



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
www.usip.org

[USIPeace Briefing](#)

Overcoming Obstacles to Humanitarian Assistance in Darfur

By [Dorina Bekoe](#)

January 2006

Civilians and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur, western Sudan, are increasingly being attacked by militia groups. At the same time, it is progressively more difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance to Darfur as aid agencies are hampered by increased banditry and continued obstruction by the government of Sudan (GOS). Moreover, the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) does not offer adequate protection as it continues to operate with severe budgetary constraints, inadequate amounts of military officers and equipment, and a limited mandate that does not allow it to prevent incidents or respond sufficiently to attacks.

On December 14, 2005, the Sudan Peace Forum of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) convened to address the continuing challenges facing the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Darfur. Firsthand accounts of the humanitarian crisis were presented by [Sloan Mann](#) of the United States Agency for International Development; Michael Heller Chu of the United Nations Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance; and [Jonathan Morgenstein](#) of USIP. Ambassadors Chester Crocker and Francis Deng co-chaired the meeting. This USIPeace Briefing summarizes the discussion on the rising insecurity faced by civilians in Darfur, the challenges facing AMIS, the response by the GOS, and the opportunities for the international community to facilitate humanitarian assistance in Darfur.

Rising Insecurity

Nearly three years after the start of the conflict in Darfur, violence is once again on the rise as a result of continued attacks by the Janjawid; fragmentation of the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) into the Wahid and Minawi factions; the resumption of hostilities by the Justice and Equality Movement's (JEM) faction, the National Movement for Reform and Development¹; and increased ethnic conflict. In fact, one panelist reported, the GOS has little control over the countryside as bandits, militias, and indigenous groups increasingly take security matters into their own hands—either by employing traditional conflict resolution mechanisms or by taking up arms for protection, monetary gain, or to avenge attacks.

One panelist reported that, on average, bandits attack civilians and commercial trucks carrying humanitarian relief supplies ten to fifteen times per week. Attacks usually involve the burning of villages and markets; displacement of IDPs from the camps; and, increasingly, gender-based attacks such as rape. The JEM uses ransom payments from abductions to finance its operations, while the SLA/M and the Janjawid charge "protection fees" or "development taxes" to guarantee safe passage to civilians. The rising banditry has hampered the ability of humanitarian groups to provide assistance to those in need. In one extreme case, humanitarian activity ceased altogether in October and November 2005 due to the insecurity in El-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. One panelist estimated that the United Nations is only able to reach 70 percent of those in need of assistance.

Violence against women, committed mainly by the Janjawid, has been one of the prevalent aspects of the conflict in Darfur. NGOs are often reluctant to report attacks against women because they fear that the GOS will either restrict their activities or throw them out of the country in retaliation. Women also have little incentive to report attacks; until recently, women were required to fill out a form, known as *Form 8*, in order to report a rape to police or receive medical attention. The stigma associated with rape discouraged many women from completing the form. Although the deputy governor of Darfur stated in March that the government issued a decree allowing women to receive medical attention without completing *Form 8*, the panelists noted that women are still required to visit the police before visiting a doctor². Moreover, government officials have prosecuted only five cases of rape, three of which resulted in convictions³. Panelists criticized the institutional unwillingness of Darfurian and government police to follow up on incidents that are reported, which they said encourages repeat offenders, compounds the disincentives to report rapes, and adds to a culture of impunity that permeates the region.

Rebel groups have also begun targeting AMIS. On October 8, 2005, AMIS personnel were attacked near Menawashi in South Darfur⁴. The very next day, AMIS personnel were detained in North Darfur, near Tine⁵. In October, four troops from AMIS' Nigerian contingent were killed⁶. In November, four Senegalese soldiers were injured in an ambush⁷. Panelists noted that the apparent breakdown of GOS authority over rebel groups in Darfur, including the Janjawiid, might be part of the reason for the increasingly bold attacks on AMIS.

Challenges Facing AMIS

Although geographically and militarily limited, AMIS was critical to providing civilian protection in the early stages of its deployment. AMIS was able to organize escorts for women leaving their villages to collect firewood and provide other protective services for civilians. Additionally, AMIS Civilian Police Units (CIVPOL) have been more effective intermediaries between the Sudanese police force and civilians than have humanitarian actors. It was suggested by one panelist that this might be due to the possibility that the Sudanese police view their AMIS CIVPOL counterparts as peers, making them more willing to act on the African Union's (AU) suggestions. Nonetheless, despite the goals and best intentions of AMIS personnel, they have not effectively protected civilians or even themselves. The AMIS force is insufficient, inadequately trained, equipped with low-grade weapons, and saddled with financial constraints and an extremely narrow mandate.

