

African Civic Leaders Statement on the situation in Sudan

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned by the ongoing violence, displacement and repression in Sudan. We seek to urge the international community—including Sudan's neighbors and friends and, in particular, the leaders and peoples of Africa — to support the search for credible justice and accountability in Sudan and the International Criminal Court's role in promoting these.

We view the need for justice and accountability for the peoples of Sudan, in addition to adequate humanitarian assistance and physical protection, as vital to any durable peace, and support the role of the ICC in achieving these objectives. We are hopeful that this work will help break the cycles of violence and the culture of silence in the Darfur region and throughout Sudan.

We are convinced that the ICC can be one effective vehicle, alongside national and regional mechanisms, for achieving justice for the gross violations committed by all sides in the conflict in Darfur. The people of Darfur deserve more than negotiating warlords forgiving each other for the violence—including brutal sexual violence--they have perpetrated primarily against women, children and other non-combatants. There can be no real peace without justice and security.

The people of Darfur have clearly vocalized a desire for justice and accountability. The ICC has the potential to help break the cycle of death and devastation caused by years of violent conflict and abuses of power.

We are deeply disheartened by the response of the government of Sudan to the ICC's decision on March 4, 2009 to issue an arrest warrant for President Omar Al-Bashir. By expelling and restricting humanitarian NGOs and relief workers in the desperate Darfur region, the government of Sudan further endangers the estimated 4.7 million people in the region who rely on food, medical and water aid. The expelled organizations were responsible for some 50 per cent of this aid. The Sudanese government has an obligation to ensure that the needs of its people are met and to that end must either allow these organizations back into the region, or ensure that alternative and equally capable delivery mechanisms are promptly deployed without further delay.

We are also disturbed by reports that Sudanese human rights defenders, their families and local staff of international organizations expelled from Sudan are increasingly subject to harassment, interrogation, detention, banishment, exile, torture and unfounded criminal charges in a campaign which appears to be aimed at dismantling Sudan's independent human rights movement with long term implications for Sudan's democratic transition. Three of the leading indigenous civil society human rights and development organizations have had their operations suspended. These organizations had provided legal aid, psycho-social services and humanitarian and development assistance and supported networks of local human rights monitors.

In the long-term, the international community must come together to find a way forward and to help Darfuris and all Sudanese find justice and peace.

We believe that progress in the peace talks must happen in tandem with the ICC's work for justice and cooperation by all in restoring the capabilities of Sudan's institutions to ensure accountability for crimes. We call on leaders to dramatically step up efforts to negotiate an end to the violence in Darfur, actively involving the armed groups and the Sudanese government. The Sudanese women who have been building the path to peace through their dialogue and consultation efforts must be at the peace table.

We call on the friends of Sudan to join in supporting the independence of the ICC and the ICC's work for justice and peace in Sudan.

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