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Sudan (Darfur) (2003 -)

As Sudan was on the verge of a negotiated solution to 20-year north-south civil war (see Sudan war profile), violence broke out in the Darfur region in the western part of the country. In early 2003, two loosely allied groups—the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)—launched a series of attacks on government posts in Darfur. The rebels claimed that the country's central government, based in the capital of Khartoum, had systematically discriminated against Darfur's African ethnic groups, who would remain politically and economically marginalized whatever be the outcome of the peace negotiations between Khartoum and rebels in south Sudan.

Darfur is home to approximately seven million people. They belong to more than 30 different ethnic groups, all of whom, like the rulers in Khartoum, are Muslims. Some of Darfur's ethnic groups are "African" and others "Arab." The rebels, based in Darfur's African communities, claim that the central government has supported local Arab militias, known as the *Janjaweed*, who have terrorized the region's non-Arab people.

According to some scholars, the distinction between Darfur's "Arab" and "African" residents achieved its current level of political significance only recently. Centuries of Islamic influence upon the indigenous African population led many to claim Arab ancestry, speak the Arabic language, and embrace Arabic culture. And the nomadic Arabs of Darfur are in many ways culturally closer to their non-Arab neighbors than to the Arab elites of Khartoum.

At the core of the conflict is a struggle for control of political power and economic resources. The largely nomadic Arab ethnic groups often venture into the traditional farming communities—mainly African groups like Fur, Massaleit and the Zaghawa—for water and grazing. At times, this had led to conflicts between the groups.

The *Janjaweed* has engaged in what Human Rights Watch and other observers have described as "ethnic cleansing" of ethnic African groups. Of a population of 7 million people, 1.5 million have been internally displaced, hundreds of thousands have been forced into exile, mainly in neighboring Chad, and it is estimated that more than 100,000 have been killed.

Under international pressure, peace talks between the SLM and the government of Sudan began in September 2003, with the signing of a ceasefire agreement that soon broke down amid mutual recriminations. In 2004 another ceasefire was signed, and African Union troops were deployed to protect ceasefire monitors. In May 2006 the government and the SLM signed a peace accord, but other rebel groups refused to join it. Fighting and population displacements have continued.

Print Resources

Salih, M.A. Mohamed (2005) "Understanding the Conflict in Darfur" Occasional Paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Copenhagen.

Slim, H. (2004) "Dithering over Darfur? A preliminary review of the international response" *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5.

Mahmoud, Mahgoub El-Tigani (2004) "Inside Darfur: Ethnic Genocide by a Governance Crisis" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 24, No. 2.

Online Resources

Human Rights Watch. *Crisis in Darfur*.

Darfur Information.com

Global Security.org

The Darfur Consortium

International Crisis Group. *Crisis in Darfur*.

BBC News. *Country Profile: Sudan*.

Timeline

February 2003 - Fighting breaks out between the rebel groups in Darfur and the government

April 2003 - Refugees begin arriving in eastern Chad

September 2003 - Ceasefire agreement is signed by the government and SLM in order to initiate peace talks

November-December 2003 - Both parties accuse each other of violating the ceasefire agreement; violence escalates

April 2004 - A new ceasefire agreement signed between the government and the SLA and the JEM

July 2004 - The UN promises to help the African Union (AU) quickly deploy ceasefire monitors and to augment humanitarian aid

January 2005 - Peace accord between government and southern Sudan rebels

March 2005 - UN Security Council imposes sanctions against those who violate ceasefire in Darfur

May 2006 - Peace accord signed by government and SLM, but fighting in Darfur continues

October 2006 - Fighting spills over from Darfur into neighboring Chad