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Sudan: Slow IDP return to south while Darfur crisis continues unabated

More than one year after the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which ended 21 years of civil war between the central government and the southern-based Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, there are still an estimated five million internally displaced people in Sudan, including 1.8 million from the separate conflict in the western Darfur region. The CPA paved the way for the return of those uprooted from their homes in the south. The overwhelming majority of the estimated 1 to 1.2 million IDPs who have returned since the signing of the CPA have done so without support from the international community. An institutional framework to support the return and reintegration of the IDPs and refugees has been put in place, but remains largely unused as lack of infrastructure and livelihood opportunities, as well as the presence of mines and insecurity have prevented the UN from promoting the large-scale return of IDPs and refugees. Some two million IDPs from the south reside in the capital, Khartoum, where they are exposed to forced relocations within the city as part of a government urbanisation programme.

The CPA did not include other rebel groups and left many local grievances unresolved. These have already led to renewed conflict in the south as well as in other parts of the country. In Darfur, an armed rebellion by local groups against the central government has been met by a brutal scorched-earth counter-insurgency campaign. The conflict has lasted for more than three years and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, the internal displacement of 1.8 million people, and an outflow of more than 200,000 refugees to neighbouring Chad. Cross-border raids by Sudanese government-supported militias have sparked internal displacement in Chad and an influx of Chadian refugees to Darfur. The armed groups – particularly the government-supported militias – attack IDP camps, killing, looting and raping the inhabitants, and deliberately target humanitarian workers. A 7,000-strong African Union (AU) peace-keeping mission has not had the means to protect the civilian population, and the UN is negotiating with an intransigent central Sudanese government to accept a stronger UN-mandated force. The AU force's failure to provide physical protection from attacks has fuelled anger and frustration among the affected people. A peace agreement of May 2006 has not had any tangible results as only one of the rebel factions signed and intra-ethnic clashes have followed. The international community has launched the world's largest humanitarian operation in the area and managed to mitigate the worst material consequences of the violence, although mortality rates remain above emergency levels, and the humanitarian conditions in the IDP camps are worsening.

Map of Sudan



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Background and main causes of displacement

Forced displacement in Sudan is either directly or indirectly a result of fighting between government troops and allied local militias on the one hand and various insurgent groups on the other hand. This primary conflict line is largely a result of the administrative divisions separating the north from the south imposed by the British-Egyptian colonial administration which was established in 1898 and pre-colonial structural disparities which have been perpetuated in the post-independent period. Simplistically, the north is dominated by Arab Muslims, with cultural, economic, political and historical ties to other Arab states, whereas the south is dominated by black Africans, predominantly Christian, with stronger ties to Central and East Africa, as far as the elites are concerned. A pattern of exploitation of the south by the north had already been established before the signing of the British-Egyptian agreement which largely carved out the current state borders. The slave trade of southern black Africans by the economically more powerful Arab north marked the peak of the exploitation, but not the end of it. The colonial administrative separation of north and south slowed down, but did not redress the violent and repressive history. The British-Egyptian administration deliberately isolated the southern provinces of Equatoria, Bahr al Ghazal, and Upper Nile from Arab influence without attempting to modernise the economy and the political system in the south. Conversely, it invested far more in the Arab north, seeking to modernise and liberalise the political institutions in accordance with British standards. The result was a Sudan of two paces upon departure of the colonial ad-

ministration: an Arab and Muslim north, economically and politically stronger than the isolated, underdeveloped and demographically weaker black African south.

In 1956, the colonial administration handed political power over both the north and south to a northern Arab elite which has never sought to redress these inequalities. On the contrary, the post-independence Arab authorities have up to the present with varying degrees of intensity abused the state structures they inherited and continued the pre-colonial policy of repression of non-Arabs in all parts of the country through Arabisation, Islamisation and political and economic marginalisation. Hence, the Sudanese state provided the means by which the northern Arab elite in control of the government could expand its power base at the expense of non-Arabs. Largely as a result of this, Sudan has been at war with itself practically throughout the post-independence period, with various rebel groups in different parts of the country taking up arms against the central authorities.

In 1983, only some years after oil was discovered in the southern provinces, the central government retracted the autonomy the south had achieved in a peace agreement of 1972 and imposed the Islamic Sharia law nationwide. As a response, southern troops mutinied and formed the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) to fight against the Arabisation and Islamisation of Sudan, regain the lost autonomy and increase the southerners' share of the political and economic power within a unified Sudan or eventually in a new separate secular state. The prospects for a peaceful resolution of the conflict were dramati-

cally reduced in 1989 after a coup by the National Islamic Front (NIF). The NIF, which was led by the current president of Sudan, General Omer al-Bashir, revoked the constitution, banned opposition parties and embarked on a repressive Islamisation campaign.

