

U.S./Sudan: Bush Should Press for Promised Reforms

Security Service Reforms Agreed in Southern Peace Deal Are Crucial for Darfur

(New York, July 19, 2006) – When the president of Southern Sudan’s regional government visits the White House on July 20, U.S. President George W. Bush should call on Sudan to implement reforms to its security apparatus as agreed in the 2005 peace accord between the Sudanese government and the southern-based rebels, Human Rights Watch said today.

The South Sudanese president, Salva Kiir Mayardit, is the head of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). In 2005 this southern-based rebel movement and the Sudanese government signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, ending a 21-year conflict waged mostly in Southern Sudan. The accord brought the SPLM into government in partnership with the ruling National Congress Party, an Islamist party that has governed since 1989.

The United States helped to mediate the north-south Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which in turn served as the foundation for the Darfur Peace Agreement signed on May 5.

“Sudan’s peace-deal promises to reform its repressive security apparatus and political system are supposed to apply to the entire country, but they have not been fulfilled,” said Peter Takirambudde, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Arbitrary arrests and other abuses by security agents won’t end in Sudan, much less Darfur, until Khartoum implements these reforms.”

Sudan’s national security apparatus is a patchwork of unaccountable security agencies with ample funding and leaders who usually are not known publicly. Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations have documented hundreds of cases of torture, mistreatment and death in detention – in prior years often in unacknowledged, unofficial and secret “ghost houses” – since the National Congress Party effectively came to power in 1989 through a military-Islamist coup.

The security agencies have also had a major role in managing the ethnic militias used by the government to conduct its abusive wars in Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur. In its Protocol on Power Sharing, article 2.7.2, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement stipulates that there will be one national security service that is professional, with a mandate limited to advice and information gathering and analysis.

“The root causes of the conflicts in the south and now in Darfur are related to rampant human rights abuses throughout Sudan,” said Takirambudde. “The central government uses security agents and ethnic militias to do the dirty work of arbitrary arrests and attacks against civilians.”

Reforms of the security services, as promised in the 2005 peace accord, must be implemented to eliminate the systematic repression conducted by these agencies, which includes torture and mistreatment, arbitrary arrest and intimidation practiced by the existing national security agencies, Human Rights Watch said. The Sudanese government must also revoke the statutory immunity from prosecution that security agents enjoy.

Brokered with high-level U.S. involvement, the Darfur Peace Agreement signed by the Sudanese government and one of Darfur's main rebel factions has not been accepted by two of the rebel factions and many civilians in Darfur. In recent weeks, fighting has escalated in Darfur, including between rebel factions who have committed abuses against the civilian population.

"The Bush administration took the lead in negotiations for peace accords in the south, then in Darfur," said Takirambudde. "It cannot turn its back and walk away as soon as the agreements are signed. The U.S. needs to pressure the parties to uphold both agreements."

At the White House, Salva Kiir is likely to urge Bush to pressure Khartoum to live up to its part of the peace agreements. Although the U.S. government has long supported the SPLM politically, Washington still maintains extensive economic sanctions on the Sudanese government because of widespread atrocities in Darfur since 2003. The regional government of Southern Sudan, dominated by the SPLM, is nevertheless part of the government of Sudan under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and thus still subject to sanctions.

"Khartoum is eager for the U.S. to lift its all-encompassing sanctions on anyone doing business with Sudan's government, which gives the U.S. important leverage," said Takirambudde. "The U.S. must use that influence decisively to insist that Khartoum reform its vast security apparatus. Sudan agreed to carry out these reforms more than a year and a half ago, but still hasn't taken the first step."

Human Rights Watch has received repeated reports of torture and summary execution by various arms of the security apparatus in Darfur. Despite pervasive presence of government security agents, most of Darfur's population lives in conditions of mounting insecurity caused by these same agents, as well as by bandits, rebels and the government-backed militias known as Janjaweed.

At the urging of the United States, the U.N. Security Council deferred dealing with the mounting crisis in Darfur until after the north-south peace agreement was finalized in January 2005. By then, however, Sudanese armed forces and government-backed militias had forcibly evicted two million people from their homes in Darfur. None have been able to leave the displaced persons camps and return home because of continuing violence mostly at the hands of the government and its militias.

Neither the Security Council nor the United States favored expanding the north-south

peace talks to include Darfur, because they feared that pressuring Khartoum on Darfur would derail any hope of north-south peace. Now Darfur has become the location of the same kind of widespread crimes that Southern Sudan suffered for years. With the unreformed security services, the central government has waged a scorched-earth campaign of forced displacement against civilians sharing the same ethnicity as local rebel groups, first in Southern Sudan and now in Darfur.

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