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The humanitarian crisis in Darfur

Opinion¹
Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee
Rapporteur: Mr Michael HANCOCK, United Kingdom, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

I. Conclusions of the Committee

1. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee would like to thank the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population for its excellent report, on which it is to be congratulated. However, it finds it regrettable that this topic is only now being debated given that the hostilities and the resultant crisis began in February 2003 in a region which is one of the poorest in Sudan.
2. The Social Affairs Committee would also like to welcome the decision taken on 1 August by the Security Council to deploy a joint UN-African Union force in the Sudanese province to bring the massacres in Darfur to an end.
3. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee fully endorses the recommendations put forward by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, but wishes to lay special emphasis not only on the particularly deplorable situation in the refugee camps, which is contrary to the principles of human dignity, but also on the situation of women and children.

II. Explanatory memorandum by the Rapporteur

4. As the Migration Committee so rightly points out, Darfur has, since the start of hostilities in February 2003, become the scene of a severe humanitarian crisis. The Social Affairs Committee takes this opportunity to pay tribute to the courage of the humanitarian organisations which have had to contend with both practical difficulties and insecurity.
5. Quite apart from the humanitarian crisis, the Social Affairs Committee would like to draw the international community's attention to the deplorable health conditions in which the refugees have to live. According to a WHO survey, a large number of children have died as a result of the unhygienic conditions (unsafe water, poor sanitation, lack of first aid, malaria, etc).
6. With particular reference to the situation of children, the Committee appeals to all parties in the conflict to ensure that children under the age of 18 are not enlisted and asks the authorities concerned to protect displaced children, especially unaccompanied minors, as provided for in the relevant conventions. According to some NGOs on the ground, it is not uncommon to see rebels seeking children to recruit them as combatants and also to use them as sex slaves.

¹ See Doc. 11355 tabled by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population.

7. In this context, the Committee points out that more than two and a half million people live in the camps which are mainly located around the large towns and cities. Most of these camps are vastly overcrowded and security is getting worse and worse. Armed men frequently manage to enter the camps to attack civilians and humanitarian workers. Because of this lack of security and the growing difficulties experienced in carrying out humanitarian operations, it is feared that there will be an upsurge in disease and malnutrition, which will prove fatal for the most vulnerable.

8. Accordingly, the Committee cannot but lend its support to the Migration Committee's appeal to the Sudanese government to put an end to all forms of violence and the blockade of relief operations.

9. The Social Affairs Committee is at one with the Migration Committee in condemning the instances of rape, used as a weapon of war, of which there have been thousands of victims, particularly given that almost 80% of all refugees are women and children. But even more serious, according to some NGOs working in the region is the stress and frustration which have given rise to sexual violence among the male refugees themselves. In order to protect their daughters, it would seem that parents prefer to marry them off and most girls who dare to oppose a forced marriage are killed.

10. Sadly, the situation has also led to the majority of children, and especially girls, having to work in the camps and therefore no longer attending school. As a matter of urgency, therefore, all the players in the region must ensure that children of school age can have a school education and to this end must take all the necessary measures to ensure their safety.

III. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

11. After paragraph 10.3 add the following sub-paragraph:

- asks all parties not to enlist in their troops children under the age of 18 and calls on the Sudanese authorities to take all the necessary steps to protect displaced children, especially unaccompanied minors, in accordance with the conventions in force.

12. After paragraph 12.4, add the following sub-paragraphs:

- strengthen security in the refugee camps;
- take the necessary steps to ensure that children, and especially girls, can pursue their education.

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Reporting Committee: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population

Committee for opinion: Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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