

***LETTER FROM AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO
AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT***

Your Excellency,

As you prepare to join Heads of State and Government from across Europe and Africa in Lisbon next month, as African and European aid agencies, human rights groups and think tanks, we write to urge you to put Darfur at the top of your agenda.

We believe that the Summit presents a unique opportunity for African and European leaders to renew a strengthened—and united—stand on behalf of the people of Darfur.

To date, the African Union (AU) has been on the forefront of responding to the crisis in Darfur, deploying an AU Mission in Darfur (AMIS) and taking a lead role in mediating the peace talks in Abuja and the first steps around the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). For its part the European Union (EU) has been a generous supporter of AMIS and the Darfur peace process, most recently agreeing to assist with ensuring the security of Darfur refugees alongside the Government of the Republic of Chad.

The humanitarian and human rights situation in Darfur is now at a critical juncture, situated within a deeply complicated political and security context and where the deployment of a joint United Nations (UN) and AU mission is in delicate negotiation. More than ever Darfur requires careful and concerted engagement from the international community if efforts to resolve the conflict and ensure basic protection for its beleaguered population are to bear fruit.

The EU and AU with their special institutional relationship and history of close cooperation on peace and security have a unique role to play. It is a great concern to all of us, however, that despite the urgency of the situation, Darfur does not at present specifically appear on the agenda for the summit.

We urge you to push this issue to the forefront of your discussions. We are convinced that a strong and coordinated African and European position on Darfur can make a real contribution in four key areas—protection of civilians, accountability for serious human rights abuses, promotion of an inclusive and effective peace process firmly centred on the human rights of all the people of Darfur, and ensuring sufficient humanitarian response.

First, the EU and the AU must work together to ensure the swift and effective deployment of the hybrid United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), as requested by the AU Peace Security Council and authorised by the UN Security Council earlier this year.

Deployment of UNAMID fits squarely within the overall framework of EU-AU collaboration on peacekeeping which pledges “adequate, coherent and sustainable support for the establishment and functioning of the African Peace and Security Architecture [...] as well as predictable and flexible funding for African-led peace support operations.” Logistical and financial support for UNAMID from European states must be part of implementing this strategy. On the part of African States, it is encouraging that significant military support has already been offered to UNAMID. There are a variety of obstacles, however, which continue to delay its deployment, including the lack of sufficient enabling personnel and equipment and a stalled channel of engagement with the Government of Sudan.

The success of UNAMID will rest directly on the shoulders of African troops. We call in particular therefore on African Governments to urge Sudan to cooperate with the UN and the AU to ensure an effective and speedy deployment. The deadline set for the transfer of operational command of AMIS by the end of October 2007 has already been missed. Unreasonable objections to contributions should not prevent African soldiers from being adequately supported to do their vital job.

Second, we hope that European and African leaders will use their good offices to ensure that the new round of peace talks will put securing the human rights of all the people of Darfur at their core and include all parties essential to creating a sustainable peace. As security continues to deteriorate throughout Darfur all parties should immediately commit to ending attacks on civilians and agree to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Third, accountability and justice for the people of Darfur is essential to a sustainable solution to the crisis. European and African leaders will meet in Lisbon just days after the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is due to report on the progress of his investigation in Darfur. We call on African and European leaders to urge Sudan to comply with its obligations to cooperate with the Court, in particular with regard to arresting and transferring the two persons for whom ICC arrest warrants have been issued. With combating impunity for serious crime on the continent a core value and objective of the African Union, African States have a particular obligation to ensure that those persons named by the ICC are arrested and brought to justice.

Finally, we exhort European and African leaders to recognize the increasingly difficult circumstances in which humanitarian workers are struggling to respond to the needs of Darfurian civilians. Security in Darfur has further deteriorated since the start of 2007, with targeted attacks on humanitarian workers and assets at the highest levels since the conflict began. As a result, aid workers' ability to reach people is at the lowest point in over three years, and the quality of assistance is suffering enormously. These difficulties are further compounded by arbitrary expulsions of key members of the humanitarian community from Darfur and bureaucratic impediments imposed on international NGOs by the Sudanese Government. The EU and AU must vocally condemn any measures taken that impede this vital humanitarian assistance and prioritise steps to improve humanitarian access, otherwise the consequences could be catastrophic.

We urge you to make Lisbon an occasion to re-double European and African efforts to find a solution to the tragedy of Darfur. To ignore it now would be to turn our back on the people of Darfur.

Yours sincerely,

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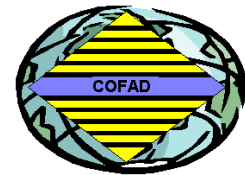
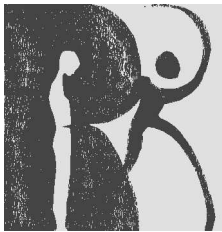


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