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Ban to Meet AU Over Darfur

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Thursday announced he would soon meet with the head of the African Union (AU) President John Kufuor of Ghana to discuss the continuing suffering in Sudan's devastated Darfur region.

The UN warned that almost 50,000 more people were forced to flee violence in the region last month alone.

Mr. Ban outlined to reporters the UN's recent initiatives to try and bring peace to Darfur.

This included a letter he sent on 24 January to Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir stressing the importance of more support for the African Union mission and also the need for the rapid deployment of the hybrid UN-African Union force.

"I have requested very strongly that President Bashir agrees to my letter [on the heavy support package which will enable the early deployment] of a hybrid UN-African Union peacekeeping operations," Mr. Ban, who is on official visit in Austria said.

He said there were two tracks that were still going on, even though both parties had not yet finally agreed.

Mr. Ban said one was the political process—a political dialogue process was going on at the highest level.

And secondly, the peacekeeping operation level is now being discussed.

Mr. Ban's comments come as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released its latest grim overview of the situation in Darfur, produced in collaboration with other UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), showing the violence forced around 46,000 people to flee their homes last month.

"New population displacements were registered weekly in January as attacks on villages, sexual violence and intimidation continued to force large numbers of people to move throughout Darfur," the overview states.

New displacements of villagers towards internally displaced person (IDP) camps continued "relentlessly" through the month as a result of attacks by both the government of Sudan and associated militia and a wing of the Sudan Liberation Army headed by Minni Minawi, according to OCHA.

This was especially the case in north Darfur where there were reports of Sudanese Government "aerial bombings in many locations—and attacks and intimidation by Arab militias."

OCHA's overview said that while there were some positive humanitarian developments in terms of access to areas that had been cut off for months, overall access for emergency supplies "continues to be compromised."

The latest January humanitarian access map shows Darfur-wide access is about 64 per cent.

Backing up this grim assessment, the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) said on Thursday a 15-year old girl was raped on Tuesday in south Darfur, while Arab tribal fighting has erupted again in the same region.

These are the latest in daily reports of violence coming out of the region, where at least 200,000 people have been killed and 2 million others displaced from their homes since 2003.

In total, some 4 million civilians need assistance to survive.

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