

United Nations Mission in Sudan
UNMIS

Human Rights Rapporteur concludes visit to Darfur, Khartoum and Port Sudan

The government and rebel movements in Darfur had failed to protect civilians in areas under their control and were violating international human rights and humanitarian law, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Sudan Simar Samar said during a press conference at UNMIS' Khartoum headquarters on 10 March.

"I received reports of killings, sexual violence, arbitrary arrest and detention and impunity for such crimes," said Ms. Samar, who was concluding a visit to the country that began on 27 February and included visits to Port Sudan, Khartoum and Darfur.

The Special Rapporteur said she had visited the village of Abu Suruj in West Darfur, which had been attacked along with Sirba and Silea by Sudanese forces and militia on 8 and 9 February. Serious human rights violations were committed during the attack, notably attacks on civilians, forced displacement and extensive, unjustified destruction of civilian property, she said, requesting an investigation to find those responsible and to bring them to justice.

During a visit to Gereida, South Darfur, she enquired about the case of 19 Massalit men arrested by the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi (SLA/MM) faction who disappeared in September 2006. In October 2006, a mass grave was found containing the remains of some of those who had been arrested.

"I call on the government to investigate and inform the families of the fate of their relatives and bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice," Ms. Samar said.

On a positive note, she said government officials had provided information on steps taken to combat violence against women in Darfur. She encouraged them to focus on prevention and bringing perpetrators to justice as a deterrent to future crimes.

Ms. Samar said she was pleased that the Status of Forces agreement had been signed between the government and UNAMID, which should give freedom of movement to the mission. She also thanked the government for its openness and assistance with her visit.

She expressed "regret", however, that the government did not allow her access to Kajbar, Amri, Meroe and Makabrab in Northern State to meet with local authorities and affected communities in the Nile valley, where two hydropower dams were being constructed.

“The visit was cancelled by the state security committee the day before I was scheduled to travel to the area. The reasons provided by the government did not justify their decision to prevent access,” Ms. Samar said.

The Rapporteur expressed particular concern about lack of accountability for the killings of protestors in Amri and Kajbar in 2005 and 2006. Noting that an investigative committee had been formed and a report submitted to the Minister of Justice, she urged the government to inform the public about the investigation’s finding and prosecute those responsible without delay.

Ms. Samar also visited Kober prison in Khartoum, where she privately interviewed detainees on allegations of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment during pre-trial detention in the custody of National Intelligence and Security Services or police. She called on the government to address allegations of torture and ill-treatment in detention by National Security and in some cases police, and also allow unhindered access to UN human rights officers to places of detention.

In Port Sudan, Ms Samar enquired about the 20 January 2005 massacre that had resulted in 22 deaths, having received information that forces brought to the city to deal with unrest had used excessive force. “Some people were arrested and held for six months without charge after the incident and later released.”

She added that an investigative committee on the incident had taken witness accounts and submitted a report to the Minister of Interior in 2005. “Three years after the event, the families of the victims have not received any information about the outcome of the investigation and no one was brought to justice.”

Ms. Samar noted that the government had provided blood money to 16 of the families, but that six others had refused compensation, preferring prosecution of those responsible for the crime. “They have reportedly suffered intimidation and harassment to force them to accept the blood money.”

During her stay, Ms. Samar met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Under-Secretary for Justice, inter-ministerial committee appointed as a focal point for her visit, Dam Implementation Unit and the National Constitutional Review Commission as well as Human Rights Committee of the National Assembly. She also spoke with the Press Council, governors and local state authorities, representatives of the SLA/MM, UN and UNAMID officials, civil society and victims of human rights violations.