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The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

Activist Brief

Nine Things You Need to Know About the Conflict in Darfur

Enough Team

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The latest round of violence in Darfur – torching of villages, terrorizing civilians, and systematically clearing prime land and resource-rich areas of their inhabitants – has forced the largest population movement since the height of the genocide in the mid-2000s. 300,000 Darfuris have been displaced since the beginning of 2013, adding to the millions already displaced. A new report by the Enough Project, [The Economics of Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur](#), draws on first-hand interviews to challenge the Sudanese government’s oversimplification of the conflict and highlight the recent large-scale violence in Darfur as systematic, state-sponsored, and driven by economic and security objectives. This activist brief provides an overview of the report’s findings.

What has triggered this year’s violence in Darfur?

Renewed violence is tied to the emergence of pressing economic imperatives, largely triggered by the loss of oil revenues following South Sudan’s secession in 2011. As the Sudanese government struggles to develop alternative revenue streams to replace oil and pacify increasingly restless Janjaweed militias, Sudanese government officials are increasingly willing to fan the flames of violence, even against some traditional Arab allies.

What has changed about the fighting, and why?

Until recently, the refugee population in Chad was predominantly from the Masalit, Fur, and other non-Arab tribes, the traditional targets of the government-sponsored Janjaweed. The Janjaweed are now additionally carrying out attacks against Arab groups who have fallen out of government favor. With some of the recent victims now of Arab origin, the situation is more chaotic, though the perpetrators of the violence are still primarily former or current Janjaweed militias. The fighting among different groups in Darfur has allowed the government to reinforce the popular misconception that most of the fighting has been simply the result of “inter-tribal” feuds. Though it is true that competing Arab groups have clashed in the past, the Sudanese government has exacerbated recent disputes and benefits from the latest round of violence by pacifying Janjaweed militias and consolidating economic control over Darfur’s resources.

What are the economic and security motivations of the government of Sudan and the Janjaweed militia groups?

- North Darfur's gold: In an effort to consolidate control of the mines and the lucrative gold export market, the government has sought to remove the traditional custodians of the mines, the Beni Hussein, by using long-favored Abbala militias to strategically attack areas around newly discovered gold mines. However, in recent weeks, the Abbala have grown dissatisfied with North Darfur's governor and declared their own rebellion. Sudan dispatched armed forces to the area this week.
- South Darfur's gum arabic: With the support of Sudan's second vice president, Beni Halba militiamen cleared some of Darfur's most valuable gum arabic-producing land. Without oil exports, gum arabic (which is exempt from U.S. sanctions) has again become a key export for Sudan's faltering economy.
- Central Darfur's arable land: Ali Kosheib, Janjaweed commander and subject of an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court, has used his Taaysha tribesmen to push Salamat off their land with the support from the central Minister of Finance and the implicit support of President Bashir himself.
- Nyala's extortion clashes: In a rare fissure, Janjaweed and National Security and Intelligence Service forces clashed in South Darfur in early July 2013 over spoils from an extortion scheme.

What is being reported by survivors of the recent violence?

- Attacks on civilians with firearms
- Burning of villages
- Land grabbing, land destruction, and population clearing
- Looting, extortion, and smuggling
- Manipulation of traditional reconciliation processes

What is UNAMID doing to protect civilians?

Since the regime in Khartoum denies journalists, aid workers, and U.N. peacekeepers access to locations where civilian targeting is frequent, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur, UNAMID, has been unable to do much to protect civilians from the latest violence.

Immediate actions that can be taken to contain further violence and crimes:

1. Holding the Sudan government accountable for the conduct of forces allied to it and under the command of its army and other security forces that have committed mass atrocities.
2. A joint African Union-U.N. investigation of the recent ambush in which 24 UNAMID peacekeepers were killed and injured should be opened as soon as possible.

3. While the A.U., the U.N., and others pursue a comprehensive peace, the ICC should continue its efforts for accountability in Darfur. It could begin investigating the current violence in Darfur for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Status of the Darfur peace process:

Peace efforts in Darfur since the mid-2000s have intensified conflict instead of reducing it. The reasons for the past failures are rooted in the lack of an effective, truly comprehensive peace process for Sudan, and the unwillingness of most countries to pressure Khartoum to change its behavior on the battlefield and compromise at the negotiating table. No proposal has addressed the core drivers of violence in Darfur, and the rebels and general population have therefore rejected multiple peace agreements. Few of the economic issues addressed in the report have been the subject of serious negotiations. Unfortunately, the African Union Peace and Security Council recently called for increased international support for the failed Doha Document for Peace in Sudan, a process that stovepipes Darfur's conflict, promotes divisive deals with small splinter rebel factions, and leaves the main rebels out of the process.

A new approach is needed to move the peace process forward:

Now that violence is again rising in Darfur, the lessons from previous failures must be heeded. In order to promote real solutions, the U.S. will have to engage much more deeply with the armed and unarmed opposition in Sudan. Diplomatic contact and non-military capacity building support should be focused on the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), the National Consensus Forces (NCF), and genuine civil society representatives. These elements must be more united and better prepared to assist the eventual democratic transition that the Sudanese people continue to demand, and should offer their vision of a political solution.

The international community needs to prioritize the creation of a comprehensive peace process that addresses all of Sudan's conflicts in one forum, maximizing participation from a wide swathe of elements of civil society, opposition, rebels, and government.

What can U.S. citizens do?

You can ask your Representative in Congress to support and cosponsor H.R. 1692, the Sudan Peace, Security, and Accountability Act of 2013. This legislation calls on the U.S. Government to adopt a comprehensive, holistic approach to solving the crisis in Sudan and support civil society efforts towards democratic transformation.