These measures fuelled discontent and opposition in the south, and eventually plunged the country further into conflict, causing the death of an estimated two million people and generating the largest internal displacement crisis in the world with around four million IDPs and the exodus of over 500,000 refugees to the neighbouring countries. A majority of the IDPs are southerners aligned with or supportive of the SPLM/A; about half of them fled the war zone in the south to the north and mostly settled around Khartoum (UN, 30 November 2004).

In January 2005 the two parties signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which marked the official end of the conflict. The agreement provided for an autonomous south with its own constitution, government and armed forces during a six-year period after which a referendum will be held on the final status of the south. The agreement also provided for the inclusion of the SPLM/A in a Government of National Unity, inaugurated in July 2005, as well as the inclusion of representatives of the north in the new government of southern Sudan which was sworn in October 2005. However, the National Congress party representing the former Arab-dominated government still controls power structures at the central level, while the SPLM/A secured a majority of the ministries in the new southern government, as provided for in the CPA (IRIN, 24 October 2005; Sudan Tribune, 27 October 2005). More than one year

after the signing of the agreement, there are still unresolved issues. Particularly contentious are the distribution of oil income and a border area between the south and the north which is believed to contain huge oil reserves. While the CPA divides the oil income on a 50-50 share, the government of Southern Sudan does not have the means to control the accuracy of their share. Southern leaders have said they would be willing to go back to war if the wealth-sharing arrangements and border demarcation issues are not resolved (Sudan Tribune, 14 July 2006). Moreover, the north's possibilities of controlling the oil reserves would be significantly reduced if the south decided to secede as provided for in the CPA. Conversely, this provision hinges on the successful implementation of the agreement which is very much dependent on the successful return and sustainable reintegration of the remaining two million IDPs in Khartoum. As a result, their right to freely choose their place of residence may be threatened.

Other conflicts and human rights abuses

The CPA was a two-party agreement, excluding rebel groups from other non-Arab marginalised peoples, and has not resolved old grievances in the western and eastern parts of the country against the central government.

In the western Darfur region, a peace agreement of May 2006 (Darfur Peace Agreement), has – contrary to expectations – led to an escalation of violence. Only one of the rebel factions signed the agreement and new rebel groups have flared up resulting in fighting between former allies (IRIN, 3 August 2006; Reuters, 21 July 2006). Between 70 and

80 per cent of the estimated two million IDPs in Darfur support the rebel faction that did not sign the agreement, according to the UN Special Representative in Sudan, Jan Pronk (Pronk, 28 June 2006), and the entire agreement is about to collapse. Indeed, the splits within the Sudanese Liberation Army – the main rebel group – have led to intra-ethnic fighting, human rights abuses and exacerbated the humanitarian situation of IDPs. At the same time armed groups frequently subject humanitarian workers to harassment, looting and hijacking of their vehicles, resulting in reduced access to IDP camps and an ever-worsening humanitarian situation. By way of example, the rebel faction that signed on to the agreement with the government was responsible for the killing of more than 70 people and raping of 30 women in the beginning of July in a village in West Darfur, reportedly with the support of government troops and local Arab militias, according to Amnesty International. The attack caused the displacement of more than 8,000 villagers to IDP camps in the area (AI, 31 July 2006). Between late 2005 and May 2006, an estimated 250,000 people have been forced to flee, sometimes for a second or third time since the conflict erupted in 2003 (UNOCHA, 2 July 2006). The intra-ethnic clashes following the peace agreement of May 2006 have been preceded by three years of heavy fighting between two main rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on the one hand and government troops and local militia on the other hand. The rebellion emerged in February 2003 in response to decades of marginalisation and underdevelopment of the region as well as the lack of government protection against recurrent raids by nomads (ICI, 25 January

2005). The government responded with a massive counter-insurgency campaign including air and ground attacks, but relied mainly on local nomad Arab militias, or “Janjaweed”. The offensive has been accompanied by deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including massacres, rape, torture, abductions, forced recruitment and systematic looting and burning of villages.

