

Statement on the Humanitarian Situation in Darfur

22 June 2008



As the people of Darfur face the annual hunger gap – the period leading up to the harvest in October – the humanitarian community in Sudan is warning that limited time remains to safeguard against an increasingly precarious situation.

Underlying this potential crisis is the continued insecurity in the region, which led to an additional 180,000 being displaced from their homes in the first five months of 2008.



Attacks on the UN World Food Programme convoys have seriously delayed the delivery of food aid to Darfur culminating in a cut in the general food ration of more than 40 percent since May. At least 2.7 million people will be affected by a reduction for at least the next two months.



The increasing number of vehicle hijackings affecting humanitarian agencies in Darfur – 160 to date in 2008 – is undermining the delivery and quality of life-saving assistance. Eight humanitarian workers have been killed this year.



In addition, the general population of Darfur experienced a substantially lower cereal harvest in 2007. In South Darfur in particular, there has been a shortfall in the cereal harvest. This combined with rising food prices is of great concern. If crops cannot be cultivated due to fighting and displacement, many households will become even more vulnerable.



Water and sanitation services are already over-stretched. The impact of diseases such as diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections in the forthcoming rainy season will be more severe if people are weakened by a shortage of food.

In order to monitor, assess and alleviate the impact of these factors, it is essential that humanitarian workers have safe access to all communities. Such monitoring can only succeed if aid agencies are able to undertake and release the results of surveys and assessments in a timely manner and without restrictions.



There is a window of opportunity to protect the population of Darfur from the worst effects of this year's difficult hunger gap but it is closing. Overall, despite localized spikes and the vulnerability of the newly displaced, malnutrition and morbidity rates in Darfur are still currently comparable to the same time last year. However, all parties must act now to allow humanitarian agencies to safely monitor the situation and deliver life-saving assistance. Without these conditions in place, specifically the security necessary to deliver full food rations, the situation will deteriorate.



We, as humanitarian agencies in Sudan, call for the following immediate actions to address these concerns which we know the Government also shares, many of which have already been agreed to at the Sudan Consortium in Oslo and through the High Level Committee.

The Government of Sudan should implement its stated commitment to ensure that food convoys with escorts are organized a minimum every 48 hours on main routes into Darfur. However, in order to return the food ration to normal levels, the authorities must permit food relief trucks to travel into Darfur every day, regardless of whether escorts are in place or not.



All armed groups operating in Darfur who bear responsibility for attacks on humanitarians – including signatories and non-signatories to the Darfur Peace Agreement – must cease the hijacking of vehicles and assets and demonstrate full respect for International Humanitarian Law and principles.

The Government of Sudan must urgently enact its agreement to release the results of technically cleared humanitarian surveys — including nutritional and crop surveys — and minimize delays in publishing future survey findings.

The deployment of UNAMID troops needs to be accelerated to provide protection of civilians and humanitarian workers and assets.

Ultimately, there must be a negotiated settlement to the Darfur crisis which allows internally displaced people (IDPs) to return home voluntarily and in safety, and enables communities to re-establish their lives and livelihoods. In the interim, IDPs should continue to have access to camps and protection against forced or involuntary return.

A failure to respond now will have serious repercussions on the wellbeing and development of the people of Darfur — not just during the coming days and months but in the longer-term.

This statement has been endorsed by the following members of the UN Country Team in Sudan:

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
United Nations Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC)
World Food Programme (WFP)
World Health Organization (WHO)

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