

Justice for Darfur



For Immediate Release

Bashir warrant: a major step towards justice for victims in Darfur

(The Hague, March 4, 2009) Today's decision by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese president General Omar al-Bashir is a major step towards combating impunity associated with the horrific crimes in Darfur, said the Justice for Darfur campaign. President al-Bashir is wanted by the court for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Justice for Darfur calls on the international community to press Sudanese authorities to comply with their obligations to execute the warrant. The government of Sudan has failed to bring to justice any of those responsible for crimes under international law in Darfur, and has so far refused to cooperate with the ICC and to surrender any of the suspects.

"The ICC represents the best hope for justice for the victims of Darfur." said Dismas Nkunda from the International Refugee Rights Initiative. *"The international community must ensure that Sudan complies with its obligation to cooperate with the ICC, including by handing over anyone subject to an arrest warrant."*

In 2005, the UN Security Council mandated the Prosecutor of the ICC to investigate and prosecute crimes committed in Darfur since 2002. The Court has now issued three arrest warrants for: President al-Bashir, current State Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Ahmad Harun, and Janjaweed leader Ali Kushayb. The ICC prosecutor has also requested arrest warrants for three rebel leaders implicated in attacks on international peacekeepers in Darfur.

The Justice for Darfur campaign also calls on United Nations Security Council members to remain committed to the independence of the ICC and to reject any attempt to invoke article 16 of the Rome Statute, which would defer investigation and prosecution of crimes under international law in Darfur.

Over recent months, some Sudanese officials have threatened that issuing an arrest warrant for President al-Bashir would jeopardize the safety of the U.N. staff and infrastructure as well as humanitarian staff in Sudan.

The Justice for Darfur campaign also expressed concerns about the increasing harassment faced by human rights defenders and others in Sudan who have spoken out in support of justice for the victims in Darfur.

"The UN Security Council should make clear to Sudanese authorities that threats or attacks against UN peacekeepers, humanitarian workers or civilians in Darfur or elsewhere in Sudan in retaliation for the ICC's decision to issue an arrest warrant are not acceptable," said the Justice for Darfur campaign.

The government of Sudan is required by international law to ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel as well as the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need in Darfur, in particular to the internally displaced. Deliberate attacks on personnel involved in humanitarian or peacekeeping missions, by any party to the conflict, constitute war crimes under International Law.

The international community's strong support for the work of the ICC is essential to enable the Court to provide justice in Darfur.

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NOTE TO EDITORS

“**Justice for Darfur**” is a campaign supported by human rights organizations worldwide, calling on the international community to ensure the prompt arrest and surrender of the persons subject to an International Criminal Court arrest warrant. Please find below the list of the 46 signatory organizations. For more information, please visit: www.justice4darfur.org

The following people are available for interviews:

- In Kampala, for **International Refugee Rights Initiative**, Dismas Nkunda (English): +25-641-434-0274; or +25-675-331-0404 (cell)
- In Cairo, for **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)**, Moataz El fegiery (Arabic, English): +20-227-951-112; or +20-123-429-991 (cell); or moataz@cihrs.org; or melfegiery@hotmail.com
- In New York, for **Human Rights Watch**, Richard Dicker (English, French): +1-212-216-1248; +1-917-747-6731 (cell); richard.dicker@hrw.org
- In London, for **Amnesty International**, Christopher Keith Hall (English): +44-(0) 207-413-5733; or chall@amnesty.org
- In Paris, for **Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l’Homme (FIDH)**, Karine Bonneau (English, French, Spanish) : +33-6-72-34-87-59 (cell)
- In Dakar, for **Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l’Homme (RADDHO)**, Alioune Tine (French) : +221 77 644 3396
- In Lagos, for **Socio-Economic Rights & Accountability Project (SERAP)**, Adetokunbo Mumuni (English): +23-480-231-391-90
- In The Hague, for **Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)**, David Donat Cattin (English, Italian, and French): +31-70-360-4433; or +31-62-331-8581; or +39-333-166-0309 (cell), or donat@pgaction.org
- In New York, for **Human Rights First**, Nicolas Burniat (English, French): +21-28-45-52-42; or +91-73-28-92-52 (cell)
- In London, for **Aegis Trust**, James Smith (English): +44-792-147-1985
- In New York, for the **Coalition for the International Criminal Court**, Steve Lamony (English): +1-646-465-8514; or lemony@iccnow.org; and in The Hague, Cecilia Nilsson Kleffner (English): +31-70 311 10 85; or nilsson@iccnow.org

Background

- In March 2005, the Security Council adopted resolution 1593 referring the situation in Darfur since 1 July 2002 to the ICC Prosecutor and decided “that the Government of Sudan and all other parties to the conflict in Darfur, shall cooperate fully with and provide any necessary assistance to the Court and the Prosecutor”. Although Sudan has not ratified the Rome Statute which created the ICC, it is obligated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to implement the Security Council resolution.
- In April 2007, the Court issued arrest warrants for state Minister for Humanitarian Affairs Ahmad Harun and former Janjaweed leader Ali Kushayb, both suspected of having committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Sudanese government has repeatedly refused to cooperate with the Court and to arrest and hand over the two suspects,
- In June 2008, the UN Security Council renewed its call to “the Government of Sudan and all other parties to the conflict in Darfur to cooperate fully with the Court, consistent with resolution 1593 (2005), in order to put an end to impunity for the crimes committed in Darfur”.
- On 14 July 2008, the ICC prosecutor asked Pre Trial Chamber I to issue an arrest warrant against President al-Bashir, on ten counts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- On 20 November 2008, the Prosecutor sought arrest warrants against three Darfur-based rebel leaders on allegations of war crimes committed against African Union peacekeepers in Haskanita in September 2007.
- The ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I reviewed the evidence submitted by the prosecutor to determine whether to grant the request of 14 July 2008. The arrest warrant for crimes against humanity and war crimes has been issued today because the Pre-Trial Chamber judges were satisfied that there are “reasonable grounds to believe” that President al-Bashir has committed the alleged crimes.

The following organizations support this statement:

Action de la Jeunesse Guinéenne pour l'Aide au Développement et à la Prospérité
Action des Chrétiens Activistes des Droits de l'Homme à Shabunda
Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture - France
Action pour les Droits humains et l'amitié
Aegis Trust
African Development and Peace Initiative
Americans Against the Darfur Genocide
Amnesty International
Arab Center for Independence of the judiciary and the legal profession - Egypt
Arab coalition for Darfur
Arab program for human rights Activists
Bahrain Centre for Human Rights
Bahrain Human Rights Society
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
The Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre
Coalition for the International Criminal Court
Collectif Urgence Darfour
Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies
Darfurhilfe Verein e.V.
Darfur Reconciliation and Development organization
Darfur Rehabilitation Project
Darfur Union UK
Fédération internationale de l'Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture
Fédération Internationale des ligues des Droits de l'Homme
Forum pour le renforcement de la société civile - FORSC Burundi
Gambia Moral Coalition
Genocide Alert
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
International Criminal Court Student Network
International Refugee Rights Initiative
Justice for the World
Kenya Human Rights Commission
Moroccan Center for Human Rights
No Peace without Justice
Parliamentarians for Global Action
Prepared Society – Kenya
Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l'Homme - Senegal
Recherches et Documentation Juridiques Africaines a.s.b.l.
Save Darfur Canada
Save Darfur Coalition
Socio-Economic Rights & Accountability Project - Nigeria
Stand Canada
Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken
UN Watch
Waging Peace