Insufficient troops: Presently, 6,964 personnel are deployed in Darfur. Of these, 5,645 are military personnel and 1,320 unarmed CIVPOL⁸. Yet even with its troop commitments nearly fulfilled, AMIS faces tremendous challenges. Comparisons to NATO's missions in Bosnia and Kosovo reveal stark differences. Whereas the 60,000 NATO's troops initially deployed in Bosnia covered 51,126 square kilometers and the 46,000 NATO troops at the start of the intervention in Kosovo covered 10,887 square kilometers, in Darfur, AMIS forces are expected to protect 493,180 square kilometers⁹. Thus, in Darfur, there is one soldier per 88 square kilometers, while in Bosnia and Kosovo, each soldier covered 0.85 and 0.24 kilometers, respectively.

Inadequate Equipment and Training: The panelists reported that AMIS is lightly armed. Sudanese soldiers and rebel groups possess heavy, mounted machine guns, anti-aircraft artillery and attack aircraft, multiple rocket launchers, mortars, and other artillery. AMIS soldiers are armed with pistols, AK-47s, and some rocket-propelled-grenades; however, at times they are not armed at all. The speakers also emphasized the need for more uniform training for AMIS troops, to address competency gaps among AMIS contingents. This would improve both the AU's ability to react quickly and aggressively when necessary, and interoperability among forces from different countries. Although the United States does offer training assistance to African peacekeeping troops, the bulk of soldiers present in Darfur have not received such training.

Financial Constraints: AMIS suffers from inadequate funding. In December 2005, AU Peace and Security Commissioner Said Djinnit announced that despite a recent EU provision of \$84 million, AMIS would run out of money in late March or early April 2006 unless the international community contributes more funding¹⁰. The U.S Congress recently revoked \$50 million earmarked for AMIS from the foreign operations budget.

Limited Mandate: According to its mandate, AMIS is to "monitor and observe" the ceasefire agreement of April 2004, help in building confidence, and create a "secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian relief....¹¹" As a verification force, AMIS troops are lightly armed and primarily charged with investigating ceasefire violations. AMIS has the authority to intervene in the event of violence only in the immediate vicinity where troops witness attacks on civilians. The mandate specifically leaves general civilian protection to the GOS. The panelists argued that AMIS needs authorization to stop human rights atrocities rather than deal only with their aftermath, and should receive the troops necessary to do so.

Khartoum's Slow Response

The diminishing humanitarian access is tied to the continuing conflict in Darfur. Yet some argued that the GOS has not taken decisive actions to end the conflict. One example cited by a participant was the GOS failure to exhibit a credible effort to abide by its agreement to disarm the Janjawiid and, in fact, has incorporated the Janjawiid into special units of its army. Some speculated that the GOS fears that fully and conclusively settling the grievances in Darfur would ultimately weaken the central government in Khartoum. An agreement for Darfur that resembled the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) might not be feasible. As one participant observed regarding a recent oil concession to China, a CPA-like solution would call for some revenues to revert back to Darfur, which is not advantageous to Khartoum. Moreover, splits and disagreements among the rebel groups work in the government's favor and are likely to prolong the conflict.

The Way Forward

To resolve the protection crisis, the panelists identified a number of concrete actions the international community can take to bolster the AMIS force, support grassroots efforts for reconciliation, and ultimately help resolve the conflict. First, in view of AMIS' logistical challenges, the speakers recommended that Congress reinstate the \$50 million previously budgeted for AMIS and recently revoked by Congress. The speakers agreed that the international community could strengthen the AU mission by increasing the number of troops and providing heavy weaponry. However, one argued that in order to increase the AU's overall effectiveness, the international community should prioritize training all AU soldiers and officers to a common standard. This is occurring to some degree already, as NATO troops are currently training AU forces and the American and European Union CIVPOL serve as advisors to the AU's contingent on the ground.

Second, in light of the tendency of ethnic group leaders to take matters into their own hands, panelists emphasized the need to support traditional grassroots conflict reconciliation mechanisms. Most parties to the conflict are accustomed to using such measures to resolve local disputes, especially regarding territorial issues, and they have largely supported their use in Darfur. As a result, grassroots measures have successfully resolved some smaller-scale problems. The U.S. Agency for International Development, with the support of the rebel factions, has provided funds to facilitate such meetings, but a more systematic support plan would increase the effectiveness of traditional reconciliation practices.

