

ICC Prosecutor Seeks Charges Against Sudanese President for Darfur Crimes

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Three years after the United Nations Security Council requested him to investigate atrocities committed in Darfur, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court today presented evidence against Sudan's President for alleged war crimes in the strife-torn region, including genocide. ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo is seeking an arrest warrant for President Omar Al-Bashir, who he believes "bears criminal responsibility in relation to 10 counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes," according to a news release issued by the Court.

An estimated 300,000 people have died in Darfur, either through direct combat or because of disease, malnutrition or reduced life expectancy, over the past five years in Darfur, where rebels have been fighting Government forces and allied Arab militiamen, known as the Janjaweed, since 2003. "His motives were largely political. His alibi was a 'counterinsurgency.' His intent was genocide," Mr. Moreno-Ocampo said.

The evidence presented today at the ICC, which is based in The Hague, shows that Mr. Al-Bashir masterminded and implemented a plan to destroy in substantial part the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa groups, on account of their ethnicity. Mr. Moreno-Ocampo says that for over five years, armed forces and the Janjaweed attacked and destroyed villages on Mr. Al-Bashir's orders. They also uprooted millions of civilians from their lands, killed the men and raped the women. "I don't have the luxury to look away. I have evidence," the Prosecutor said.

The President's intent to commit genocide became clear, according to the Prosecutor, with well coordinated attacks on the nearly 2.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in camps. Instead of helping the people of Darfur, Mr. Al-Bashir "mobilised the entire State apparatus, including the armed forces, the intelligence services, the diplomatic and public information bureaucracies, and the justice system," in carrying out his campaign of violence. "They all report to him, they all obey him. His control is absolute," the Prosecutor added.

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The Court's Pre-Trial Chamber will now review the evidence presented and decide whether to issue an arrest warrant for Mr. Al-Bashir. If indicted, the Sudanese President would become the first sitting Head of State to be charged by the ICC. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has emphasized that the Court is an independent institution and that he does not have any influence on the ICC Prosecutor, a point he reiterated to Mr. Al-Bashir in a telephone conversation with the Sudanese President on Saturday. In a statement issued today, the UN said its peacekeeping operations in Sudan will continue to carry out their functions in an impartial manner, "cooperating in good faith with all partners so as to further the goal of peace and stability in the country." The world body will also continue its vital humanitarian and development work there.

"The Secretary-General expects that the Government of Sudan will continue to cooperate fully with the United Nations in Sudan, while fulfilling its obligation to ensure the safety and security of all United Nations personnel and property," the statement added. In addition to the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), a joint UN-African Union force – known as UNAMID – has been in place since the beginning of this year to try to end the violence in Darfur, which has uprooted some 2.7 million people, many of whom are living across the border in eastern Chad.

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