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**HEADLINE:** After the ceasefire: the next urgent steps for Darfur KOFI ANNAN

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**BODY:**

The agreement signed between the government of Sudan and the largest rebel movement in Darfur on May 5 gives the world one more chance to bring peace to that unhappy region. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union is meeting today in Addis Ababa to see how best to take the agreement forward. The rest of the world must also engage rapidly and without reservation if the opportunity the agreement offers is not to be lost.

The talks that led to the agreement were long and very hard. Many people share the credit for bringing them to an at least partly successful conclusion. But this is not a moment for anyone to bask in congratulations. Darfur is still far from being at peace. Last Monday, while the United Nation's top humanitarian envoy was visiting a camp for displaced people, rioting broke out and an interpreter for the African Union Mission (Amis) was hacked to death.

There is a vast amount to be done, and no time to lose. First, there are some rebel leaders who have not yet signed the agreement. We must all do whatever we can to convince them to choose peace over conflict, for the sake of their people. If this tragedy continues because of what they did, or failed to do, history will judge them severely.

Next, we must do everything in our power to ensure that those who have signed the agreement actually implement it on the ground and that the people of Darfur can survive the next few months. For that, they need both protection and sustenance - since, driven from their homes and farms, they cannot feed themselves. Sustenance means protection also for those who are bringing them relief.

Right now, there is only one force on the ground that can even begin to provide protection: Amis. Therefore, our immediate priority must be to strengthen that force, so that it can move ahead with implementing the agreement and providing real security for the displaced people.

But this can only be a stopgap solution. As soon as possible Amis must be transformed into a larger and more mobile UN operation, better equipped and with a stronger mandate. We aim to agree as fast as possible, with our partners in the AU, on what extra resources Amis will need to implement key points in the Abuja agreement and then to hold a pledging conference, possibly in Brussels, in early June. But I appeal to donors not to wait for that conference. They need to be very generous, starting now. We cannot afford to lose a single day. And I appeal to everyone in Darfur to help Amis do its job. Attacks such as last Monday's must not be encouraged, condoned or tolerated.

No less urgent is the need to raise more money for emergency relief. Right now the region is facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Without massive and immediate support, relief agencies will be unable to continue their work and hundreds of thousands more people will die from hunger, malnutrition and disease.

Meanwhile, we must continue planning for the transition to a UN operation, as was requested by the Peace and Security Council of the AU as long ago as March 10 and authorised by the UN Security Council on March 24.

This a big challenge to the UN. But it is a challenge we cannot refuse. And, having accepted it, we cannot delay. It is clear, from the work we have already done, that a follow-on UN force would have to be much larger than the current Amis and will need big logistical support from countries that are able to give it.

The next step is a technical assessment mission to Darfur itself. During this, the UN and the AU will undertake a first-hand assessment of the situation on the ground and will consult with all the parties to see what is required.

No peacekeeping mission can succeed without the support and co-operation of the parties at the highest level. That is why I have written to Omar Hassan al-Bashir, the Sudanese president, asking him to support the assessment. His support is essential. I look forward to talking to him directly about it, very soon.

Meanwhile, I appeal to all parties and especially to the government to observe the ceasefire and to prove, by their deeds, that they intend to honour their word. And I appeal to all Sudan's neighbours to give whatever support they can, whether financial or political, or both.

We in the UN Secretariat will do everything in our power to help Sudan's people close this tragic chapter in their history. I count on the support of all member states, especially those in the Security Council.

The writer is secretary-general of the United Nations

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