

Statement by the Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon David Miliband MP, on ICC arrest warrant for President Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity

The International Criminal Court announced on 4 March that it has issued an arrest warrant for President Bashir of Sudan for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Court has already issued arrest warrants in 2007 for two other individuals in Sudan. It continues to investigate three rebel leaders allegedly involved in attacks on African Union peacekeepers at Haskanita in 2007.

The UK has consistently been a strong supporter of the ICC as an independent judicial body committed to the fight against impunity, and of its engagement on Darfur following UNSCR 1593. We support the independent process that has led to this decision, which we fully respect. We have consistently urged the Government of Sudan to cooperate with the Court over existing arrest warrants. We deeply regret that the Government has not taken these allegations seriously or engaged with the Court, and we repeat today our call for its cooperation.

The UK is also strongly committed to supporting peace in Sudan and believes this must continue to be pursued. We support the UN/AU-led political process for Darfur under the leadership of Djibril Bassolé, and Qatar's important contribution to that, and encourage them to continue their efforts. We welcome the signature in Doha on 17 February of an initial agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Justice and Equality Movement. We urge its full implementation and look forward to further work on a cessation of hostilities, to be followed by full talks for a lasting settlement. We welcome the mediators' intention also to engage other Darfur leaders directly in further work.

We urge all parties in Sudan and the region to support this work, and to take more action to facilitate full deployment of UNAMID and to allow provision of humanitarian assistance.

We also welcome recent progress on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and urge further progress in 2009, especially on resolution of the Abyei dispute, border demarcation and preparations for national elections and the 2011 referendum on self-determination. It is vital for the people of Sudan and the entire region not to lose the gains of the last four years.

We strongly urge all parties in Sudan to avoid escalation, maintain order and protect Embassies, international personnel and humanitarian workers, and above all the Sudanese civilians who have already suffered so much.

We will continue to work with the Government of Sudan and others for progress on these issues. All sides should intensify efforts to achieve this and to build lasting peace in Sudan.