

Dr. Luís Filipe Marques Amado
President of the
Council of Ministers of the European Union

13 September 2007
Ref: B699

Dear Dr Amado,

Subject : Visit of Sudanese President Bashir to Italy on 14 September

The human rights situation in Sudan continues to be one of the most pressing humanitarian crises in the world today, and one to which the international community has failed for far too long to provide an effective response. Ahead of the April 2007 GAERC meeting, Amnesty International wrote to the then German Presidency to express concern about the EU's inaction in the face of the ongoing humanitarian disaster in the Darfuri region. At the time we noted that the EU's only response to the hundreds of thousands of lives lost, millions displaced, and countless rapes and other violations committed in Darfur and the surrounding region had been a series of statements. Yet while these words at the time amounted to little more than a token response to the scale of the crisis, they did at least represent a commitment on the part of all EU member states to work for peace and security in the region.

Amnesty International recognises that this commitment has been pursued in the UN context and in efforts to seek protective intervention in Chad. However, the ceasefires in Darfur have not been enforced, and meanwhile crisis has spread to Chad and the Central African Republic. Humanitarian access to those displaced or otherwise affected by conflict has still not been secured and in some areas is worsening. The limited diplomatic pressure that has been placed on the Khartoum regime continues to be consistently ignored. Indeed recent Amnesty International photo evidence shows that the Sudanese government is making a mockery of UN Security Council resolutions and its own undertakings in ceasefire agreements by continuing to deploy offensive military equipment in Darfur, showing the UN arms embargo and peace agreements to be essentially ineffectual.

Against this background, it is remarkable that the Italian government has decided to receive Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir for a series of meetings on 14 September in Rome with Prime Minister Prodi, President Napolitano and Foreign Minister D'Alema. It may be assumed that as an EU member state, party to the Council's expressions of concern about the situation in the region, the Italian government will not renege on its evident obligation to raise these urgent matters with the Sudanese President. However there is good reason to be concerned not only that Sudan may misuse the visit, which is also to include a meeting with the Pope, for its own political ends, and also that the EU may find itself perceived to be less than united on this critical issue.

Therefore, at the very least, having decided for whatever reason to engage directly and privately with President Bashir, the Italian government has a responsibility to demonstrate publicly that the EU's position on the crisis in the Darfuri region remains strong and unequivocal.

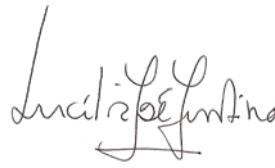
Amnesty International urges you to discuss this with your Italian counterparts before the meetings on 14 September.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting
Director,
Amnesty International EU Office



Lucília José Justino
Vice- Chair,
Amnesty International Portugal

Cc:

Javier Solana, High Representative for CFSP

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations

Riina Kionka, High Representative's Personal Representative for Human Rights