

United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee

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I would like to thank the Committee and particularly Senator Kerry and Senator Lugar for the opportunity to appear here today and to speak about the conditions in Darfur and my hope for peace.

BACKGROUND

I was born and raised in Darfur and have lived in Darfur for most of my life. I am a medical doctor and also serve as a professor of medicine at Al-Fashir University in Darfur in Sudan. I received my medical degree from the University of Khartoum Medical School in Sudan in 1976 and I am a specialist in internal medicine.

I am of the Fur tribe, the largest of the African tribes of Darfur and I am also a community leader in Darfur. In this capacity, I have addressed major community problems in Darfur and have engaged in peace negotiations on behalf of people in Darfur for the past 20 years, since 1989.

In preparing for this hearing, I spoke and consulted with many Darfuris on the ground and in the Diaspora as well as leaders of Sudanese civil society groups. Many of their views are represented in this statement.

In the interest of time, I will only focus on a few key issues facing Darfur. However, I welcome questions on other areas not covered in my testimony. Today, my testimony will focus on the humanitarian situation on the ground, particularly in the Internally Displaced (IDP) camps, the targeting of local civil society leaders, and the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed between North and South Darfur. Finally, I will share my recommendations for the United States Government.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

Humanitarian Conditions and Situation in the Camps

When the genocide in Darfur erupted in 2003, I was living in Darfur and have lived there ever since. I personally have provided medical treatment to hundreds of civilians injured as a result of the conflict. The injuries have been in various forms: gun-shot wounds, rape, torture, beatings and other forms of violence.

From 2004 - 2007, I worked as the Director of Medical Treatment at the Amel Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture (the Amel Center) in Darfur. The Amel Center provided medical and psycho-social services to victims of rape and torture and also documented human rights abuses taking place in Darfur. Most of the cases referred to the Amel Center were from the camps. I regularly treated several victims of rape, torture and other forms of violence on a daily basis. The victims comprised men, women and children and they ranged in age from a boy of 3 years old to an elderly man who was 80 years old. The Amel Center was the only organization on the ground providing medical treatment and psycho-social services to victims of rape and torture.

Many of the civilians who fled their homes as a result of the conflict live in camps in Darfur and Chad. I visited several of the camps in the Darfur area, and worked mainly in three of them: Kalma, Dreij and Otash in Southern Darfur, providing health care services to the men, women and children living there.

There are more women than men living in these camps. A typical camp is composed of about 65% females; 25% children and 10% men, mostly elderly. 30% of children under the age of five in these camps are malnourished. Since the escalation of the conflict in 2003, several of the women and girls living in these camps have been raped and subjected to other forms of sexual harassment. Reports of threats of violence and rape in these camps persist today. In June this year, two girls from Hamdya Camp in West Darfur were attacked, raped and beaten by six janjaweed militia. On the same day, another girl from Abusorroge Camp in West Darfur was kidnapped by armed men in military uniforms. In July this year there have been four cases of rapes in Nyretti Camp in West Darfur. Also in July, an elderly man was killed, and four children were slaughtered in Tawila Camp in North Darfur, by the janjaweed militia. Four young men from Abokaro Camp were also killed by the janjaweed militia when they left the camp to collect firewood and straw.

The expulsion on 9 March 2009 of 16 aid organizations (13 international and 3 national) by the government following the issuance of the arrest warrant for President al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC) has worsened the deplorable humanitarian conditions in camps in Darfur. Reports from my fellow community leaders on the ground indicate that as of June 2009, no one was providing health care services in Kalma and only two organizations were supplying food there. Kalma is one of the largest camps in Darfur with a population of about 100,000 people. Shadad Camp in Northern Darfur, which previously received food and water supply from the expelled organizations, is also experiencing a severe shortage of food and water supply.

