

Senior UN official ejected from South Darfur after opposing liquidation of the IDP camps

Sudanese authorities today (7/11/07) expelled a senior UN staff member from Darfur for opposing the Sudanese Government's dismantling of IDP camps and forced relocation of their inhabitants.

The head of the South Darfur Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), was informed he was to leave South Darfur or face arrest and be forcibly removed from the region.

The Wali of South Darfur, the state governor, issued an aggressive threat to a UN delegation sent from Khartoum to pacify rising tensions between the UN and Sudanese authorities in Darfur, informing them that if the Head of OCHA did not leave today then Sudanese authorities would remove him by force.

Last week, the Wali told the UN that should UN officials oppose the dismantling of the camps, from which people are forcibly relocated, he would ensure those officials would be expelled.

The forced relocation of people in Darfur goes against the UN Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced People, contravening international humanitarian law. Sudanese authorities complained that Ibrahim had breached state humanitarian law, without providing any details.

Sudan has a history of expelling humanitarians from Darfur. This includes the high profile expulsion of UN envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, in October last year, and of Paul Barker, the head of aid agency Care, earlier this year, along with diplomats from both Canada and the European Union.

UN Under-Secretary-General John Holmes has previously condemned Sudan for "clearly undermining both the letter and the spirit" of the joint communiqué he signed earlier this year with the Government of Sudan. Mr Holmes stated, after signing the joint communiqué, that it was intended to relieve the "bureaucratic impediments" hindering the humanitarian community in Darfur.

One UN official in Sudan said today, "Sudanese authorities have no respect for the humanitarian community in Darfur. Sudan does not assist in facilitating the aid effort. It purposefully hinders the work of the humanitarian community, harassing, threatening and expelling staff of aid agencies and the UN."

The latest expulsion comes at a tense time in which the UN is trying to mediate peace talks between rebel groups and the Government of Sudan. The Libya talks have been postponed, with some rebel groups requesting more time. With disunity among the rebels and ongoing violence against civilians on the part of the Government, the peace talks are threatened with failure. Meanwhile, the embryonic UN/AU mission remains dogged by problems, including delayed deployment and the absence, so far, of a commitment from any government of desperately needed helicopters.

The UN is expected to release a public statement on the removal of the Head of OCHA tomorrow (8/11/07), including comment on Sudanese authorities not adhering to agreements made between the Government and the UN stipulating that Sudan is to respect the humanitarian community in Darfur, and facilitate their work.

"Given his pivotal role, the forced removal of the Head of OCHA is a devastating blow from the Sudanese authorities to the humanitarian work of the UN and international aid agencies in Darfur," says Dr James Smith, Chief Executive of the Aegis Trust for genocide prevention. "He was forced out essentially because he did his job so well. He was resisting a policy that amounts to further ethnic cleansing of Darfur's African population. With no security to allow them to return home and rebuild, forced removal of the IDPs from the camps gives their inhabitants no choice but to leave the region or die.

"All three strands needed to solve the crisis in Darfur are in trouble: the peace talks are controlled by Khartoum in part because of the disunity of the rebels, the security efforts are knobbled by Khartoum insisting there will be no contribution from non-African countries, and the humanitarian operations are also systematically hampered by the regime."

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