

New York, 4 April 2008 - Statement by the Secretary-General marking four years since the first Security Council meeting on Darfur

Four years ago this week, the Security Council first took up the issue of Darfur. The situation remains grim today, as then, if not worse. Violence targeting civilians, including women and girls, continues at alarming levels with no accountability, or end, in sight.

Some 4.27 million civilians, including 2.45 million internally displaced, continue to suffer. As a result of ongoing attacks by armed forces and groups, more than 100,000 civilians have been forced to flee from violence this year alone, at a rate of 1,000 per day. The ongoing conflict risks the lives of civilians and also jeopardizes regional stability. Furthermore, the deterioration of the security situation undermines the deployment of the UN-AU Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and threatens the historic North-South peace agreement, which ended one of Africa's longest and bloodiest wars.

Where humanitarian workers have been able to operate, they have been effective, preventing epidemics and keeping widespread mortality in Darfur below emergency thresholds. There are approximately 14,700 aid workers providing life-saving assistance to those in need. At the same time, these humanitarian staff and their assets have increasingly become targets of armed groups and individuals. The safety and security of humanitarian personnel must be ensured or else we risk rolling back the humanitarian gains of the last four years to emergency levels.

However, humanitarian aid, while necessary, is never the only solution. The international community has spent close to \$1 billion per year during the past three years on humanitarian assistance and recovery operations in Darfur in the hope that peace and development would follow. Resolving the Darfur conflict requires all parties and stakeholders to lay down their arms and commit to a peaceful settlement of the conflict. A peacekeeping operation can be only effective when there is a peace to keep. Pressure must be maintained on all parties to commit to a cessation of hostilities and ultimately a cease-fire and political settlement. While we press forward with the deployment of UNAMID, we will continue to support the joint AU-UN mediation efforts.

Although the Security Council has adopted seven resolutions related to Darfur since 2004, the conflict and suffering of the people of Darfur continue. I call upon all parties and stakeholders to immediately focus on the fundamental requirement for the protection of civilians and the establishment of sustainable peace and stability in Darfur. Four years on, the conflict in Darfur persists at extreme and unacceptable levels. But continued suffering is both unforgivable and preventable, and the potential for peace and progress is great. So let us not dwell on what has been lost in Darfur, but call upon all parties and stakeholders to immediately focus on what can be achieved by ending the hostilities, protecting civilians and coming to the negotiating table in good faith to secure the peace the Darfurians desperately need now.