



Submission No 48

**Review of Australia's Relationship with the  
Countries of Africa**

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## **Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa**

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### **The Darfur Australia Network**

This submission from the Darfur Australia Network (DAN) is based on discussions with members of Australia's South Sudan and Darfur communities now living in Australia, as well as official statements from the Sydney chapter of the Southern Sudan and Other Marginalised Peoples' Association.

The submission will cover three key areas from the Inquiry's terms of reference:

1. Development assistance cooperation and capacity building.
2. Defence cooperation, regional security and strategic issues.
3. Migration and human rights issues.

"Australia's relationship with countries of Africa is very important as Australia has a moral obligation and responsibility in the region of Africa, just as it has to developing countries in South East Asia and the Pacific. Australia can come to be part of Africa's future by supporting Africa's efforts to promote peace and security and through development and emergency aid assistance".

Adam Khamis, Australian Darfuri.

### **1. Development assistance cooperation and capacity building**

Australian foreign policy, trade, aid and defence policies have traditionally been centered on Australia's close geographical neighbours in the Asia and Pacific regions, with the belief that focusing Australia's resources here was in the best interest of our strategic, security and national interests. This outlook has placed the African continent on the periphery of Australian policymakers concerns. While Australian private enterprise has long been trading with and investing in Africa and while Australian-based INGOs have long been providing vital development assistance and emergency relief, the Australian government has lagged behind. However, over the past decade the Australian government has shown promising signs of reversing this trend, notably through improving its diplomatic relations with most African states, in particular with the states in which Australian companies are doing business.

- Australia has strong diplomatic relations with most countries in Africa and this will provide future opportunities for forging bilateral trade and investment projects, and most importantly, for pursuing global solutions to trade and financial crises, climate change, transnational crime and international security threats. However, Australia must continue to build and strengthen these diplomatic ties through increasing the human resource capacity of fragile African states and their institutions. This should be done through targeted technical assistance to African countries.
- The Australian government should consider providing local capacity building aimed at equipping populations emerging from conflict to rebuild their nations through sustainable development practices for a more prosperous and peaceful future.

“We [Southern Sudanese] are very happy to come to Australia to find a multicultural country. We need to change Sudan to be like that. We need Australia to support us in growing up like a new child. In Sudan, you can find unexplored wealth here but we also have a corrupt government and this is a potential crisis for the future of Africa...but the African people in Australia can play a central role in transforming power. We can train our brother and sisters to help themselves”.

Southern Sudanese and Other Marginalise Communities Associations

#### Proposal: Peer to Peer Capacity Building

We encourage the Australia government to invest in a government-funded work programme enabling African expatriates to return back to their country of origin. This will assist in facilitating the vital transfer of skills needed to rebuild impoverished nations. Such a programme has already been trialed by the German government, which runs in-country projects in South Sudan in the areas of agriculture and health, aimed at teaching peer-to-peer training for sustainable development.

- Currently AusAid does not report in its Annual Reports on spending per year by countries in Africa. Rather it only reports against spending to “Africa”, making it difficult for lobby groups such as the Darfur Australia Network to hold the government to account for their spending on particular countries.
- Despite a commitment to increasing aid to Africa by 40% this financial year, there has been a substantial reduction in the amount of humanitarian response funding to Sudan and other countries in Africa. This comes at a time when South Sudan alone is expected to have up to 5 million people suffer

from malnutrition and starvation, and when the region of Darfur still has up to 3 million people living in Internally Displaced Peoples' (IDP) camps, largely dependant on international humanitarian emergency relief. Emergency preparedness, humanitarian response, protection and peace-building work is thus integral to development in Sudan and many conflict affected countries in Africa - consequently, this should be a high priority for Australia's engagement in the region. Working in partnership with reputable humanitarian organisations already operating in Africa, and streamlining Australia's assistance to compliment these existing projects, will ensure maximum effectiveness from Australia's humanitarian response funding.

- Investment in African from Australian mining companies and private businesses is growing exponentially. Increasing Australia's assistance to sustainable development and poverty reduction in Africa is of a great benefit to Australia's business and national interests, as it will grant Australia more confidence in seeking business contracts and investment opportunities for Australian companies in Africa. However, as Australia and other global powers such as China continue to increase their investments in Africa, Australia has an obligation to ensure that good governance practices such as accountability and transparency are promoted hand-in-hand with this influx of international capital. The Australian government must encourage and help African states to adopt good governance and anticorruption policies, and equip African states with the capacity to defend themselves against economic exploitation from foreign investment.

## **2. Defence cooperation, regional security and strategic issues**

Australia has shown that it is determined to work with Africa as a friend a partner over the coming years to expand long term relationships in diplomacy, trade, sport, tourism, economics, culture and defence. Furthermore, Australia has a history of participating in peacekeeping operations in Africa, including the active African Union-United Nation joint mission in Darfur (UNAMID). If Australia intends to play an increasing role in shaping Africa's future, Australia's engagements with Africa must be based on a mutually beneficial relationship and governed at all times by due diligence and transparency. It also means that Australia must respond appropriately to regional security threats.

