



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION BULLETIN

SUDAN

THE JUSTICE AND EQUALITY MOVEMENT (JEM) ATTACK ON OMDURMAN – 10 MAY 2008

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Preface

- i This Country of Origin Information Bulletin (COI Bulletin) has been produced by the Country of Origin Service (COIS), UK Border Agency (UKBA). It is intended to give a brief overview of events in Sudan during the period 10 May to 24 June 2008.
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- iii The Bulletin is not intended to be a comprehensive survey. For a more detailed account, the relevant source documents should be examined directly. The Bulletin should be read in conjunction with the existing COI Report on Sudan.
- iv The Bulletin and the accompanying source material are publicly disclosable. Where sources identified in the COI Bulletin are available in electronic form the relevant link has been included.

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Events in Omdurman on 10 May 2008

1. 10 May – The Darfur rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), launched an armed attack on Omdurman, one of the three towns that form greater Khartoum. [1a] (Human Rights Watch, 17 June 2008) On 10 May, BBC News also reported of the incident, and stated “Sudanese troops have clashed with rebels from Darfur outside the capital, Khartoum, reports say, prompting an overnight curfew in the city.” [2a]
2. On 11 May, BBC News reported that: “Sudan says it has cut off diplomatic relations with Chad, blaming it for helping rebels from Darfur to launch an attack on Sudan’s capital, Khartoum. Both Chad and Jem rebels deny working together to launch the assault on the Khartoum suburb of Omdurman, which the rebels say they have taken control of. The government said the rebel advance, the closest they have come to Khartoum, had been defeated.” The report added that an overnight curfew imposed on Khartoum had been lifted, although not in Omdurman. [2b]
3. On 12 May, Relief Web gave a full account of the situation as follows:
 - On 10 May 2008, rebels of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) launched an assault on Omdurman, a western suburb of Khartoum. Omdurman, situated across the Nile from Khartoum proper, is part of the capital's greater metropolitan area.
 - This was the first time a Darfur rebel group had staged an attack on the capital. Government forces defeated the rebels, but their attack highlighted a number of concerns for the government and the wider political situation in Sudan.
 - The attack, the report noted “... was never going to succeed in toppling the government by force. However, it succeeded to the extent that it presented an audacious and symbolic challenge to the government's control of the capital” the objective being “... to send a warning to the government and a wider audience, and to test the strength and loyalty of the army and security forces in the capital. JEM has previously staged small attacks outside Darfur, on targets in Western and Northern Kordofan, and it has always held a stronger interest in political change in Khartoum than has the mainstream Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A).”
 - Small groups of vehicles were used to cross from Northern Darfur through Northern Kordofan, “... a sparsely inhabited semi-desert region, during May 8-9.
 - In fighting, “... a small JEM group first tried to attack the Wadi Saidnaya air-force base, about 21 kilometres north of Omdurman (on the west bank of the Nile). After the attack was repelled the rebels drove into Omdurman, where they were eventually stopped by government forces backed up by helicopters.”
 - The report noted that in the aftermath of the attack, each side made a number of claims and counterclaims, and that “... Khartoum has taken a series of practical measures in an attempt to reassert its control of the situation.”
 - Furthermore, during and after the attack, the government made a number of arrests, including some army officers and Darfurians suspected of having facilitated the rebel attack.
 - The report continued that JEM officials denied the extent of the casualties Khartoum claimed to have inflicted on them, noting that the JEM said that they were ready to attack again.

