Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre

Statement on the Renewed Military Confrontations in Darfur

Geneva, Monday, 29 May 2017

The Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre is concerned about the renewed military confrontations in Darfur between the security forces and militias loyal to the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the insurgent Sudan Liberation Movement–Minni Minawi (SLM–MM) and the SLM/Transitional Council led by Nimir Abdelrahman in South, East and North Darfur States since 19 May 2017. The renewed round of large-scale fighting, which continues to date marks an end to the unilateral ceasefire that had been declared by GoS and the Darfur insurgents several months ago and frequently renewed. There are different versions about the reality on the ground and the manner in which the fighting had erupted. GoS claimed that the insurgent groups entered Darfur from South Sudan and Libya while the insurgents maintained that their troops were stationed in areas under their control in Darfur and that they were in fact conducting internal movements for administrative purposes. It seems that the two protagonists inflicted heavy human and material losses on each other. Senior commanders from both sides were either killed or held prisoners of war with the insurgents being out numbered. There are fears of massive violations of international humanitarian law, including reports about torture and degrading and inhumane treatment of insurgent fighters held capitives by the security forces. There are also reports about summary executions of insurgent fighters such as Commanders Gouma Mendi and M. Abdelsalam Tarada who were believed to be initially arrested but expeditiously executed by the Rapid Support Forces. Some captured insurgent fighters, including injured commanders were paraded on Sudan’s national TV and forced to make self-incriminating statements.

The recent military confrontations were preceded by a GoS-sponsored public relations campaign, including a meeting in Berlin with the main insurgent groups of Darfur and briefings with the representatives of members of the UN Security Council held in Khartoum a few hours before the launching of the attack. During these meetings, GoS expressed concern about imminent military action warning of possible military incursion into Darfur by the insurgent groups hinting its intention to confront such incursion through military means, which cast doubts about GoS’s commitment to the unilateral ceasefire it has renewed recently. The massive nature of the ongoing military confrontations and the high numbers of casualties on both parties indicate that the armed conflict in Darfur is far from over and any claims to the contrary cannot be substantiated. The ongoing fighting also indicates that the Darfur insurgent groups are present in the region and capable of carrying out military activities.

On 28 May 2017 military confrontations between GoS and the Darfur insurgents have been reported in Ain-Siro and the mountainous area in North Western Kutum area (North Darfur State), which is under the control of SLM-Transitional Council. As has been practice during the last 14 years of the armed conflict in Darfur, the ongoing military confrontations are associated with deliberate attacks by GoS security forces and allied militia groups against African villagers as well as looting and destruction of their habitats. Areas affected by such attacks are Marla, Muzbad, Um Baru, Aboaala and Arori and other areas of Kornoy locality. They are reports of arrests and forced disappearance of large numbers of civilians in these areas arrested under the pretext of communicating with the armed movements.
The overall security situation is degrading rapidly and criminality is in the increase in Darfur. On 24 May 2017 clashes between the army and militiamen resulted in the killing of Ezedine Abdullah Issa and the injury of 20 others in Tundabia Gate in North Darfur. The casualties are all members of the government-controlled Popular Defense Forces (PDF). The confrontation took place when the PDF members carjacked a civilian convoy in its way from El-Fasher to Tawila and composed of seven commercial vehicles and a relief truck and looted the merchandise and the passengers’ belongings.

DRDC is very concerned that the ongoing fighting encourages the parties to pursue military actions for ultimate victory and further jeopardizes all prospects for a just and negotiated political settlement. It follows months of frequent attacks by the Rapid Support Forces and GoS-backed nomad militiamen against civilians in Darfur that were partially documented by the UN Secretary General in his report to the Security Council (S/2017/250 of 23 March 2017), which documented a series of crimes committed by GoS-supported militia groups against civilians and highlighted the volatility and unpredictability of the conditions on the ground, and the lack of tangible progress in addressing the causes and consequences of the conflict.

DRDC is deeply concerned that the ongoing fighting has been associated with aggressive political rhetoric by GoS officials labelling the Darfur insurgents as mercenaries and calling for their annihilation. The use of such disparaging language contradicts GoS claims of commitment to the outcomes of the national dialogue conference and national reconciliation. DRDC condemns the racist media pronouncements by the Governor of East Darfur State Mr. Anas Omer in which he said that: “... bullets are more valuable than the Darfur insurgents” and he called on the security forces: “... not to bury the killed insurgent fighters and instead leave their dead bodies to be devoured by vultures.”

DRDC call on the international community to take immediate measures to:

1. Pressurize the warring parties in Darfur to fully respect the existing ceasefire declarations, end all sorts of military operations in the region, and put an immediate halt to all attacks against civilians, especially aerial bombardment of residential areas and the destructions of habitats.
2. Protect the civilian populations in Darfur by establishing a no-fly zone all-over the region and by enacting the existing UN Security Council-sponsored measures to curtail the inflow of weapon in Darfur.
3. Strengthen the mandate of the African Union and United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and provide it with additional means and powers to protect the civilian population and ensure timely reporting of incidents of violence and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
4. Further pressurize GoS to allow UN relief agencies and humanitarian aid organizations unhindered access to the affected populations.
6. Arrest and handover all individuals accused by the International Criminal Court of committing international crimes in Darfur in particular war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, including General Omar Al-Bashir.