

Africa Regional Update

Embargo: 0501 hrs (GMT) 28 May 2008

Annual Report 2008 - Africa Regional Update Selected events covering the period from January to April 2008

The situation for human rights defenders remained precarious, as illustrated by the case of Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie in Ethiopia. The men – believed by Amnesty International to be prisoners of conscience – had been detained since November 2005 and were only finally released in March 2008. Some positive movement in the region on impunity in the DRC, was offset by escalating levels of violence in various armed conflicts. Massive unrest and human rights violations were sparked by elections.

People under fire

All parties to the conflict in **Somalia** continue to abuse human rights and violate international humanitarian law. Torture and other ill-treatment, rape, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, and attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure persist unchecked. On 14 March 2008 the UN Secretary General presented his report to the UN Security Council, outlining the status of contingency planning for the possible deployment of a United Nations

.../2

CANADIAN SECTION

National Office: 312 Laurier Avenue East, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 1H9 Tel: (613) 744-7667 Fax (613) 746-2411 E-mail: info@amnesty.ca
Web site: www.amnesty.ca

Toronto Office: 14 Dundonald Street, Toronto, Ontario, M4Y 1K2 Tel: (416) 363-9933 Fax (416) 363-3103 E-mail: toronto@amnesty.ca

Pacific Regional Office: 319 W Pender St. Ste. 490, Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1T4 Tel: (604) 294-5160 Fax: (604) 294-5130 E-mail: pro@amnesty.ca

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (AI) is a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights

AI's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

In pursuit of this vision, AI's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC), UNESCO and the Council of Europe, and has cooperative relations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States.

peacekeeping operation to take over from AMISOM. On 29 April the arms embargo on Somalia was extended by the UN Security Council.

On 1 February 2008, armed opposition groups in **Chad** launched a major offensive on N'Djamena and heavy fighting lasted for three days. Hundreds of civilian casualties have been reported and thousands of people fled the capital to neighbouring Cameroon. In the aftermath of this attack, members of political opposition parties, journalists, as well as human rights defenders have been harassed and persecuted by the Chadian authorities. In addition, extrajudicial executions, sexual violence and forced evictions have also been reported in N'Djamena.

Armed conflict, including inter-communal clashes, continued in **eastern Chad** and around 9,000 new Sudanese refugees fled to eastern Chad in February, following attacks of the Sudanese army on villages in Darfur.

The situation in **Darfur** remains highly unstable. In February, the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF) launched a military campaign on the villages of Sirba, Abu Suruj, Silia and Saraf Jidadand in the northern corridor of West Darfur following the occupation of the corridor by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). More than 115 people died and more than 30 000 were forcibly displaced. There were also several clashes between the government forces and the JEM, and two attacks by Janjaweed militias on villages in North Darfur. On 10 May JEM forces reportedly attacked a military airbase close to Khartoum and military operations took place in Omdurman – Khartoum. Scores of people associated with the (armed) opposition were arrested following the attack.

UNAMID's intervention has, so far, been limited and its impact unnoticeable. Its forces lack essential military equipment as well as logistics. As of 31 March 2008, the UNAMID strength was at 9,213 total uniformed personnel, including 137 military observers, and supported by 129 UN Volunteers.

The tension between different parties in Abyei, **Sudan**, has lately reached a new height with the arrival of the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) administrator, Edward Lino. The National Congress Party (NCP) accused the SPLM of having breached the North-South agreement by unilaterally appointing a governor. Both the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) and the northern Sudan Armed Forces have since been exchanging accusations of building-up their troops.

The situation in North-Kivu in the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** remained extremely tense despite the staging of the Kivu Peace Conference and the signing by Congolese armed groups in the Kivus of an "Act of Engagement" on 23 January 2008. The Act of Engagement, which was brokered by the international community (US, EU and AU), committed the armed groups to respecting an immediate ceasefire and immediately ending all acts of violence against civilians and the recruitment of children. An AI mission to North-Kivu in February found evidence, however, of continuing widespread recruitment and use of children by the armed groups and illegal detention and ill-treatment of captured child soldiers by government forces. The mission also confirmed that widespread sexual violence, killings of civilians, torture and ill-treatment and other grave violations by all armed forces in the province are continuing.

Scores of people were killed in the course of government security force operations to restore order in Bas-Congo province in February and March. The continuing unrest in Bas-Congo seems to derive directly from the failure of the state authorities to investigate and prosecute previous acts of excessive use of force and extrajudicial executions by security forces in the province in January 2007.

Elections fuelling violence

More than 1,000 people are reported to have died in **Kenya** through politically motivated ethnic violence and associated police killings following the disputed presidential and parliamentary elections on 30 December 2007. The UN estimated that more than 500,000 people were displaced – thousands remain so. About 12,000 are reported to have crossed into neighbouring Uganda as refugees. The violence has since abated following the African Union-supported political mediation that was led by the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and a government of national unity has been formed.

One month after the March general election in **Zimbabwe**, the country's electoral commission (ZEC) had still not released the results. The post-election period saw an increase in retributive violence – mainly against supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). It appeared to be targeted in rural areas and low-income suburbs where the MDC reportedly won more support than the ruling ZANU-PF party. By the end of April more than 500 people had been treated for injuries sustained after being tortured, beaten or having their homes burnt down.

On 25 April, police raided the office of the MDC in Harare. More than 300 people were arrested, including those who had taken refuge from the violence perpetrated by ZANU-PF supporters and soldiers. About 215 people – among them 35 children, the oldest of whom was 11 – were taken to Harare Central police station. About 180 of those arrested have since been released after the MDC obtained an order from the High Court for their immediate release on 28 April. Police allege that some of the detainees had committed acts of violence in rural areas and fled to Harare.

About 25 other MDC supporters were arrested on allegations of committing acts of violence after the MDC called for a general strike on 15 April to protest the delay in announcing the election results.

Human rights defenders

The violence has intensified the constant fear of arrest for human rights defenders in **Zimbabwe**. Several journalists were arrested during the post election period and detained for several days. On 25 April, police officers from the Zimbabwe Republic Police's Criminal Investigations Department (CID) raided the offices of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), with a search warrant for "subversive material likely to cause the overthrow of a constitutionally-elected government". ZESN believes the harassment is an attempt to incapacitate the organization so it cannot observe a run-off of the presidential election.

International justice / impunity

Mathieu Ngudjolo was surrendered to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in February on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Ituri district of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** in 2002 and 2003. There are now three ICC suspects in custody in The Hague (all of them commanders of Ituri armed groups). In April a fourth indictment, against Bosco Ntaganda, was unsealed by the ICC. He is indicted on charges of recruitment and use of child soldiers in Ituri between July 2002 and December 2003. Bosco Ntaganda is still at large, and is serving as senior commander with Laurent Nkunda's *Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple* armed group in North-Kivu, which is also accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.