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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Association for World Education, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 September 2010]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The UN in Darfur – and the silencing of information

1. Despite its ongoing agony, Darfur is slowly disappearing from international sight. An absence of data, reports, and news dispatches has created what Human Rights Watch has recently called an “information vacuum”¹, and moral energy and political focus have inevitably begun to dissipate. Diplomatic efforts—nominally under the auspices of the Qatari government—have degenerated into ugly turf wars involving various actors from the Arab League, the African Union, and the UN.

2. Darfur’s fractious rebel groups are hopelessly divided, and incapable of representing the region’s civil society. And President Obama’s envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration, has successfully argued for a US Sudan policy that de-emphasizes Darfur². Having failed badly in his first year and a half—alienating both Darfuri civil society and the rebel leaders—Gration is taking his unproductive stubbornness—a substitute for diplomatic experience—and turning his attention to the very difficult issues surrounding southern Sudan’s January self-determination referendum.

3. But let us be clear: the Darfur genocide is disappearing not because ethnically-targeted killing has been halted. Indeed, on September 2 a particularly brutal attack on Fur villagers in Tabarat (southwest of Tawilla, North Darfur) left 58 civilians dead and 86 wounded³. The UN/African Union peacekeeping force charged with civilian protection (UNAMID), though apprised of the situation almost immediately by relatives of the dead and wounded, failed to take action to begin medical evacuation (apprehending the Khartoum-backed militia perpetrators was not even considered). According to UNAMID, the force—based only 15 miles away in Tawilla—awaited orders from higher-ups in the North Darfur capital of el-Fasher, who would in turn have to secure permission from the very Government that was ultimately responsible for this attack.

4. On September 3, in the politically charged Hamidiya camp in West Darfur, reports from the ground claimed that Khartoum-allied gunmen shot and killed at least seven people, wounding many more. UNAMID said it was unable to identify those responsible, despite again having a large military and policing force nearby. Well to the east, in South Darfur, the huge Kalma camp remains very tense following the inter-factional killings there in August; moreover, UNAMID chief Ibrahim Gambari seems prepared to turn over six representatives of the displaced persons in Kalma, presently in UNAMID custody, to Khartoum’s security forces.

5. This at least is the Khartoum Government’s public claim. UNAMID chief Ibrahim Gambari was charged by UN officials in New York with ensuring these civilians would be brought “to trial in accordance with international standards of justice, fairness and due process of law.” Gambari may simply be looking for the most expedient way to rid UNAMID of a problem without a solution, at least one that will not anger Khartoum. But the turnover of those in custody may well spark even greater violence in Kalma and elsewhere.

6. Ibrahim Gambari’s most recent decision is to support enthusiastically Khartoum’s ominous “New Strategy For Darfur,” in particular the move from providing humanitarian aid to “development projects”⁴. In the words of the “New Strategy,” which largely

¹ <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/07/19/un-strengthen-civilian-protection-darfur>

² http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/08/13/as_tensions_boil_obama_s_sudan_envoy_contemplates_kenya_post_0

³ <http://www.acjps.org/Publications/Press%20releases/2010/3-9-10SudaneseArmedForcesandLocalMilitias.html>

⁴ <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures-darfur-peace-process.php>

abandons diplomatic efforts to end conflict in Darfur, “the government expects UNAMID and other partners to play decisive role in this anticipated shifting from relief to development.” This entirely premature “shift” is simply code for Khartoum’s decision to begin dismantling camps for displaced persons, and forcibly returning these vulnerable of people to their villages and lands, however insecure—or to as yet unconstructed “new villages.” The goal is to remove the *raison d’être* for the presence of international aid organizations—to remove international eyes and ears from positions in which they might bear witness to ongoing suffering and destruction.

7. Humanitarian need is greater than ever: according to UN figures, some 4.7 million conflict-affected Darfuris are in need of assistance; 4 million people are food insecure, almost half of them “highly food insecure”; and humanitarian access continues to be denied to the some of the most desperate populations, including the more than 100,000 civilians in eastern Jebel Marra, without aid since February. Such indicators as we have—and they are far too few—are of the deepest concern, especially concerning food security, clean water, and primary medical care⁵. The absence of information about humanitarian conditions reflects a calculation by UN officials that accommodating Khartoum holds out the best chance for sustaining a deeply threatened operation. But this calculation may be based on cynicism and a failure of nerve; it is thoroughly belied by recent history; and it is now working to diminish international awareness of what is occurring in Darfur, as well as to attenuate the possibilities for political advocacy and diplomatic pressure.

