



February 2008

**Briefing Paper and Position Statement:
United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)
Australia’s Contribution and the need for Helicopters**

In 2007 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1769 authorised the deployment of the United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). This mission has the potential to contribute to the protection of innocent civilians, safeguard the world’s largest humanitarian operation and assist in the facilitation of a meaningful negotiation for enduring peace.

In addition to the ongoing obstructions placed in the way of UNAMID’s full deployment by the Government of Sudan, the mission has been further delayed by the failure of United Nations (UN) member states to contribute air transportation units. There is now a real danger that UNAMID could be rendered as ineffective as its predecessor, the similarly under resourced African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). A month after taking over from AMIS, the joint mission has a mere 9,000 people on the ground – a fraction of its full strength of 26,000 personnel promised for the operation. The UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, recently indicated that the operation is now not expected to be fully deployed for the best part of 2008¹. Given this, the speedy provision of essential equipment, especially helicopters, is critical to UNAMID’s success.

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has estimated that UNAMID is in desperate need of a small number of helicopter and transportation companies. Specifically, the DPKO requires three Medium Utility Helicopter Wings and one Light Tactical Helicopter Wing (totalling 18 transport and six attack helicopters, with associated troops) and two Medium Heavy Transportation Companies².

These helicopters and transportation units are critical for UNAMID to perform its duty and protect the people of Darfur. The force is operating in a hostile desert environment the size of France, with only dirt tracks between major towns. Helicopters are essential due to their rapid-response capabilities, and to ensure the peacekeepers can reach all areas. They can also assist the distribution of aid and play a positive role in the protection of civilians. Without these units UNAMID cannot fulfil its mission. As Jean-Marie Guéhenno recently asked;

”Do we move ahead with the deployment of a force that will not make a difference, that will not have the capacity to defend itself and that comes at the

¹ “Sudan peacekeeping mission delayed until year’s end: UN”, 29 January 2008, Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/01/29/2148637.htm?section=world>

² Report of the Secretary-General on the deployment of the African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2007/653), 27th November 2007.

risk of humiliation of the Security Council and the United Nations and tragic failure for the people of Darfur?”³

In June 2007, the UN made a formal request to Australia to contribute to peacekeeping operations in Darfur.⁴ Furthermore, less than a month before the force was due to deploy, the UN Secretary-General personally contacted every potential helicopter contributor, including Australia, “to no avail”⁵.

In August last year, nine Labor Senators and MP’s including Martin Ferguson, Lindsay Tanner, Annette Hurley, Linda Kirk and Gavin Marshall indicated in a letter to DAN that:

“Labor does believe that Australia should contribute to a United Nations mission in Darfur. Labor will seek the advice of our Defence Force as to an appropriate contribution consistent with Australia’s national security priorities.”

In our letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs dated 29 November 2007, DAN requested that Minister Smith “consult with the ADF and consider your position on (Australia’s) contribution to UNAMID”. Writing on behalf of the Minister on 21 December 2007, Ms Rowena Thompson replied that in regard to

“any specific contribution Australia might make on top of its existing contributions to the UN Mission in Sudan (UNAMIS) overseeing implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, **this will be a matter for consideration by the government at the time of any future request by the UN.**”

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has recently confirmed the well publicised fact that **there is still an open request for helicopters and transportation units, with or without the accompanying personnel.** The Department has also informed us that the need is currently greater than ever, following the withdrawal of several specialist units, such as those from Mali and Jordan, after their failure to meet minimum technical requirements. On 5th February Ethiopia offered the use of three attack and two transport helicopters, of which only some are seen as suitable. Bangladesh also promised several helicopters but these did not meet UN requirements as they have inadequate range and are unable to fly at night.⁶

It seems that Australia is in an ideal position to significantly contribute to the Darfur peacekeeping operation through the provision of helicopters. A recent paper by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute concluded that while the Australian Defence Force is busy, it is not overstretched⁷. **Of their 34 Black Hawk, 41 Kiowa, 25 Iroquois, 6 Chinook and 6 Tiger helicopters, only 8 Black Hawk and 4 Kiowa are currently deployed offshore.**⁸

³ Ibid, p.8

⁴ Stewart, C., “Australia rejects UN plea for Darfur help”, 15th June 2007. Available: <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,21909345-2,00.html>

⁵ “UN chief warns that without 24 helicopters new Darfur peacekeeping force is at risk”, International Herald Tribune, 7th December 2007. Available: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/12/07/news/UN-GEN-UN-Secretary-General-Darfur.php>

⁶ Worsnip, P., “UN officials prefer Ethiopia to Bangladesh copters” 7th February 2007. Available: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N07402340.htm>

⁷ Thomson, M., “The final straw: Are our defence forces overstretched?”, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, May 2007.

⁸ Ibid.

As noted by Robert McClelland in an interview on the 3rd August 2007, it is important that Australia make a contribution to the peacekeeping efforts. McClelland stated that;

“We would certainly provide assistance to the international mission in Darfur... there unquestionably would be a range of resources that we would look at where it be in the nature of air traffic resources, whether it be in air transport resources, whether it be in logistical support, whether it be in medical capacity with medical reservists. These are things we would certainly be prepared to look at and explore to deploy”⁹.

It is within Australia’s current capacity to assist UNAMID by contributing four Chinook transport helicopters as well as two Black Hawk assault helicopters. In addition, the AFP International Deployment Group could easily expand existing deployments to Sudan, making a further contribution to UNAMID’s police contingent.

These measures, in conjunction with ongoing humanitarian support, will help Australia, as a member of the international community, to fulfil its responsibility to protect the citizens of Darfur from ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. A small contribution to the force, in the form of air assets and logistical support would serve as a powerful symbol of Australia’s commitment to multilateral, international peacekeeping efforts.

For more information please contact:

Darfur Australia Network
www.darfuraustralia.org
PO Box 1249, Collingwood, VIC, 3066
0432 144 128
contact@darfuraustralia.org

⁹ Doorstop interview with Robert McClelland, 3rd August 2007. Available: <http://www.alp.org.au/media/0807/dsifa030.php>