

For Immediate Release

Sudan: North Darfur Attack Kills 13 Civilians

Hold Attackers Accountable; Allow Peacekeepers Access

(Nairobi, November 7, 2012) – The government of [Sudan](#) should urgently investigate an attack on a village in North Darfur on November 2, 2012, that killed 13 civilians, Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities should allow African Union/United Nations (UNAMID) peacekeepers prompt and full access to the site.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that at around 8 a.m. on November 2, scores of heavily armed men in vehicles and on camels attacked Sigili, an ethnic Zaghawa village 40 kilometers southeast of El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. The attackers entered the village, fired on civilians, and looted and burned shops and homes. Thirteen civilians, including two infants, were killed and several more were wounded or abducted.

“The authorities should urgently and impartially investigate the attack on Sigili and hold all those responsible to account,” said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The victims deserve real justice, not a replay of past investigative committees that are formed and forgotten.”

Witnesses identified the attackers as ethnic Berti members of the Popular Defense Forces, a locally recruited militia that the government has deployed alongside the army in Sudan’s conflict areas. Human Rights Watch could not independently confirm if the attackers were members of the Popular Defense Forces or some other militia.

A shopkeeper told Human Rights Watch that a vehicle full of armed men arrived at the market, and then one of the attackers shot dead an unarmed man standing near his shop. “I was afraid. My whole body was shaking when someone shouted loudly, ‘Janjaweed [militia] attack, run!’” the shopkeeper said. “I found myself running like everyone else. I left behind my shop but saved my life.” Several hundred villagers fled the village to El Fasher and nearby villages.

That afternoon, villagers brought the bodies of their relatives to the El Fasher hospital. The next day, hundreds marched with the bodies in a funeral procession from the hospital to the UNAMID headquarters, demanding justice and compensation for the loss of life and property. Protests reportedly continued in El Fasher on November 6.

Authorities prevented displaced villagers from returning home on November 3 to attend the burial of their relatives. The village representative, Sheikh Musa Mukhtar, lodged a complaint against the attackers with the police, petitioned the governor's office for justice, and asked UNAMID to investigate the case independently, victims’ families told Human Rights Watch. But local authorities have yet to investigate the incident, despite a report by the government-run SUNA news service that authorities had established an investigative committee. Domestic as well as international law applicable in Darfur obligates the Sudanese authorities to investigate the killings, Human Rights Watch said.

The authorities blocked UNAMID peacekeepers from visiting the area until November 6, according to UN sources. Sudan has repeatedly blocked UNAMID from visiting various locales in Darfur, seriously undermining the mission's ability to carry out its mandate to protect civilians and investigate human rights abuses.

In recent years, there has been increasing tension between Berti and Zaghawa communities in the area southeast of El Fasher, largely over land. The widely held perception that the government supports the Berti community and that Zaghawa populations support rebel movements has exacerbated their conflicts, particularly since the alliance between the government and the Darfur rebel leader Mini Minawi dissolved in [late 2010](#).

“Sudan’s repeated refusal to let international peacekeepers do their jobs should not go unchallenged by concerned governments,” Bekele said. “The UN Security Council should demand answers from the Sudanese government.”

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on Sudan, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/africa/sudan>

For more information, please contact:

In Mombasa, Jehanne Henry (English, French): +1-917-443-2724 (mobile); or henryj@hrw.org

In Amsterdam, Leslie Lefkow (English): +31-6-21-59-7356 (mobile); or lefkowl@hrw.org

In New York, Philippe Bolopion (English, French): +1-212-216-1276; or +1 917 734-3201 (mobile); or bolopion@hrw.org