

Beat: Travel

Gunmen kill South African peacekeeper in North Darfur

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USPA News - A South African peacekeeper was killed Wednesday when gunmen ambushed a United Nations (UN) convoy in Sudan's troubled Darfur region, just two weeks after a similar attack resulted in the deaths of four Nigerian peacekeepers, the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) said. The attack happened at around 10 a.m. local time on Wednesday when a group of unidentified gunmen attacked a UNAMID integrated assessment mission consisting of sixteen vehicles about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) from Hashaba North, where they were heading, in North Darfur.

The gunmen attacked the convoy with a combination of automatic and mortar fire, prompting the peacekeepers to return fire. Aichatou S. Mindaoudou, UNAMID's Joint Chief Mediator, confirmed one South African peacekeeper was killed in the attack while three others were seriously injured. "I condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the second criminal attack on our brave peacekeepers in the course of this month, during which we have lost five peacekeepers," she said. "These attacks will not shake our resolve to fulfill our mandate and help the people of Darfur. I call on the Government of Sudan to investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice." Both UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UN Security Council promptly condemned the latest attack. "The members of the Security Council expressed their condolences to the family of the peacekeeper killed in the attack, as well as to the Government of South Africa and to UNAMID," the Council said, urging the Sudanese government to swiftly investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice. South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation also condemned the attack and said it counts on the Sudanese authorities to fully cooperate with the UN. "The South African Government is deeply disturbed by the incident and extends its deepest condolences to the bereaved family," the department said. Earlier this month, four Nigerian peacekeepers were killed and eight others were injured when a group of unidentified assailants ambushed a Nigerian military patrol in El Geneina, about 2 kilometers (1.2 mile) from UNAMID's regional headquarters in West Darfur. The military patrol was part of the joint AU-UN mission. The deadly attacks this month come two months after the UN Security Council (UNSC) voted to extend the mandate for the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur for another twelve months. The 15-member body said the mission will be reconfigured to focus on the areas of Darfur with the highest security threats. About 21,600 troops, military observers and police officers and nearly 4,500 civilians currently serve with UNAMID, which assumed peacekeeping duties from an earlier African Union mission at the start of 2008. A total of 43 UNAMID blue helmets have been killed in the line of duty while serving in Darfur. The UNAMID force is tasked with protecting civilians, promoting an inclusive peace process and help ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance across Darfur, an arid region on Sudan's western flank. Fighting and large-scale displacement has convulsed the region since 2003 when rebels took up arms against the Government, whose military forces responded with the support of allied militiamen.

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