A 7,000-strong African Union peace-keeping mission has not been able to protect the civilian population and the UN is negotiating with an intransigent central Sudanese government to accept a stronger UN-mandated force (UNSC, 16 July 2006). The desperate situation for the displaced in the camps, the recurrent raids, looting, rapes and humiliation have in some cases turned the population against the largely impotent AU force and humanitarian workers (Reuters, 20 July 2006). In one particular brutal incident, three Sudanese aid workers were beaten to death by a mob in an IDP camp in West Darfur State (IRIN, 21 July 2006).

In total an estimated 1.8 million people – 713,000, 666,000 and 409,000 (UNOCHA, 31 January 2006) in West, South and North Darfur respectively – have been displaced as a direct or indirect consequence of the scorched-earth counter-insurgency tactics used by the government and its allies. Another 220,000 have fled Darfur into neighbouring Chad where they receive protection and assistance from UNHCR under extremely difficult conditions (UNHCR, 14 July 2006). Militias supported by the Sudanese government have conducted cross-border attacks in Chad, forcing at least 50,000 Chadians to flee internally and another 15,000 to seek refuge in the war-torn Darfur region (Reuters, 6 July 2006;

UNHCR, 14 July 2006). Water supplies and firewood are scarce and the extra burden on the host community fuels animosity against the Sudanese refugees (UNSC, 15 June 2006).

The conflict in Darfur can be traced to the early 1980s when drought and concomitant desertification led to intensified competition for land and scarce resources and ensuing divisions between predominantly Arabs and black Africans. The tensions were further fuelled in 1988 when the government decided to empower and arm the Arabs to fight against an incursion by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A) in Darfur. The arming of the Arabs disrupted the local balance of power and rendered peaceful local resolution mechanisms obsolete. Most of the government-supported perpetrators of displacement in Darfur come from tribes that were armed to fight the SPLM/A in the late 1980s (Sean O'Fahey, BlackElectorate.com, 3 August 2004).

In Kassala and Red Sea states in eastern Sudan tensions have been high between the Eastern Front that brought together the Beja Congress and Free Lions on the one hand and government forces on the other. The tensions have been accumulated over decades as a result of social, political and economical exclusion and ensuing weakened means of production. The region has some of the highest mortality and illiteracy rates in the country. Access to health facilities is extremely limited with most health centres concentrated in Port Sudan. The pauperisation of the region has been exacerbated by mechanised agricultural schemes and mechanisation of the port in Port Sudan, according to a study on the causes and consequences of underdevelopment in eastern Sudan (Pantaulino,

September 2005). Animosity against the central government is particularly strong among young Beja people, many of them destitute and unemployed, notably in Port Sudan.

In late 2004 and early 2005 accumulated grievances led to bloody confrontations and the government deployed thousands of troops to quell the uprising and the potentially devastating threat to the oil installations in the region (Sudan Tribune, 2 October 2005; Justice Africa, 23 February 2005). However, the Eastern Front, the major rebel group in the region, was as of June 2006 engaged in peace talks with the government, which may reduce the possibilities of a full-fledged rebellion (UNMIS, 23 June 2006).

In the contested oil-rich Abyei region, tensions are high between farmers and pastoralists, who fear that their access to pastures will be blocked if the majority of the area's non-Arab population vote to join the South in the referendum scheduled for 2011 (Sudan Tribune, 6 April 2006).

Moreover, the UN Secretary-General's Representative in Sudan has warned that there may be vested interests among both military commanders and negotiators in not reaching results in peace talks (UNMIS, 6 June 2006).

Return movements and prospects in the south

The international community has set up an institutional framework to support the return and reintegration process of millions of displaced people to the south. However, the overwhelming majority of

the IDPs who have returned have done so on their own. The UN estimates that between 1 and 1.2 million IDPs who remained in the south have returned spontaneously to their places of origin following the peace agreement of January 2005, but the figure is not based on a registration survey (VOA, 20 July 2006). Another 150,000 refugees have returned spontaneously from abroad without assistance from the UN refugee agency (UNHCR, 14 July 2006). The UN has organised the return of only 10,000 refugees from the neighbouring countries, far below the projected 60,000, and around 40,000 IDPs who were residing in insecure areas (UNOCHA, June 2006, 10 October 2005, 1 September 2005). In an apparent response to the low figures, the government of Southern Sudan – set up as part of the Peace Agreement – and various state authorities in the south have started helping IDPs to return independently of the UN. More than 300,000 people have been assisted outside the UN system as of April 2006, according to an informed estimate – a figure which was not expected to rise during the rainy season from June to October 2006 (UNMIS, 30 April 2006). The government of Southern Sudan strongly and openly encourages IDPs to return to the south, seemingly in preparation of the census planned for November 2007 (SV, 21 May 2006) and without enough focus on the sustainability of the process.

