

## **Sudan Army Surrounds Darfur Camps, Aid Agency Says**

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By Finbarr O'Reilly

EL-FASHER, Sudan (Reuters) - The Sudanese army and police surrounded camps holding internally displaced people in the south of Sudan's troubled Darfur region Tuesday, blocking access to aid agencies, U.N. officials said.

They said security forces moved in before dawn and removed some people from two camps near Nyala, while in a third camp Sudanese forces fired shots in the air and teargas to disperse crowds.

"Early this morning, police surrounded two camps and later on relocated a number of IDPs (internally displaced people)," the World Food Program (WFP) spokeswoman in Nyala, Bettina Leuscher, told Reuters.

Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail said in Khartoum that he was not aware of the incident but would investigate.

More than 1.5 million people have been driven from their homes by violence in Darfur in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The conflict erupted in early 2003 with a revolt by two rebel groups following years of skirmishes between African farmers and Arab nomads over land and scarce resources.

The United Nations has said at least 70,000 people have died from disease and malnutrition since March, a figure disputed by Khartoum.

Leuscher identified the two surrounded camps as Otash and Al-Jeer Sureaf, both in South Darfur state. She said one WFP worker entered Al-Jeer Sureaf and saw police relocating people.

Other U.N. officials said aid workers were unable to enter the camps.

George Somerwill, a U.N. spokesman in Khartoum, said Sudanese army and police had fired shots into the air and teargas to disperse large crowds at al-Shaeria camp, about 100 km (60 miles) northeast of Nyala.

"There is a high level of discontent among the IDPs (internally displaced people) because they fear the government wants to relocate them," he said, but added the United Nations was not aware of anyone being removed from al-Shaeria.

Humanitarian workers say police have previously said that people they have removed from camps had not fled violence, but had come from nearby towns to get food and then return home.

## RISING TENSIONS

Aid officials say security across other parts of the region has deteriorated in recent weeks despite a cease-fire which is being monitored by African Union (AU) troops.

Leuscher said rising tension was barring vital aid reaching areas of West Darfur state.

"Roughly 160,000 people in Zalingei, Nertiti and Goloare are no longer accessible by road ... and we cannot bring food to these areas," Leuscher said.

"In general the situation has become more tense over the last few weeks (in West Darfur)."

The WFP said 88 aid workers from the U.N. and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were evacuated from the three areas Monday because of the lack of security.

Sudan's foreign minister blamed rebels for any deteriorating security. "If there is any increase in insecurity it is because of rebel activities," he said.

Barry Came, the WFP's spokesman in Khartoum, said tensions had risen since AU monitors reported that 11 Arab civilians had been taken hostage by the rebel Sudan Liberation Army near Zalingei.

One source in the aid community said there were fears the Arab militias would retaliate to get the hostages.

The militias, known as Janjaweed, are accused by the United Nations of terrorizing the African communities with campaigns of rape and looting.

Rebels say Khartoum has aided the Janjaweed, but the Sudanese government denies this and says they are outlaws.

Another 200,000 Darfuri refugees are encamped in the desolate eastern part of neighboring Chad.