8. There are many to blame for this absence of information, but the most egregious example of UN acquiescence is that of Georg Charpentier, since January the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan. While the job is primarily humanitarian, its political dimensions are significant in a country where President Omar El-Bashir faces indictment by the International Criminal Court for genocide and crimes against humanity, crimes committed in the very region where humanitarian operations are centered. So Mr Charpentier has decided that it is “politic” to refuse to speak to the most urgent questions about humanitarian conditions, quashing initiatives by others within the UN system, but he has himself agreed to allow all his own public pronouncements and press releases to be vetted by the Khartoum Government. In short, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan is allowing those responsible for the vast human catastrophe in Darfur to decide what the UN says to the world about the present nature of that catastrophe. Despite a second arrest warrant for crimes against humanity and war crimes – and now genocide – issued on 12 July 2010 by the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, those responsible are being allowed to control communication about the victims of genocide.

9 For over a year, beginning with the March 4, 2009 expulsion of thirteen international humanitarian organizations in Darfur, aid workers have developed extremely strong habits of self-censorship. Such self-censorship was certainly present before the expulsions, but it is now almost complete. UN agencies are directed not to talk; some agencies are partnered with Khartoum Government ministries that have been given veto power over promulgation of data and reports. The UN’s Darfur Humanitarian Profiles—lengthy compendia of humanitarian data from a range of sectors and agencies—suddenly stopped appearing following the expulsions. Malnutrition studies that had been completed and were ready to be released instead languished because Khartoum judged the findings unacceptable. It is no accident that now—at the height of the annual “hunger gap,” which this year started very early—we have no comprehensive data or reports on malnutrition. Even the normally useful Famine Early Warning Network (FEWS Net) has in its August issue almost nothing

⁵ <http://www.sudanreeves.org/Article273.html>

of real value about Darfur. This is so despite an earlier forecasting FEWS report offering data strongly suggesting that by this point in the hunger gap perhaps 150 people would die every day from malnutrition⁶.

10. But now, not only is data and information being tightly restricted by Mr Charpentier, he has decided that he will give Khartoum's officials a chance to decide what he says publicly. This censorship extends to Mr Charpentier's refusal to speak out about Khartoum's recent expulsion of senior officials from the (intergovernmental) International Organization for Migration, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN High Commission for Refugees, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (the latter for circulating a petition concerning world hunger). Is this a decision he has made on his own? Has the retiring UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Britain's John Holmes, been aware of this appalling decision? What about the head of UN peacekeeping, Alain Le Roy of France, who has major oversight responsibilities for UNAMID? What about the office of the Secretary-General? It was Ban Ki-moon who came into office declaring that he would make Darfur a priority, indeed a signature issue. Does he know and approve of Mr Charpentier's decision?

11. Historically genocides have ended in various ways, even if we look only at the examples of the past 100 years. Sometimes military realities end the reign of *génocidaires*, as was the case for the Holocaust, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. Sometimes genocidal goals are largely achieved, as in the al-Anfal campaign against Iraqi Kurds during in the late 1980s under the rule of Saddam Hussein. During the Armenian genocide (1914 – 1918), the Ottoman Empire was even more successful in its ghastly ambitions. But genocide in Darfur is coming to a very different sort of "end," and we should attend to the details of its particular demise.

12. Some of course have denied that genocide ever occurred in Darfur. But whatever we call the past years of deliberate human destruction, it is highly unlikely that the killing will end, including large-scale, ethnically-targeted killing of the sort we saw on a massive scale in 2003-2005. There may be fewer targets of opportunity, but as the September 2 attack on Tabarat shows, they still exist, and victims are completely vulnerable.

13. If UNAMID withdraws or collapses—which is increasingly likely, and may occur almost immediately if Rwanda pulls its troops out of Darfur in response to a UN report on the role of Rwandan military personnel in atrocity crimes in Democratic Republic of Congo—then humanitarians, those that remain, will evacuate their personnel and end operations⁷. It cannot be said too often that this will lead to wholesale human destruction; and though the genocide will have "ended" in one sense, it will be just beginning in another.

14. Considering the documentation provided in the Reports submitted to the 14th HRC session by the Independent Expert on the Sudan, Mohammed Chande Othman, we call on the Human Rights Council to act decisively by adopting a firm resolution based on the reality and condemning all forms of killings in Sudan – and renewing the Independent Expert's mandate.

Note

This text is adapted, with the permission of the author, Professor Eric Reeves (Smith College, Northampton, MA) from Dissent Magazine (on-line), September 5, 2010 <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/atw.php?id=259>

⁶ www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Sudan_Outlook_April_2010_final.pdf

⁷ <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2010/08/rwanda-united-nations.html>