While the return process itself poses tremendous logistical challenges such as enormous distances, high transportation costs, mined and flooded roads, the reintegration process is a source of major concern for all the involved agencies. There are millions left, particularly in Khartoum, who are increasingly wary of

the conditions in their home areas. Their concerns are not unfounded; the civil war devastated the southern countryside, leaving hardly any schools, health clinics, water and sanitation facilities intact. In addition, after many years of displacement, land and property restitution poses a challenge. The United Nations Mission in Sudan established by the Security Council in March 2005 to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including the voluntary return of refugees and IDPs, is seriously underfunded. Consequently, UN officials have warned that IDPs who decide to return will end up in urban slums in the south unless humanitarian assistance and recovery go hand in hand and the donor community responds urgently to the massive needs.

The UN Mission in Sudan has started facilitating returns by providing limited humanitarian support to those who decide to go back and strengthening the local authorities' capacity to receive them. The government announced in October 2005 a decision to resume the demolition of IDP camps and squatter areas in Khartoum after the end of the rainy season in November and forcibly relocate IDPs to resettlement areas as part of what it describes as ongoing urban development efforts. An estimated 900,000 IDPs and urban squatters have been forcedly relocated since 1989 – 250,000 since the decision to resume demolition at the end of last year and up to May 2006 (UNOCHA, 1 April 2006; IRIN, 7 October 2005)

While the government has plans to urbanise and upgrade the new settlements, these areas in most cases do not even provide the most basic services and it is feared the relocation will create a major humanitar-

ian crisis and push even more people into returning to the south prematurely.

Conditions in areas of origin are clearly not conducive to the reintegration of the IDPs who are faced with the dilemma of whether to remain in the north, and be exposed to forced relocation by the government, or return to the devastated south. Despite the pressure from the authorities and the dire conditions in the camps around Khartoum, some of the returning IDPs have found the conditions worse in their home areas and have decided to go back again to the squalid conditions in the north. The main reasons for this are a lack of opportunities for earning a livelihood, insecurity, tax extortion, drought and lack of services (UN briefing, 18 October 2005).

Forced displacement and military, political and economic objectives

Forced displacement has been and continues to be an integral part of war strategies, particularly those of the government, and serves two immediate purposes. The physical capture or control of the civilian population is also the capture of the enemy's support base. The local militias used by the government to uproot the civilian population often come from communities already at odds with them, in most cases over access to land or water. Therefore, the uprooting frees land and access to water or other resources which are in turn occupied and used by the perpetrators and their communities or other supporters of the authorities. The displacement of civilians as war strategy started to be systematically implemented by the government in 1985-1986 in southern Kordofan and is currently in full

swing in the western Darfur region (UNSC, 14 October 2005; Johnson, 2004, pp. 151-153).

The strategy transforms internal displacement from being a secondary consequence of the fighting to a military and economic objective with its own local and national logic.

In Greater Upper Nile the link between forced displacement and oil exploration has been highlighted by successive UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights in Sudan and several NGOs. Observers have consistently reported that the Khartoum government deliberately depopulated oil-rich areas, using violence and sophisticated weapons to assert control and enable oil firms to exploit new sites. The government used proxy wars and divide-and-rule tactics to weaken the southern-based opposition, notably by sowing tensions between Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups (ICG, 10 February 2003; HRW, 25 November 2003).

The overall strategy has been accompanied by a series of laws which have undermined the land rights of small farmers and rendered them more exposed to long-term consequences of internal displacement, particularly in western Sudan, southern Kordofan, southern Darfur and southern Blue Nile (Johnson, 2004, p. 49). For instance, the Unregistered Land Act of 1970 gave the state ownership of most of the rural land, paving the way for it to establish large mechanised farming schemes in these areas and open land for oil exploitation. Another law of 1974 restricted nomads' and small farmers' access to land and in 1990 the Civil Transactions Act removed customary land rights from the protection of the state

courts (Johnson, 2004, p.130). With these measures, the state has given itself the means to legally occupy and dispose of land abandoned by IDPs.

