

September 18, 2006

Esteemed Ministers,

We write to express our deep concern at the present impasse between the government of Sudan and the wider international community, over the situation in Darfur. We believe that you, as protectors of safety and security for Africa's people, have a unique role to play in bridging the divide and providing relief to millions of exhausted and suffering Darfur civilians.

As you are aware the situation in Darfur is deteriorating dramatically; fighting between armed groups is intensifying, sharply increasing the danger to unarmed men, women and children. Nearly two million people have lost their homes and nearly three million are dependent on humanitarian aid for food, shelter and medical assistance. The international community must be allowed to meet its declared responsibility to protect civilians in Darfur.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, one of the most eminent Africans of our age, has warned that we are heading for a "disaster" in Darfur that would be rivaled only by the crimes against humanity witnessed in Rwanda.

As you gather this Monday 18 September to decide the fate of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), we urge you, as Africa's guardians of peace and security, to press the leadership in Khartoum to allow the UN force proposed in UNSC Resolution 1706 (2006) to deploy as soon as possible and to reconfirm the Council's commitment to hand over to that force. Until that deployment is achieved, it is vital that the mandate of AMIS should be extended until 31 December 2006 to avoid any interruption of a mission presence on the ground.

In addition, we call on the PSC to approve the AMIS force commander's Concept of Operations for the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, including provisions to expand the force's size and mandate, open safe passages and provide more effective civilian protection.

Meanwhile, the PSC should strongly reject the Government of Sudan's announced plan to stabilise Darfur, which we believe is an attempt to resolve the situation in the Darfur region militarily, a violation of the DPA and several UN and AU resolutions.

As the Council presses for Sudan's agreement to the deployment of the expanded UN force, we call on you to do all in your power to revive political negotiations by engaging all parties and helping them to reach a full and lasting agreement.

If the Government of Sudan cannot be persuaded to permit the UN force, we believe the AU should consider all options for enforcing compliance with its policy in favour of deployment, as provided for under Article 9 1 (e) of the African Union Constitutive Act.

Finally we urge you to use your good offices to engage the small number of governments that continue to provide overt or tacit support to Khartoum in resisting deployment of a UN force, and convince them that the humanitarian crisis in Darfur is now so grave as to far outweigh concerns about sovereignty.

We acknowledge the vital importance of respecting sovereignty. But Darfur's civilians, like all human beings, also have a legitimate claim - to survival. Defending sovereignty at the expense of the massive suffering we are now being forced to witness evokes not honour but shame. We therefore ask you to stand up for Darfur's people today, and in the critical days to come.

Yours sincerely,

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Cc: People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Republic of Cameroon
Democratic Republic of Congo
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Gabonese Republic
Republic of Ghana
Republic of Kenya
Kingdom of Lesotho
Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Republic of Mozambique
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