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Sudan and Rebels Agree to New Cease-Fire

By REUTERS

EL FASHER, Sudan, April 8 — The Sudanese government and two rebel groups agreed Thursday to a 45-day cease-fire and to allow relief groups access to war-torn Darfur Province.

Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail said the three sides also agreed at a meeting in Chad to hold more talks in two weeks on the conflict, which has displaced hundreds of thousands of people in Darfur, a region in western Sudan along the Chad border.

Arab militias have been driving African villagers off their land in Darfur in what international organizations have described as an ethnic cleansing campaign.

Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations said Wednesday that international military intervention might be needed to stop the conflict.

The rebels — the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement — took up arms in February 2003, saying the government had armed the militias and had neglected the impoverished region for years.

Mr. Ismail said the African Union would meet in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, next week to discuss ways of monitoring the cease-fire, which is supposed to take effect immediately.