

Norway welcomes the Special Session of the Human Rights Council on Darfur. We particularly welcome that it is taking place as a result of a joint effort with broad support, including from the African Group and the concerned country, Sudan. The seriousness of the situation in Darfur is well documented by the African Union Mission in Sudan, the Secretary General of the UN and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Norway is deeply concerned about the worsening security situation in all three states of Darfur. Escalating violence, fighting and attacks on villages have a devastating impact on the civilian population in the region. Those who flee report about killings, mass rapes and gross violations of human rights in their villages.

The last few days, humanitarian workers have been evacuated and relocated from different places in North and South Darfur as a result of violence and direct attacks. The lack of access and obstacles to the operations of humanitarian organizations, including frequent attacks on humanitarian workers, is threatening the humanitarian operation in Darfur.

This fighting must stop, civilians must be protected and the humanitarian agencies respected. Ensuring free and unimpeded humanitarian access is not an option, it is an obligation under International Humanitarian Law. We call upon the Government of Sudan to assume its responsibility to protect the lives of its citizens, and on all parties to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need in Darfur.

Norway is concerned about the regional dimension of the conflict, in particular the spill-over to Chad and the Central African Republic. We are also deeply worried about the impact of the Darfur conflict on the whole peace project in Sudan, including the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Only a credible political process can provide sustainable solutions to the crisis in Darfur. We support the conclusions from the AU/UN Summit in Addis Ababa 16 November, including the measures to re-energize the political process based on the DPA-framework and to establish a strengthened Ceasefire. All parties, including the Government and non-signatories to the DPA, should immediately re-commit to existing Cease Fire Agreements. We further welcome the three-phased plan for support to AMIS, and the AU PSC decision to extend AMIS' mandate for 6 months.

Regarding the outcome of this Special Session, we support the urgent dispatchment of an independent assessment mission to Darfur. We do, however, not support the notion that the regular reporting by the African Union Mission in Sudan, the UN Secretary General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights are not credible and accurate. This is why the main focus of the Mission should not be fact-finding, but to assess the Human Rights situation and protection needs, and provide recommendations thereon to the Human Rights Council. To ensure implementation, it is important that this decision is taken by consensus. We expect no less of the Human Rights Council.