Other legal measures have undermined security of land tenure during displacement. By way of example, the government has been reluctant to consider the southerners squatting around Khartoum as IDPs, and decrees issued in 1987 and 1990 recognise as such only those who had arrived before those years. According to the decrees, people who arrived later, whether forcibly displaced or not, were denied the right to own land and construct permanent shelter. This, in combination with the government's demolition of IDP camps and squatter areas around Khartoum, has undermined the IDPs' possibilities of sustaining their livelihoods. However, it has rendered large numbers of IDPs willing to accept low-paid or unpaid jobs on large labour-intensive agricultural schemes to the benefit of the government and even the army (Johnson, 2004, pp.133, 155-156).

International and national response

The international community represented by UN organisations, the UN Security Council, private and public aid organisations, the African Union and national governments has responded massively but not enough to stop a humanitarian crisis of enormous proportions in Darfur and ensure the sustainability of the return and reintegration of uprooted people in the south. In January 2006, there were more than 14,000 aid workers in the greater Darfur region. The UN Security Council has adopted seven resolutions on Sudan, issued two presidential statements in re-

sponse to the regional destabilising consequences of the various national conflicts and set up a separate UN structure (UNMIS) to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The African Union has deployed troops to protect the resident population and IDP camps in Darfur and international pressure led to the Darfur Peace Agreement of May 2006. Donors have disbursed more than \$500 million for the Humanitarian Action Component of the Sudan Work Plan 2006 (OCHA, 4 August 2006). Yet, the latest escalation of intra-ethnic fighting in Darfur, as well as attacks against IDPs, resident populations and humanitarian workers, have hindered access to the IDP camps. Humanitarian conditions in the camps are worsening (UNICEF, 22 May 2006), the return and reintegration process of IDPs to the south is slow, and the situation in the east has potential for a new conflict if the ongoing peace talks are derailed (Pronk, 1 August 2006).

The delivery of humanitarian assistance in Darfur and recovery efforts in the south have not only been hampered by logistical challenges such a long rainy season lasting from May/June to October, national armed groups and bureaucratic obstacles set up by the government in Khartoum, but also by rebel groups from neighbouring Chad and Uganda. The Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army – a long-time ally of the Khartoum government in its fight against the SPLM/A – has caused widespread insecurity in southern Sudan, killing aid workers and local civilians (IRIN, 26 April 2006). This has further reinforced the UN's decision not to promote return to the south. While waiting for conditions in areas of return to improve, the UN and NGOs have been pre-

paring for the expected return of hundreds of thousands of IDPs under highly volatile circumstances. The agencies have deployed staff to collect information about the number, gender, age and destination of returnees along routes of return (UNMIS, 22 April 2006). UN assistance to IDPs returning spontaneously includes mine protection, return and reintegration packages in urban centres close to the final destinations as well as micro-credit schemes to support the local economy. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by reports of IDPs returning to camps in Khartoum, humanitarian assistance alone may not be sufficient. There is a clear risk that lack of investment in infrastructure and livelihood opportunities in the south could derail the process of reintegration of IDPs and refugees, thus putting the overall peace process in jeopardy (Sudan Tribune, 27 July 2006).

In an apparent response to the UN's policy of not actively promoting return to the south and the corresponding low number of IDP returns, some southern states have started organising return of IDPs without the participation of the UN (UNMIS, 5 June 2006). However, the UN is concerned that lack of infrastructure and livelihood opportunities and the presence of mines may lead people to return to areas of displacement or cause aid-dependency in the south (UNMIS, 22 April 2006). The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) set up by SPLM/A in 1985 to coordinate and facilitate humanitarian assistance has had limited impact. Little has changed with the formation of the new and strongly supportive government of Southern Sudan which is far from being in command of the means and institutional capacity to respond adequately to the massive needs.

The Government of National Unity (GNU) on the other hand may have the resources, but lacks the will to protect and assist displaced populations. In Darfur, for example, the government's continued support of the militias responsible for displacements and harassment of IDPs makes any expression of commitment to solving the displacement crisis ring hollow (IRIN, 3 August 2006; UNSC, 14 October 2005).

The Humanitarian Aid Commission set up by the central government in 1995 to protect and assist IDPs has not achieved any tangible results, as demonstrated by the continued forced demolition of IDP camps in Khartoum and the ongoing attacks on IDPs in Darfur. While the presence of thousands of aid workers resulted in increased access and improved conditions in the IDP camps in 2005, the escalation of the violence following the peace agreement of May 2006 not only jeopardises the humanitarian operations in the area, but risks destabilising the already fragile achievements of the CPA in the run-up to the referendum on the status of the south in 2011.

Note: This is an overview of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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Note: All documents used in this overview are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) page of the [Sudan country page](#).

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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