"Africa is being recolonised by China through aggressive economic exploitation and this will increasingly cause conflict and instability across the continent... There is a growing problem of foreign investors buying up fertile pastoral lands and extracting Africa's natural resources. This will leave Africa further pillaged and unable to provide for itself".

Southern Sudanese and Other Marginalise Communities Association

- Australia must inform itself on, and act to prevent the emerging catastrophe which Africa is likely to face if its natural resources and pastoral lands continue to be exploited by foreign investors, which includes wealthy nations seeking “quick fixes” to food security.
- Regrettably, Australia has not met its obligation to adequately fund UNAMID and AMIS, the two international peacekeeping operations currently active in the Sudan. While Australia is not alone in failing to equip and fund the emergency peacekeeping operations, if the operations are to succeed, then leadership in the international community must be shown. While Australia has pledged a contribution of six personnel to UNAMID, currently a bureaucratic impediment on behalf of the Sudanese government is preventing the deployment of these vital services. The Australian government should continue to investigate ways to remedy this hold up.

### **3. Migration and human rights issues.**

Australia makes a major financial contribution to United Nations missions around the world and the Darfur and Southern Sudanese communities of Australia acknowledge this, and are grateful for Australia’s assistance. However, routine abuses of fundamental human rights continue to mar improvements in development standards across many countries in Africa. Development and economic assistance to African states must be contingent upon reaching certain benchmarks in human rights standards. Australia should enforce this through refusing to vote in favour of IMF loans to countries notorious for abuses of human rights. Asserting pressure through withholding financial assistance, as well as supporting internationally endorsed campaigns of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) is another effective way to do so. In this way, “Australia can show leadership in helping countries of Africa to improve human rights standards and human security”.

- The Darfur communities in Australia continue to hold grave concerns for the safety of their families left displaced and vulnerable to attack in IDP and refugee camps across Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic. Despite statements in mid-2009 from the outgoing chief of UNAMID that “the conflict in Darfur is over” [sic], accounts from the Darfur communities in Australia strongly suggest that this assessment is incorrect and was politically motivated. Rather, the situation as it stands is that that millions of Darfuris continue to suffer from conflict-related disease, starvation, neglect and abuse. And, as the Sudanese general elections of April 11 2010 approach, deadly violence is anticipated to once again escalate across Darfur and South Sudan.
- The Darfur communities in Australia continue to hold concerns over the processes for claiming asylum from the conflict in Darfur, which are most

often carried out through the UNHCR's Cairo office. According to the Australian Darfuris, who have themselves been through the process, there is much collusion between the Sudanese and Egyptian governments, aimed at preventing Darfuris fleeing the conflict from claiming asylum. Secondly, there is concern over the poor living standards for Darfuris in Cairo who have no access to social services while they wait for their applications for asylum to be processed.

- The Darfur communities of Australia acknowledge and thank the Australian government for granting them protection and a new home in Australia through the IHSS and urge the Australian government to continue prioritising applications for asylum from Darfur.
- A recommendation is that Australia commit to, over a staged process, increase its intake through the Humanitarian Resettlement Program from the current 13,500 places to 20,000 as per recommendations from the Refugee Council of Australia about Australia's "fair share" of the global resettlement need. This would increase Australia's ability to support humanitarian needs of people living in "warehoused" conditions in Africa.
- As Australia heads into an election year itself, we urge the Australian government to avoid making immigration policies and "asylum seekers" an election issue. Instead, we urge the government to continue showing compassion, generosity and international responsibility in responding appropriately to the crisis of displaced peoples. We also urge the Australian government to continue providing information and support to NGOs dedicated to raising awareness about global conflict and the effect this has on international flows of displaced people seeking asylum.



darfur australia network

This submission has been prepared by Alpha Lisimba and Melissa McCullough from the Darfur Australia Network, with contributions from members of Sydney and Melbourne's Darfur communities; the Southern Sudan and Other Marginalised People's Association and the Southern Sudanese Resettlement Services.

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#### **About the Darfur Australia Network**

The Darfur Australia Network (DAN) is a not-for-profit, independent, community organisation run by members of Australia's emerging Darfur community and concerned volunteers from the broader Australian community.

The group functions as a network between the Darfur community in Australia, skilled volunteers and established organisations in the community sector. This makes DAN a highly legitimate, resourceful and innovative network. It has proven its capability to rapidly implement new ideas, form new organisational linkages and respond to the evolving political landscape.

Since its establishment in May 2006 DAN has become the most visible organisation advocating about Australia's response to the Darfur conflict and one of the few organisations proactively engaging the Darfur community in its activities and management.

