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Arbour Blames Sudanese Government for Darfur Atrocities

UN rights chief: Government of Sudan and aligned militias are behind most serious violations

Atrocities are being committed in Darfur at a "horrific" rate, and the Sudanese government is to blame for the worst of them, the United Nation's high commissioner for human rights reported Wednesday.

Louise Arbour said civilians are now regularly raped, killed and forced from their homes in the region of Darfur in western Sudan.

"The government of Sudan and militias aligned with them, some still actively supported by them, continue to be responsible for the most serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law," Arbour said in a speech delivered to the UN Human Rights Council.

Arbour, a former Supreme Court of Canada judge, said the government must provide answers for its links to the militias, as well as for the possible "criminal culpability" of government officials who are helping the militias commit acts on the government's behalf.

She said militant groups are also violating human rights law.

The atrocities being committed in Darfur do qualify as crimes under international law because of their nature and scale, Arbour said.

She urged the world community to support the international criminal court in its efforts to prosecute those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

"Attacks on villages, killing of civilians, rape and the forced displacement of tens of thousands of civilians go on unabated," Arbour said. "[They] have now reached, in Darfur, the horrific levels of early 2004.

"The atrocities must stop."

World in denial, UN's Egeland warns

In a separate news conference Wednesday, the UN's humanitarian chief accused the international community of being in denial about the scope of the crisis in Darfur.

'If there had been enough pressure earlier on the government and the rebels, we would not have had the situation in Darfur we have today.'- *UN humanitarian chief Jan Egeland*

Jan Egeland said the world could have stopped the war in early 2004, when there was a ceasefire.

"If there had been enough pressure earlier on the government and the rebels, we would not have had the situation in Darfur we have today," he said.

"It is not too late," he added.

In a statement, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Human Rights Council it should focus less on the situation in the Palestinian territories and should call a special session on Darfur.

UN council rejected Sudan motion

Arbour made her comments the day after the Human Rights Council rejected an attempt to hold the Sudanese government responsible for halting the atrocities.

The UN Human Rights Council voted 22-20 to reject a resolution from the European Union and Canada telling the Sudanese government to prosecute those responsible for killing, raping or injuring civilians in Darfur.

On Tuesday, the 47-nation body narrowly rejected a resolution from the European Union and Canada telling the Sudanese government to prosecute those responsible for killing, raping or injuring civilians in Darfur.

The vote was 22-20.

Instead, the council accepted a proposal from African countries supported by Muslim countries from elsewhere that called on all parties to the conflict to end human rights violations.

The crisis in Darfur erupted in March 2003, when Muslim militants took up arms against the Sudanese government and its Arab militia allies.

Since then, at least 200,000 people have died and another 200,000 have fled to neighbouring Chad.

Evidence of massacres

In Arbour's speech Wednesday, she cited reports that say four million people are now in need of immediate assistance and two million have been displaced from their homes.

She said the chief prosecutor with the international court has evidence and information about wide-scale massacres, direct killings, looting and the destruction of homes and food supplies.

She said the crisis has spilled into Chad and the neighbouring Central African Republic. She spoke of reports of civilians being killed and displaced in eastern Chad.

Egeland said the spreading crisis could turn into a large regional conflict.

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