- The likelihood of other such attacks in the future, the report noted, was dependent on what the government and the JEM did in the coming weeks and months.
 - “Khartoum. Bashir and his government cannot afford to look weak on their own doorstep, especially seeing that they face hostility from many groups. In the near term, Khartoum is therefore likely to step up its military attacks on JEM targets in Darfur, perhaps backing this up by cross-border actions in Chad. At the same time, it is likely to tighten its monitoring of the army and security in and around the capital.”
 - Such an attack was deemed as highly risky for the JEM and therefore “... it may bide its time before attempting further such attacks. However, its ability and interest to carry out attacks outside Darfur is not in doubt.”
 - The implications were deemed to be great for Darfur and also the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).
 - In terms of peace-making, the report stated that “... efforts for Darfur have been adrift for more than a year and have played into the interests of hardliners in Khartoum. However, the attack illustrates the danger of waiting for an effective peace agreement between Chad and Sudan before seeking an effective peace agreement for Darfur. The attack also illustrates the problem of underestimating the JEM and treating it as merely one of a number of rebel factions in Darfur. As a consequence of the current approach, it is now more difficult to resolve the conflict peacefully than it was before.”
 - In relation to the implications for the CPA “... the attack illustrates how much is still at stake in domestic politics, despite formal dominance of the NCP [National Congress Party] and its junior partner in the Government of National Unity, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). With elections due some time in 2009, a wide range of options are on the table for the parties. The SPLM is wary of the possibility of the NCP making an alliance to its disadvantage, before the elections. The Umma Party, the Democratic Unionist Party and the PNC [Popular National Congress] also have yet to decide how to approach the planned elections and are watching each other's behaviour.”
 - The outlook for the JEM is that the “... attack illustrates that JEM – in common with the mainstream [Sudan Liberation Movement/Army] SLM/A – will need to be part of any eventual effective settlement of the Darfur conflict, whether that is through a peace agreement, a new political alliance, or another arrangement. The failure to include JEM in the peace process has left the movement free to pursue its agenda unilaterally, thereby adding to the threats facing the CPA. The key benefits that a peaceful settlement would bring would be to improve the situation of displaced Darfurians and reduce the probability of an outcome to the conflict which jeopardised the CPA.”
 - In conclusion, the report stated that “JEM's assault on Khartoum did not threaten the government's control militarily. Nevertheless, it illustrates the danger that until JEM – and the mainstream SLM/A – have reached a peaceful settlement, the threat remains both to security and to the CPA.” [3]
4. Amnesty International reported on 23 May that the organisation was seriously concerned by the government's security forces' crackdown following the attack on Khartoum by the JEM. “The crackdown has been characterized by serious human rights violations including hundreds of arbitrary arrests, cases of ill-treatment, as well as extra-judicial executions. These violations have mostly been targeted at Darfuris.” [4a]

5. On 23 May, Amnesty International also reported on the arrests of several Darfurians in Khartoum over the previous two weeks accused of supporting the JEM. "Many of those arrested are reported to be held incommunicado in national security detention facilities in the capital or at unknown locations. All the detainees are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment, and may even be killed or subjected to enforced disappearance by the authorities." [4b]
6. The same source reported that:

"On 9 May, police and National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) agents in Khartoum began arresting people whom they accuse of supporting the armed opposition group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The JEM has been fighting Sudanese government forces in Darfur since 2003, and on 10 May 2008 launched an attack on Khartoum for the first time. Eyewitnesses claim that the arrests were arbitrary, merely on the basis of people's Darfuri origin, ethnicity or physical resemblance, or on suspicion of having provided shelter to JEM members. Excessive use of force was reported during many arrests." [4b]
7. Likewise, on 26 May, IRIN News reported on the attacks, stating "Several human rights organisations have accused Sudan authorities of arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial executions and ill-treatment of detainees following the 10 May rebel attack on Sudan's capital. In separate statements released since the attack, human rights watchdogs accused the Sudanese government of ethnic profiling during the arrests that followed the withdrawal of rebel forces." [5]
8. On 17 June, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that a number of people from Darfur had been held incommunicado since the JEM attack. Georgette Gagnon, Africa director at HRW was quoted as saying "Hundreds of people in Khartoum have been rounded up because they are from Darfur, and brutally beaten and thrown into overcrowded jails where some have died... The Sudanese authorities should account for every individual and charge them with a cognizable crime or immediately release them." [1b]
10. In their report, Crackdown in Khartoum, dated 17 June 2008, HRW reported on the Government's response to the JEM attacks:

"In the weeks following the JEM attack, Sudanese authorities have arrested hundreds of individuals. Human Rights Watch interviews with released detainees and family members of those still unaccounted for has produced a list of more than 200 names of people detained by NISS during this time. Some former detainees estimate the total number may be as high as 3,000. NISS officers arrested men, women and children in house-to-house searches, on public transport, on the street, and at checkpoints set up by police and security forces around Khartoum." [1a] (p14, Arbitrary Arrest and Detention)
11. The report added "Accounts from local residents indicate that the vast majority of those detained were individuals who are or appear to be from Darfuri ethnic groups, mainly the Zaghawa ethnic group, which form the majority within JEM." [1a] (p14, Arbitrary Arrest and Detention)
12. HRW further reported that "According to Sudanese government statements, 89 children were amongst those arrested following the May 10 attack. Pictures purported to be of JEM captives were shown on May 11 on the state television.

