



Media Release

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Darfur civilians finally promised the protection they deserve

The UN Security Council's unanimous resolution to commit a 26,000 strong peacekeeping force to Darfur is a long-overdue yet positive step in ending the violence that has plagued the region. The peacekeepers are authorized to use force to protect humanitarian workers and civilians. This well resourced UN-AU hybrid force should be able to achieve what the undermanned AU force has not.

The new force, named UNAMID, will have up to 19,555 military personnel, including 360 military observers and liaison officers, a civilian component including up to 3,772 international police, and 19 special police units with up to 2,660 officers.

The Darfur Australia Network welcomes the resolution. There is no doubt that this resolution is the closest and best hope we have to ending the bloodshed in Darfur. However, we are concerned, about the inability of the peacekeeping members to seize and dispose of illegal arms. This could jeopardize the disarmament process which is necessary for a long-lasting peace.

Abdelhadi Matar, president of the Darfur Community Association of Australia, was also cautious about Sudan's acceptance of peacekeepers. "Omar al-Bashir is notorious for backing out of peace deals. We have to be wary of any promises he makes".

The UN Resolution calls on member states to finalise their contribution to the force within 30 days. While infantry soldiers will mainly be drawn from African states, it is expected that personnel from around the world will be used for specialised engineering and in command headquarters.

Sarah Hellings, Director of the Darfur Australia Network called on the Australian Government to contribute to the force. "Australia has contributed to numerous peacekeeping forces in the past. Given their expertise and knowledge it is disappointing that the Government has not already committed to the force, even a non-military contribution".

Before the Australian Government continues to withhold support of personnel for the force, they should consider the words of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to the Security Council after their vote:

"You are sending a clear and powerful signal of your commitment to improve the lives of the people of the region, and close this tragic chapter in Sudan's history".

In July, Mr Downer told ABC television "We also want to help the United Nations peacekeeping operation as best we can". The Government's recent donation of \$20 million to aid in Darfur demonstrates they are clearly concerned about the crisis. But without a clear commitment to the force, is it enough?

The Darfur Australia Network (DAN)

The Darfur Australia Network is an association of refugees from Darfur and concerned Australians. We aim to raise awareness about the suffering and continuing injustice in Darfur and advocate for increased Australian and international pressure to stop the genocide in Darfur.

For more information please contact Sarah Hellings on sarah@darfuraustralia.org

To arrange an interview with Abdelhadi Matar, please contact Jen Ward at media@darfuraustralia.org