Press Release

COMESA, EAC and SADC leaders must act on Darfur

(Kampala October 21, 2008)-African leaders meeting in Uganda at the first tripartite summit of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have been asked to use this historic opportunity to discuss the escalating crisis facing the people of Darfur, western Sudan.

“This is a critical time for the leaders of the three communities to speak with Sudanese leaders and send an unequivocal message that civilians must be protected and a solution found to the conflict” said Dismas Nkunda, spokesman for the Darfur Consortium, a coalition of 50 African and international human rights and civil society organisations.

Sudanese President Omar Bashir is expected to attend the summit. Sudan is a member of both COMESA and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) which came into force in June this year.

The frameworks of all three of the regional economic communities - and the ICGLR - between them enshrine the principles of human rights and the imperatives of peace and security, protections the people of Darfur have been yearning for.

In August the Consortium released a report Putting People First; The Protection Challenge Facing UNAMID in Darfur which depicted an African and United Nations joint operation hamstrung by lack of equipment, training and personnel and governmental obstruction.

“It is our hope that the consolidation of the regional economic communities and the deepening of cooperation between States in the region will create an opportunity to address Darfur and other conflict prone areas such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Zimbabwe and solve them once and for all,” added Nkunda.

“Failure by our leaders to fulfill the promises contained in the regional instruments in respect of fundamental freedoms will undermine any efforts at economic integration and development”.

--The Darfur Consortium: African and International Civil Society Action for Darfur--
The Consortium also called on Uganda, which was this week voted a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council beginning in 2009, to use her position to help make ending the conflict in Darfur a top priority.

Fourteen African heads of states including President Omar Bashir of Sudan, the new South Africa President Kgalema Motlanthe and chairperson of SADC, President Jakaya Kikwete, Chairperson Africa Union Summit, President Mwai Kibaki the chairperson of the COMESA Summit and President Paul Kagame, Chairperson of East Africa Community, are expected to converge in Kampala for the first ever tripartite meeting of the three regional blocks of COMESA, EAC AND SADC.

The three blocks represents a total of twenty six countries and half membership of the Africa Union, with a total population of 500 million people.

Ends

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