Finally, emphasizing the need for a political solution, the speakers urged high-level support for the Abuja talks and the need for confidence-building measures between the GOS and African indigenous groups. They called for increased international pressure on Khartoum to negotiate with rebel and indigenous group leaders and to provide incentives to stop the conflict. Specifically, some speakers urged increased U.S. engagement in the Darfur peace process. One participant worried that if the status quo continues, the GOS will benefit, while Darfurians continue to suffer until a political solution is reached.

Notes:

1. In September 2005, a Libyan-led mediation produced a ceasefire agreement between the JEM and SLA. (See International Crisis Group, "Unifying Darfur's Rebels: A Prerequisite for Peace," October 6, 2005, pp. 9 – 10 [electronic version]).
2. See also: "SUDAN: Gender-based violence still rampant in Darfur, say aid agencies," [IRINnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org), December 5, 2005 (Accessed January 6, 2006).
3. Ibid.
4. U.S. Department of State, "Sudan: Darfur Violence," Press Statement, 10 October 2005 (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/54637.htm>, accessed January 10, 2006).
5. Ibid.
6. Daniel Pepper and Abraham McLaughlin, "AU struggles to calm Darfur," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 12, 2005 (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1212/p06s01-woaf.html>, accessed January 10, 2006).
7. "Sudan: AU condemns killing of peacekeeper in West Darfur," [IRINnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org), 9 January 2006 (Accessed January 10, 2006).
8. African Union, Peace and Security Council, 45th Meeting, "Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Situation in Darfur (the Sudan)," [PSC/PR/2/XLV], January 12, 2006, paragraphs 50; 53 (electronic version).
9. See "NATO's Role in Relation to Kosovo," (<http://www.nato.int/docu/facts/2000/kosovo.htm>, accessed January 23, 2006) and "NATO's Role in Bosnia and Herzegovina," (<http://www.nato.int/docu/facts/2000/role-bih.htm> accessed January 23, 2006). Geographic information on Kosovo, Bosnia, and Darfur: "Kosovo" Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9369404>, accessed January 23, 2006); "Bosnia and Herzegovina" Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. (<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9357766>, accessed January 23, 2006); "Darfur." Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica Online (<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9028769>, accessed January 23, 2006).
10. "Sudan: AU mission in Darfur running out of cash," [IRINnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org), December 16, 2005, (Accessed January 19, 2006).
11. African Union, Peace and Security Council, 17th Meeting, "Communiqué," [PSC/PR/XVIII], October 20, 2004, paragraph 4 (electronic version). See: African Union, Peace and Security Council, "Agreement with the Sudanese Parties on the Modalities for the Establishment of the Ceasefire Commission and the Deployment of Observers in the Darfur," May 28, 2004, paragraph 2, sections II.6 and III.iii (electronic version).

version); and African Union, Peace and Security Council, 17th Meeting, "Communiqué," paragraph 6.

Of Related Interest:

[The Sudanese Hecatombe](#)

Peace Watch, April/May 2006

[Peacekeeping in Darfur](#) Event, March 2006 (Audio)

[Emergent Insecurity in Eastern Sudan](#)

USIPeace Briefing, December 2005

[Orphans of Conflict: Caring for the Internally Displaced](#)

[Peace Agreements: Sudan](#)

[Events: Africa](#)

[Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention](#)

About the Authors

This USIPeace Briefing was written by [Dorina Bekoe](#), senior research associate, and Kelly Campbell, program assistant, in the [Center of Conflict Analysis and Prevention](#) at the United States Institute of Peace. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of USIP, which does not advocate specific policies.

About the Sudan Peace Forum

Since 2003, USIP has convened a working group in Washington, DC, that brings together officials and academics to discuss peace strategies in Sudan. The group is chaired by Chester Crocker, Schlesinger Professor of Strategic Studies at Georgetown University and member of USIP's Board of Directors, and former USIP senior fellow Francis Deng, director of the Johns Hopkins SAIS Center for Displacement Studies.

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent international conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and democratic transformations, and increase peacebuilding capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in peacebuilding efforts around the globe.

[See our complete list of USIPeace Briefings.](#)

United States Institute of Peace - 1200 17th Street NW - Washington, DC 20036
(202) 457-1700 (phone) - (202) 429-6063 (fax)