

Sudan: uncertain prospects

by Tim Morris

Khartoum's refusal to allow Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, to visit Darfur – and the expulsion of the Norwegian Refugee Council from the troubled region – is further evidence of efforts by the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) to contain international engagement in Sudan.

The Darfur conflict erupted in early 2003 when the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army and the smaller Justice and Equality Movement took up arms against the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum. The NCP

responded by backing Arab militia known as the Janjaweed. Humanitarian workers estimate that more than 180,000 people have been killed in the violence and nearly two million forced to flee their homes.

Even before Egeland was denied permission to visit Khartoum or Darfur in April 2006, the long-awaited transfer of peace-keeping responsibility in Darfur from the African Union to the UN appeared to be on permanent hold. The 7000-strong African Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has lacked the resources to halt a steady deterioration of the security situation and widespread banditry and human rights abuses from all combatants. UNICEF estimates that in North and West Darfur around half a million people in need of humanitarian assistance cannot

be reached due to ongoing conflict. Insecurity and lack of funding has constrained the expansion of humanitarian programmes into remote and rural areas, potentially exacerbating the 'pull-effect' of camps for displaced people as rural communities abandon their villages.

Egeland described the situation as an "eerie reminder" of 2004, when aid workers were denied access at the point when the situation in Darfur was at its worst. "This is symptomatic of the everyday problems my colleagues face in Darfur, trying to feed nearly three million Darfuris to whom we are a lifeline," he said.

In a grim assessment the International Crisis Group notes that the NCP has kept the international community at bay over Darfur by

facilitating increased chaos on the ground and promoting divisions within the rebels which have brought peace talks in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, to a standstill. It is similarly containing international engagement with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) by selectively implementing elements of the agreement without allowing for any weakening of its grip on power – particularly control of oil revenues – or fundamental change in the way the country is governed. The international community has remained largely silent.

Heavy on monitoring but weak on follow-through, the international community – particularly the key countries involved in the negotiation of the CPA – has not yet embraced its role as a guarantor of the CPA, and continues to lack a consistent, coordinated approach

to hold the parties, particularly the NCP, to their respective commitments.¹

On his return from Sudan, Egeland noted that the international community seems "to be slacking on this last leg of the marathon to bring peace and security and prosperity to the biggest country of Africa ... I have seen a waning interest in Sudan this year ... this is really the moment of truth for international compassion and solidarity with Sudan," he said.

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For more information on Sudan, see FMR24 www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR24/FMR24full.pdf

1. www.crisisgroup.org/home/getfile.cfm?id=2289&tid=4055&type=pdf&l=1

A refugee family from Darfur outside their tent in Farchana camp, eastern Chad.