The rainy season in Darfur which normally lasts from June to September poses serious challenges for humanitarian workers providing aid to the Darfuri people in the camps. Even with a full complement of aid organizations providing health services, health problems generally increase during the rainy season. As pit latrines become flooded during this period, there is an increased incidence of diseases, such as diarrhea and cholera. During this month of July, there have already been three reported cases of cholera in displaced camps in Nyala in Southern Darfur. There are no good roads leading to the camps; there are only feeder or dirt roads. During the rainy season these roads become flooded, making it difficult to access the camps. Conditions such as these will place heavy constraints on the remaining aid organizations on the ground or on any new agency at this stage given that the rains have already started.

As we know, in March 2009, the Sudanese government expelled 16 humanitarian organizations, including my former organization, the Amel Center. The shut-down of the Amel Center in essence means there is no organization on the ground providing both medical treatment and psycho-social support to women and girls who are victims of rape or to victims of torture.

Although the government has allowed a few aid organizations to return to Darfur, reports from my colleagues on the ground indicate that the organizations have not yet started operations in the camps as a result of lengthy bureaucratic processes locally. Thus the sufferings in the camps continue.

In addition to the problems within the camps, there are long-term problems in West Darfur which need to be addressed today. Supported by the Sudanese Government, newcomers, from Chad and Mali, are settling on land belonging to the displaced African groups who now live in the camps. Even if conditions finally improve in Darfur and people are able to return home to their villages, they will have nothing to return to and nowhere to go. Any solution for peace must seriously address these issues.

Finally, the continued and prolonged existence of Darfuris in the camps contributes to a serious deprivation of the educational rights of Darfuris. Educational facilities are lacking in the camps. Even before the conflict, the education level of Darfuris lagged far behind that of other groups in Sudan, due to the limited number of schools in Darfur, compared to the rest of the country. The enrollment of Darfur children in elementary school, for instance, was only 40%, compared to 90% in North Sudan State. The limited education in the camps will stunt the educational development of Darfuris, denying them access to positions in key sectors in the country.

Targeting of Civil Society and Local Activists and Organizations

Those of us who try to address the deplorable conditions in Darfur that I just outlined, face constant intimidation by authorities of the Sudanese Government.

In late 2008, we became aware that our operations at the Amel Center were no longer secure as information was being leaked to the Government, thus endangering the lives of the survivors of the Government-sponsored violence. Six of us from the Amel Center therefore started the Sudanese Organization for Rights and Peace Building (Sudanese Organization). The Sudanese Organization provided legal support for those whose rights had been violated, such as victims of illegal arrest and detention and police brutality, and also provided support to victims of rape and torture. In late October/early November 2008, three of my colleagues, including one who held a British passport, were arrested and detained for about three weeks. The holder of the British passport was spared physical abuse; however, the other two Sudanese were severely beaten to the extent that one of them sustained broken ribs. My three colleagues placed in solitary confinement and denied access to lawyers and visits, even from family members. The incident forced my colleagues and I to keep a low profile.

On March 9, 2009, during my absence from Darfur, national security officers went to the hospital where I worked and to my house looking for me. They enquired about my whereabouts and conducted a search of my home. Fortunately, they took nothing from my house and no one in my household was harmed. On that same day, the national security forces also went looking for Massad Mohamed, Director General of the Sudanese Organization. They went to his home, but did not find him; when they left

Massad's home, they left with his brand new car. Personally, I fear that if I return home I will be arrested. The five of my other colleagues who ran the Sudanese Organization with me have also left Darfur and fear for their lives should they return. In effect, this means that the Sudanese Organization is no longer functional and victims of crimes and Government abuse are left without much needed support services.

The Government of Sudan has also prevented civil society groups from traveling outside of Sudan to participate in peace-building efforts. In May 2009, about 300 people representing different groups of civil society members in Darfur were to travel to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia to meet with other civil society groups in the Diaspora to formulate a unified vision for peace. The Government denied exit visas for these members of civil society. As a result, the meeting in Addis Ababa never took place.

