

STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF SUDAN ON THE CRITICAL SITUATION IN DARFUR

We, the Catholic Bishops of the Sudan express our concerns regarding the tragic situation in Darfur. We are moved to do so in defence of the dignity of the people expressed in their God-given human rights. As shepherds and pastors, we cannot ignore the annihilation of an entire ethnic group whatever their creed, gender, or clan.

Darfur has always been considered a source of cheap labour and army recruits utilized particularly to stem the civil war in the South, Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile.

For the last 10 to 15 years the Government of Sudan had never admitted the rebellion in Darfur but through the media propagated the idea that the upheavals in Darfur are caused by 'ARMED ROBBERY AND HIGHWAY BANDITRY'.

The situation in Darfur has resulted to terror, rape, torture, murder, and slavery. Already in the last one and half year, about 35,000 people lost their lives and it is predicted that this number will increase in the few days to come due to the obstruction of relief agencies from saving the population. It is also calculated that two million people are internally displaced. Two hundred thousand have fled to neighbouring Chad while others fled to Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and other centres in the North.

The arming and military assistance to the Janjaweed militia is a repetition of the Popular Defence Force (PDF) named also as "Murahellin" in Kordofan that caused destruction in Abyei and Northern Bahr el Ghazal. The Janjaweed could not have purchased sophisticated weapons, and ammunition. In the first place they do not have the funds to pay for themselves and secondly they do not have bomber planes to hurl bombs on the innocent civilians.

We call upon the United Nations and the International community to exert pressure to bear on the Government of Sudan not only to halt arming the Janjaweed but also to immediately disarm them and bring the perpetrators to justice. We do not believe that any further time be given to the government to take serious measures and action because many innocent people are losing their lives. If the Government of Khartoum is reluctant to assume this responsibility, then we appeal to the international community to intervene immediately. Time factor is crucial in order to save innocent and precious lives.

We also call upon the Government of Sudan to open wide the doors for the humanitarian agencies to deliver food, medicines and shelter to the displaced people of Darfur. Assistance should reach the displaced wherever they are and without further delay tactics.

We appeal to the Government of Sudan to take positive steps as a Government, whose prime interest is the protection of lives and the respect of the dignity of its citizens, to sit and negotiate a just and peaceful settlement to the conflict. A government that violates the rights of its citizens should expect the intervention of the international human family. In fact this is mandatory of the international community.

We also appeal to both belligerent parties to sit at the negotiating table in order to reach a just and peaceful solution to the situation. This is because war is not the best way of addressing grievances. We therefore commend the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on one hand and the government on the other for accepting the invitation of the intermediaries to seek a peaceful settlement. War and killing do not solve problems.

We also plead with the international community to avoid further discussion and compromise. We ask all concerned authorities to stop politicking. What is at stake are the lives of hundred of thousands of innocent people, particularly the children, the women and the elderly. There is no room for further statements, discussions, or deliberation. This is a time for action to save innocent people.

We further appeal to the United Nations to assume their responsibilities. The holocaust of the African ethnicity in Darfur is **ethnic cleansing**. There is also need to strongly deter the government of Sudan from arming its militia in Upper Nile where atrocities are being committed against innocent civilians. This means that the international community should interfere and offer all necessary assistance.

We also launch our strong appeal that the case of Darfur should not stall the negotiation of the peace talks in Naivasha, Kenya. We hereby wish to note that it is contradictory to negotiate peace with some while others are being totally eliminated. This should be considered while the leaders of the SPLM/A and GOS resume their peace talks. We reiterate that any peace without justice is no peace.

In conclusion, we the Catholic Bishops of the Sudan pray to Almighty God to rescue his people from the present tribulation, and invite all those who yearn for justice and peace to offer prayers and assistance for the suffering people of Darfur.