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Bachelet welcomes Sudan peace deal, urges accountability

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GENEVA (1 September 2020) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has welcomed the signing of a peace deal between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the majority of the country's armed groups as a major step in ending the suffering and human rights violations and abuses inflicted on the Sudanese people over the past decades.

"I hope that this hugely positive development can herald a final comprehensive accord with all parties to ensure peace prevails in Sudan," said Bachelet. "I urge all sides to ensure that human rights are kept at the heart of the peace deal and how it is implemented."

The High Commissioner said she was heartened that the parties had agreed to establish a special criminal court for crimes committed in Darfur, to establish transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms, and to cooperate with the International Criminal Court.

"These commitments now need to lead to justice, truth and remedies for victims and their families. All those responsible for human rights violations and abuses committed during Sudan's conflicts must be held to account, in accordance with due process and without unjustified delays," Bachelet stressed. "In addition, there needs to be the continued consultation, participation and representation of the Sudanese population in the establishment of these transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms."

The peace agreement, initialled by the Government and a coalition of armed groups on 31 August, includes security arrangements, land ownership, power-sharing, wealth-sharing, return of refugees, accountability and reconciliation. It is hoped that the two armed groups that have not joined the peace deal can be encouraged to participate in a final agreement.

The peace deal is the latest positive development in Sudan, where in July a series of law reforms were introduced, including regarding the eradication of female genital mutilation, the elimination of discrimination against women in law, the protection of freedom of religion or belief, and ensuring better protection for child rights.

"Given these bold steps, I urge Sudan to accede to the international human rights treaties that it has not yet ratified, and to ensure a consultative approach to reforming the National Human Rights Commission with a broad mandate to protect and promote human rights," the High Commissioner said, noting that her office remains ready to continue providing technical assistance on this and a variety of other human rights issues.

However, in a reminder of the huge challenges that Sudan faces, the High Commissioner voiced deep concern that inter-communal violence had erupted in East Sudan in recent weeks, with dozens of people reportedly killed or injured.

In East Sudan, including in the cities of Port Sudan and Kassala, inter-communal violence broke out in July and August between the Nuba and the Beni Amir tribes, and also between the Beni Amir and Hadandwa tribes.

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Despite a curfew imposed by the State Security Committee and the heavy deployment of security forces in Kassala since 25 August, there were renewed incidents of communal violence on 26 and 27 August. The Prime Minister issued a statement on 27 August to the victims' families in Kassala and called for the reinforcement of the security and police presence in the area.

"It is clear that inter-communal clashes, often stemming from lack of development and ongoing competition over resources, could pose a significant challenge to Sudan's stability and its path to a solid democracy. Amid the recent violence in eastern Sudan, I call on the Government to take all necessary measures to ensure that civilians are protected and that these incidents are the subject of a thorough, independent and impartial investigation," the High Commissioner said.

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