



## World news

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# Darfur returns to chaos after peace deal fails

- Khartoum accused of fomenting divisions
- Aid agencies consider leaving after staff deaths

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*Xan Rice, east Africa correspondent*

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The [Darfur](#) peace agreement is on the verge of collapse with fresh fighting displacing tens of thousands of people and violent attacks on relief workers forcing aid agencies to consider pulling out.

Clashes involving government forces, allied militia and guerrilla factions have forced more than 50,000 people from their homes since the deal was signed three months ago, aid workers said. Most have ended up in overcrowded refugee camps, which are becoming increasingly difficult for aid agencies to reach.

Eight Sudanese humanitarian workers were killed last month, more than in the previous two years. The crisis is so acute that at least one prominent aid agency has flown in a trauma team to counsel staff.

"There is extreme tension across Darfur," said Suliman Baldo, the [Africa](#) programme director for the International Crisis Group, who was in Sudan last week. "The peace deal is on the verge of collapse," he added.

The agreement, signed on May 5, was meant to end the violence that has left more than 180,000 dead and 2 million displaced since the Arab-dominated government began targeting African tribes in February 2003. It now seems clear the deal was deeply, and perhaps fatally, flawed.

Only one of Darfur's rebel groups signed up - a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) led by Minnie Minnawi. Though commanding the strongest force, Mr Minnawi, who hails from the minority Zaghawa tribe, had little support on the ground. Most of the displaced in Darfur are Fur, and trust neither Mr Minnawi, who has been appointed as a special adviser to the president, Omar al-Bashir, nor the government.

Reports suggest Mr Minnawi's troops are receiving help from the government and its proxy Janjaweed militia in fighting rival rebel groups, most of which have splintered and formed new alliances since May. Abdel Wahid, who headed the SLA faction and enjoyed widespread support in the camps, appears to have been toppled by a coalition of field commanders.

The new National Redemption Front now appears the strongest and most active rebel movement. Made up of the Justice and Equality Movement, which also shunned the peace deal, and dissident fighters from both SLA factions, it controls much of north Darfur. On Monday it claimed to have shot down a government Antonov aircraft.

"There is much more violence than everyone expected and the situation has quickly become fluid and complicated again," said Eltayeb Hag Ateya, director of the peace research institute at Khartoum University. "We thought Darfur inter-dialogue may work, but it hasn't and it seems we are in trouble now."

The camps are awash with rumour and suspicion. On July 20, three water and sanitation workers were beaten to death in a camp near Zalingei. With banditry and rebel attacks on the increase, effective aid work is becoming near impossible. Tearfund, Care, Relief International and Oxfam have all had staff killed in recent weeks, and Médecins sans Frontières' vehicles have been repeatedly attacked.

"We cannot drive outside most main towns," said Alun McDonald, a spokesman for Oxfam. As soon as we do, our cars get stolen and our staff beaten up."

The government has become increasingly emboldened. Last week, even as the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, pushed for 18,600 troops to replace the toothless 7,000-strong African Union mission, the government issued several statements rejecting any intervention.

The status quo suits Khartoum, said Mr Baldo. "All along, the government has been very actively promoting ethnic divisions and splintering the rebel groups to try to vindicate its claim that the Darfur crisis was always just a tribal problem," he said. "It's really Machiavellian."

Main rebel groups:

SLA (Minnawi) The only faction to have signed the peace deal. Leader Minnie Minnawi is special adviser to the government

SLA (Wahid) Opposed to the peace deal. Its former leader Abdel Wahid appears to have been toppled by field commanders. Strong support in refugee camps

National Redemption Front Comprises the Justice and Equality Movement, former commanders from both SLA factions, and the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance. Against the peace deal

G19 Dissident rebels once under Wahid. Against the peace deal and aligned to National Redemption Front. Popular and active in north Darfur

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