

U.N. Authorizes 26,000 Peacekeeping Troops for Darfur

By Colum Lynch
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, August 1, 2007; A10

UNITED NATIONS, July 31 -- The U.N. Security Council voted unanimously Tuesday to authorize a force of about 26,000 U.N. peacekeepers to help end more than four years of violence in the Darfur region of Sudan, which has left hundreds of thousands dead and forced millions from their homes.

The U.N. mission, one of the largest in the organization's history, would assume authority by Dec. 31 over a force of about 7,000 African Union peacekeepers who have struggled to protect civilians. But U.N. officials said that it could be several more months beyond the deadline before the full force is deployed and that stemming the violence will be impossible without a political settlement between the government in Khartoum and numerous rebel factions.

The Security Council resolution grants the peacekeeping mission authority to use military force to protect its personnel, guarantee the safe travel of aid workers and provide protection for civilians. Hours before the text was adopted, the House voted to pass a bill that would shield investors and state and local governments in the United States from lawsuits if they divest funds invested in companies doing business in Sudan or Iran.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said that Sudan's cooperation will be vital for the success of the peacekeeping operation and that member states will have to contribute troops and police officers for the United Nations to meet the council's year-end deadline. "National governments know from their own experience that this takes time, but time is not on our side," Ban said.

If Sudan "is not a good-faith partner in this initiative, the operation will fail," he added. "We have the same expectation of the rebel movements."

The Security Council vote ended months of negotiations led by Britain, France and the United States and involving China, Russia and Sudan. The Sudanese U.N. envoy spent much of the weekend editing the text at the British mission to the United Nations.

In an effort to secure the endorsements of Sudan and China, its closest ally, British and French negotiators dropped a provision from an earlier draft that threatened unspecified sanctions against Khartoum if it impeded the U.N. mission.

The Bush administration welcomed the council's decision to adopt the resolution, but it declined to co-sponsor the resolution on the grounds that it was not tough enough, a U.S. official said. Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, called for an expedited transition from the African Union to the United Nations.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice phoned Ban in recent days to press him to take over the mission by October. Ban refused on the grounds that his military planners would not be ready.

Sudan's U.N. envoy, Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem Mohamad, said Sudan was grateful that the European sponsors of the resolution had stripped out some of the toughest provisions, and he vowed to cooperate on implementation. "We really want the deadline to be met so that nobody can come and blame us," he said.

Mohamad differed with the United States and European countries over the extent of the U.N. peacekeepers' powers to protect civilians. He said that the resolution would require the mission to respect Sudan's ultimate responsibility to provide security for its people. "No blank check is there," he said.

The violence in Darfur began in February 2003, when rebels took up arms against the government. Khartoum responded with a brutal counterinsurgency campaign that led to the deaths of as many as 450,000 people and forced more than 2 million into camps or across the border.

The new force -- which will be run jointly by the United Nations and the African Union - - will be of "predominantly African character," the resolution says. The United Nations will be able to recruit troops from outside the continent if its needs are not met within the region. The mission will be led by African political and military leaders, but the United Nations will retain ultimate authority over its activities. The mission could cost more than \$2 billion in its first year, a U.N. peacekeeping official said.