Most of them showed signs of being beaten, and some appeared to be under 18 years of age.” [1a] (p21, Detention of Children)

13. The HRW report also described the prison conditions for those detained:

“Those in the military prison told Human Rights Watch that they were held in severely overcrowded cells. The prison is described as being composed of several buildings. In one of the buildings, the area was divided into around ten cells each measuring 8 by 12 meters with around 200 people in each cell, allowing no space to lie down. The cells did not have sanitation except for a few buckets. Detainees received water once a day and sometimes not at all; daytime temperatures in Khartoum regularly reach over 40 degrees Celsius at this time of year. Detainees released from Karrari report that in the days immediately following the attack prisoners were dying at the rate of approximately two per day because of beatings by NISS officers, poor conditions of detention or lack of medical attention.” [1a] (p20, Inhumane conditions in detention)
14. HRW reported on the Sudanese Justice Minister, Abdul-Basit Sabdarat, briefing to Parliament made on 9 June, where he announced that “... trials will begin within a week to prosecute some of those accused of taking part in the JEM attacks. In his briefing, Sabdarat outlined that five Special Courts were set up to try the first of 57 of 197 defendants currently in his custody under the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Act at the first instance.” [1a] (p23, Fair Trial)
15. HRW continued:

“A human rights lawyer told Human Rights Watch ‘According to [the Justice Minister’s] statement, the trials are reportedly due to start in less than a week. However, we do not know what the Special Courts’ structures are or who will preside over them. We haven’t even been given the name of the defendant’s, let alone been allowed to meet them.’ Among the necessary criteria necessary to ensure a fair trial is the right to have the adequate time and facilities to prepare one’s defense.” [1a] (p23, Fair Trial)
16. HRW in a report dated 25 June 2008 ‘Sudan: End Unfair Trials’ stated that the Anti-Terrorism Special Courts set up by the Sudanese government to try individuals accused of participating in the 10 May attack, did not meet minimum international standards. [1c]
17. The HRW report went on to state that the trials of 36 people had begun simultaneously on 18 June, 2008 in three special courts in Omdurman, Khartoum North, and Khartoum; and that lawyers for some of the 36 defendants complained that they had limited or no access to their clients, forcing some lawyers to withdraw. The report also stated that at the Special Court in Khartoum, the judge refused defence lawyers access to their clients and assigned the cases to legal aid lawyers, while another Special Court removed the defendants right against self-incrimination, contrary to international law. [1c]
18. On 19 June Amnesty International (AI) reported on the arrest of the family of a lawyer (already arrested on 14 May) suspected of being involved with the JEM attack on 11 May 2008. AI reported that “Zubeida Sandal Hajjar, her nine-month-old son Hashem Abdel Shakour Haslem, and her sister Zahra Sandal Hajjar were arrested by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS)

in Khartoum on 8 June. They are believed to be held incommunicado in a NISS detention centre, where they are at risk of torture, ill treatment or enforced disappearance.” [4c]

19. AI continued:

“Zubeida Sandal Hajjar's husband is Abdel Shakour Hashim Derar, a lawyer and member of the Darfur Bar Association. He was arrested by the NISS in Khartoum on 14 May, on suspicion of involvement in a military attack on Khartoum by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a Darfurian armed opposition group. He is being held incommunicado at an unknown location. The two women are also sisters of a JEM commander, Suleiman Sandal Hajjar. On 8 June, a group of plain-clothed NISS agents went to Zubeida Sandal Hajjar's house in Khartoum and asked her to go with them, telling her that her husband wanted to see their nine-month-old son. Zubeida Sandal Hajjar took the baby with her, and asked her sister Zahra Sandal Hajjar to accompany them. The three have not been seen since. On 11 June, a relative visited the NISS Headquarter in the capital to inquire about their whereabouts but NISS indicated that "we do not have any information about them". [4c]

20. The AI report added “However, Amnesty International has learned from human rights activists that the three were seen by former detainees in a NISS detention facility in North Khartoum, where they were reportedly held incommunicado. It is feared that the two women and the infant have been taken into custody as a way to put pressure on Abdel Shakour Hashim Derar or to extract information on their brother.” [4c]

21. A letter received from the FCO on 22 July 2008 stated that the exact numbers of detainees was impossible to verify as there was no access to places of detention in Khartoum, but that the FCO understood that a number of detainees had since been released, but others (reports indicate 450) remained in custody, with reports continuing to arrive of further detentions. The letter went on to say that the FCO had also heard allegations of torture, mistreatment and inhumane detention conditions. [6]

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