



BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT: REBEL MOVEMENTS

From the beginning of the Darfur conflict, the rebel movement has been split between the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The SLM/A were supported by the Fur, the largest of the black Muslim tribes in Darfur, as well as the Zaghawa and Masaleet tribes. The JEM is a smaller, mostly Zaghawa operation, made up of Islamists.

Today, the Darfur rebel movement has split from two groups to more than fifteen, many of which are little more than armed bandits.

THE ORIGINAL DARFUR REBEL MOVEMENT

The main two groups fighting in Sudan's Darfur region - the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the larger Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) - have very different ideas and aims.

The Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA)

The Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) is backed by Eritrea. Until 2003, the group was known as the Darfur Liberation Front. The Darfur Liberation Army announced no connection with the Southern rebels, but it called in the middle of March 2003 for "an understanding" with the opposition forces which fight the Islamic government in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

In March 2003 the Darfur Liberation Front announced it had brought down a helicopter that was carrying an official. Later that month, the Darfur Liberation Front announced that the movement would be called the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLM/SLA).

The Darfur Liberation Front wanted Darfur to be politically separate from Sudan. The SLM/A issued statements that it does not want independence, but does want more self-governance and a fairer share of resources from the main government authorities¹.

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) is said to be backed by a Sudanese opposition leader, Hassan al-Turabi².

¹ "The objective of the SLA is to create a united democratic Sudan....Sudan's unity must therefore ultimately be based on the right to self-determination and the free will of the various peoples of Sudan... on an economy and a political system that address the uneven development and marginalization that have plagued the country since independence," SLA Secretary-General Minni Arkou Minnawi, Political Declaration.

² Turabi, the former speaker of Sudan's parliament and the ideologist of its Islamist revolution, was removed from office in May 2000 and imprisoned by Sudan's military. During the late 1970s he had worked with Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the Mahdist political party and grandson of The Mahdi.

In 1989 President Omar al-Bashir overthrew the government of Sadeq al-Mahdi. The coup was backed by the National Islamic Front of Islamist leader Hassan al-Turabi. Mr Turabi became a leading figure of the new government and was seen as the power behind the throne. Mr Turabi went out of his way to offer African Muslims from peripheral regions of Sudan, like Darfur, a means of obtaining a share of power.

In 1999 Mr Turabi was involved in a showdown with President al-Bashir, when he introduced a bill into the national assembly reducing the powers of the presidency. Mr Bashir reacted by dissolving the assembly and declaring a state of emergency. He also removed Mr Turabi's supporters from the government. It was the African Muslims from Darfur who were removed at this time who went on to found JEM.

Other rebel groups

Other rebel groups in the region, some little more than armed bandits, only serve to complicate matters further. They include the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA), led by a former governor from the Fur tribe; the National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD), which is an off-shoot of JEM; and new groups such as the Popular Forces Troops and the Sudan Democratic Group. However, it is unlikely that these groups have much support.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORIGINAL REBEL GROUPS

On April 8, 2004, the first cease-fire agreement between the Darfur rebels and the government was signed in Chad, allowing African Union observers into the region (in order to help keep the peace).

The Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA)

On November 7, 2005 in Kenya, the Sudan Liberation Movement was permanently separated from the Sudan Liberation Army. In May 2006, Minni Minnawi, a leader of the SLM, signed a peace deal with Sudan, and officially joined the government in Khartoum. Most of Minnawi's commanders deserted him when he left for Khartoum. There are a number of groups that have split off from the original SLM, such as SLM-Classic, SLM-Unity, and Group of 19 (G19).

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)

JEM has a few alliances with members of G19, but after JEM scored some strategic victories in 2006, disagreements over the rewards caused an end to the relationship. This caused some JEM commanders to head out on their own. Some of these JEM members have pursued closer ties with the government. Smaller groups have split off from JEM as well, such as the JEM-Eastern Command.

On May 10, 2008, JEM launched an armed attack on Omdurman, one of the 3 towns that form greater Khartoum. This was first time that a rebel group has engaged government forces near the capital, marking an escalation in the Darfur conflict.

JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim Muhammad published *The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in the Sudan*, which accuses Arabs of having an unfair amount of representation at the top levels of government and administration.

Although JEM and SLA come from different backgrounds, they have managed to co-operate in their fight against the government and the Arab militia, the Janjaweed. But they have kept their separate identities and this has led to tensions. While the Sudanese Liberation Army is a member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a group of opposition organisations, the Justice and Equality Movement is not.