

## **Darfur Rebels Deny Truce With Government**

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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CAIRO, Egypt (AP) -- A Darfur rebel group denied Friday that it agreed to a cease-fire with the Sudanese government during a meeting this week with New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson. The cease-fire was "probably made for public consumption as we have not been officially consulted in that regard," said Abdullahi el-Tom, a leader of the Justice and Equality Movement rebel group.

Richardson, who was in Sudan on a mediation mission this week, issued a joint statement Wednesday with President Omar al-Bashir saying both sides in the Darfur conflict had agreed to a 60-day cessation of hostilities while they work toward lasting peace.

Richardson insisted Friday that the Sudanese president and rebel leaders "made a clear commitment to a 60-day cease fire."

"Nonetheless I do expect glitches like this down the road," Richardson said in an e-mail sent to The Associated Press by his office.

In a statement, the Justice and Equality Movement said its delegates met with Richardson for 30 minutes and that was too brief to reach a truce.

A truce "cannot be obtained as long the government continues in its escalation of violence, aerial bombardment, burning of villages and armament of janjaweed," the rebel group added, referring to Arab militiamen accused of atrocities against civilians in Darfur.

More than 200,000 people have died in Darfur and 2.5 million people have fled their homes since rebels from the region's ethnic African community took up arms against the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum in February 2003, accusing it of long-standing neglect and discrimination. The U.N. accuses the government of arming the janjaweed, which is blamed for the bulk of the atrocities. Khartoum denies the allegation.

The JEM also dismissed the government's announcement Thursday that it was willing to hold new talks with the JEM and other rebel groups that refused to sign a peace agreement in May.

The government and one rebel group signed the deal, while other rebel factions said it did not give enough guarantees or properly compensate people in Darfur for years of suffering.

Delegates from another rebel group that met with Richardson said they would accept a cease-fire if the government respected it. "When the government is serious we have no problem," said rebel Col. Abul Abdallah Ismail of the Sudan Liberation Movement, one of Darfur's many splinter factions.

The May agreement has been violated almost daily by all sides in the conflict, according to the United Nations, African Union and international aid groups. Meanwhile, the JEM has become the backbone of a rebel coalition that has repeatedly defeated government troops in northern Darfur.

Richardson said it was up to the United Nations and the African Union mission in Darfur "to serve as effective mediators and work out these differences."

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Associated Press Writer Nedra Pickler in Washington contributed to this report.

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