prime Minister Hamdok the mission was extended until October 2020.

In January 2020, Prime Minister Hamdok sent a [letter](#) to the UNSC requesting a follow-on political mission for Sudan, which would support the transitional government with a variety of governance, security, and justice-related activities, including the protection of civilians and human rights monitoring. In March 2020, Hamdok sent [another letter](#) to the UNSC, which altered the request for support and did not mention protection of civilians or human rights.

The desire of the UN and the AU to support the transitional government must not come at the expense of protecting civilians in Darfur and monitoring human rights throughout Sudan. The UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council must not renege on their commitment to civilians in Darfur. They must prioritize their safety and security, and ensure effective human rights monitoring and reporting throughout Sudan.

JEBEL MARRA CIVILIANS STILL TAKING REFUGE AROUND UNAMID BASES

Hundreds of thousands have died from violence and conflict-related disease and starvation since the conflict in Darfur began in 2003. Approximately 2 million people remain displaced in Darfur, or as refugees in Chad. Closing the mission would have a particularly devastating impact on the displaced population in and around Jebel Marra, many of whom rely on UNAMID bases for protection.

UNAMID's Sortoni base in northern Jebel Marra is a prime example. In 2016, tens of thousands of civilians fled to the area immediately around the base after the Sudanese government forces destroyed their [villages](#); many remain there today unable to go home because of fear of ongoing attacks by security forces against people who attempt to return to their areas to farm.

In 2019, some of those who had fled to Sortoni in 2016 returned to their farms in nearby villages north and east of Kaguro. Several of these villages were attacked again in late 2019 and early 2020, just as the population was about to harvest its crops. This violence, along with fighting between rebels and former-rebels now aligned with the government, has prompted several thousand more people to flee to Soronti camp during the past year.

People living in Sortoni camp told Amnesty International that they fear for their own safety and predicted renewed violence if UNAMID leaves. In early May 2020, A camp leader in Sortoni, who was displaced from his village in 2016, told Amnesty that if UNAMID leaves "there will be a mass killing."

Peacekeepers in Darfur have a mixed record of protecting civilians. On many occasions they have failed to prevent attacks on villages, but they have often been able to protect civilians fleeing violence who managed to get themselves to areas near UNAMID bases and UNAMID-protected camps. This physical protection is still urgently needed around Jebel Marra and in other parts of Darfur, and UNAMID's mere presence in these areas acts as a deterrent and more than justifies its extension.

EVIDENCE OF ONGOING ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS IN DARFUR

Violence has continued in Darfur since the transitional government took power. The ongoing attacks have included unlawful killings, beatings, sexual violence, lootings and village burning. The government has yet to show that it is willing or able to prevent this violence, protect civilians, and hold perpetrators accountable; and there is evidence that members of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its allied militias are still responsible for perpetrating attacks.

In late December 2019, more than 70 people were [killed](#) and more than [46,000](#) were displaced when armed men, many of whom were reportedly wearing RSF uniforms, carried out attacks in an IDP camps outside of El Geneina in West Darfur, an area from which UNAMID forces had withdrawn the previous year.

In late March 2020, members of a militia, many of whom were reportedly wearing military uniforms arrived near the village of Dreissa in West Darfur, to confront a group of alleged rebels who were reportedly hiding in the forest. After an exchange of fire, the militia went into three neighbouring villages – Thurr-Bogoge, Ballah, and Swoloh-Murrey – and violently interrogated the residents about the identity of the men hiding in the forest. The attackers then proceeded to loot, pillage and burn the villages, forcibly displacing nearly all the residents, many of whom fled to Mornei IDP camp. Amnesty International spoke with several residents of the villages, including Abdelrahim, who was severely beaten and his home was looted and burned:

“There were [a huge number of] men, some were wearing government uniforms, some were wearing civilian clothes. [They arrived in the village on] horses... motor bikes... [and] camels and started firing randomly in the air... We tried to run away but they stopped us. They interrogated me, and beat me. They asked me about the people in the forest. I didn't know the people. They beat me in front of my children. And then they beat my oldest child. He is seven. And then they took everything [and] torched the house. ... Now we don't have anything to eat. Everything has been burned.”

In Central Darfur State, on 21 April, the village of Tamar Bol-Jimeil, located 28 km northeast of Zalingei city, in the Abata locality, was attacked by a group of armed members of a militia from the neighboring nomadic Reziegat Arab ethnic group, some of whom were reportedly wearing military uniforms. The attack took place around 2:00 pm following the discovery of a body of young herder in a water well in the village. Two people were killed and over 400 families were reportedly displaced by the attack. Amnesty international spoke with Musa, a 40-year-old, who constructing a house in Tamar Bol-Jimeil at the time of the attack. Musa's brother was killed during the attack and Musa was shot:

“People arrived on motorcycles and camels. They came to the house where we were working. They ordered us to leave the village. We left the house to the main road, while we were there one of the attackers on a camel shot at my brother Abkar Ismael and killed him...we carried the body of my brother to the police station and reported the incident...then I decided to leave the village accompanied by another person. However, the attackers followed us and shot me on my left arm. I also saw them beat up everybody and chased them outside the village and burnt around 18 houses.”

On 5 May, in South Darfur, more than [30 people](#) were killed and dozens injured, when clashes broke out between the Riziegat/Mahariya and Fallatah ethnic groups, in the Tulus locality. UNAMID officially [handed](#) over its team site in Tulus, to the Government of Sudan on 15 October 2017.

Given the ongoing violence – including attacks on civilians – in Darfur, the fact that much of it is perpetrated by government-allied militias, and that some of the men who have retained political and military power were the architects of many of the most violent campaigns during the Darfur conflict, it would be dangerously irresponsible for the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council to dismiss the possibility of an escalation of violence against civilians in Darfur. A decision to remove the last remaining peacekeepers from Darfur before there's a viable replacement to protect civilians could create a security vacuum that would have a devastating impact on the civilian population and on the prospects for a just and sustainable end to the conflict in Darfur.