

19 December 2006

Annan Aide Heads to Sudan to Push for Darfur Force

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is sending a top aide to Sudan to press his case for bolstering an African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur with substantial U.N. resources, a spokesman said on Monday. Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah will begin a diplomatic mission to Khartoum on Wednesday aimed at clarifying the government's position on the proposed joint "hybrid" force, U.N. chief spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. The U.N. envoy will also bring a message from Annan to Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, following up on a weekend telephone conversation between the two men, Dujarric said. The United Nations has been trying without much success to persuade Bashir to accept the deployment of as many as 22,500 U.N. troops to form part of a hybrid force with some 7,000 African Union troops now in Darfur. Bashir more recently has indicated Khartoum would accept an African Union force financed and supported logistically and otherwise by the United Nations. But Bashir later wrote Annan a letter the secretary-general termed "a bit ambiguous." U.N. officials said Bashir wanted a tripartite commission to approve any troops coming into Darfur, which would in effect give Khartoum a veto. Annan said the United Nations would probably pay for the peacekeeping mission only if it was confident that "we will be able to put on the ground a workable, effective force, that will bring some measure of security." Ould-Abdallah is currently Annan's special representative for West Africa, but would be sent to Sudan in his capacity as a senior adviser to the secretary-general, Dujarric said.

Copyright 2006
The Washington Post Company