United Nations/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)

The presence of UNAMID forces has not stemmed the violence in Darfur due to lack of adequate manpower and equipment. From the inception, UNAMID has lacked sufficient number of troops, logistical supplies, including critical aviation capabilities and communication equipment, rendering it feeble to stem violence in the region of Darfur. The Security Council Resolution authorized 26,000 troops, but only about 17,000 have been deployed. The required number of helicopters has also not been provided, and with Ethiopia's pledge to deliver five in October, a shortage of 19 still remains. An empowered UNAMID will result in effective partnerships with local village police who can be trained to help provide additional security. It will also increase the effectiveness of UNAMID troops in protecting the camps and enable them to assist with the voluntary return of the civilians in the camps back to their homes when conditions in Darfur improve. However, as long as the janjaweed militia remains armed and UNAMID is inadequately manned and equipped, the prospect of people returning home from the camps remains unrealistic.

The people of Darfur continue to suffer and there seems to be no end in sight. There is an urgent need for peace in Darfur. We are counting on the United States, as a world leader, to play a key role to bring about peace in Darfur and in Sudan.

COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT

The United States and the international community has focused a great deal of attention on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2005. I welcome the CPA and the international attention on the agreement, as do many people in Darfur. It provides a framework to bring about the necessary changes that must occur to effectively address the root causes of the problems in Sudan as a whole and has relevant application to the conflict in Darfur as well. Although the CPA does not address the issue of accountability and issues unique to the Darfur conflict, such as land re-settlement, it nevertheless encompasses many of the principles that we in Darfur want: freedom of religion; equality of all Sudanese citizens; the right to one's own cultural identity, etc.

However, a number of provisions called for in the CPA, such as the review and amendments of national laws to make them compatible with the CPA agreement and the 2005 interim constitution of Sudan, have to date not been implemented. Further, the result of the 2008 census conducted pursuant to the CPA has been rejected by stakeholders in Southern Sudan and Darfur. We in Darfur and South Sudan are of the view that the census does not reflect the true population of the people of Southern Sudan and is less than the actual number of Southern Sudanese people. These issues must all be resolved within the shortest delay. Failure to do so would have disastrous consequences for the elections scheduled for 2010 and ultimately for the 2011 referendum. The people of Darfur are closely watching the implementation process of the CPA and with keen interest. If the CPA is successfully implemented, it will be a major sign of hope for peace settlement in Darfur. However, if it fails, it will threaten the prospects of peace in Darfur.

It must be emphasized that the situation in Darfur presents pressing needs which must first be addressed before some of the provisions of the CPA, elections, for instance, can be effectively implemented. There must be peace first, before elections are conducted. Further, a sizeable number of the Darfur population lives outside of Darfur as refugees. Without peace, their participation in an election is severely restricted, if not completely impossible.

Solutions to the conflict in Sudan must take into account all of the above factors which threaten to weaken peace. I would like to outline some recommendations to the United States for sustainable peace in Darfur.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The U.S. should urge the Government of Sudan to allow the return and functioning of the 16 humanitarian organizations expelled in March 2009 and remove the bureaucratic red-tape which is preventing the few aid organizations in Darfur from commencing operations.
- (2) The U.S. should ensure the inclusion of civil society groups, including representatives from the leadership of the displaced and refugees and women organizations in any peace process. The Government of Sudan should provide requisite documents for international travel and permit civil society organizations to participate in peace-building activities.
- (3) As a key player in the peace process, the U.S. should call for the timely implementation of provisions called for in the CPA such as the review and amendments of national laws, in particular national security laws and laws guaranteeing freedom of press, in accordance with the CPA agreement and the 2005 interim constitution of Sudan.

- (4) The U.S., through the Security Council, should take measures to strengthen the joint United Nations/African Union peace keeping force, UNAMID.
- (5) The U.S., working with the Security Council, should demand that the Government of Sudan fulfill its commitment to disarm the janjaweed militias, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1556 adopted on 30 July 2004.