

Now that you have learnt about peacekeeping, it is time for you to step into the role of the UN Security Council. You may have highlighted on your map that there is an ongoing conflict in Darfur, Sudan. This conflict is still unresolved and has caused a devastating amount of human suffering in Sudan and its neighbouring countries. The United Nations is working hard to solve the problem, but needs your ideas to help find effective ways to create lasting peace.

- First, we are going to look at the situation in Darfur, so that we can see what the conflict is about and how it is affecting the people living there.
- Then it is down to you to come up with an action plan for peace. Good luck!

DARFUR CONFLICT

The ongoing conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan has produced one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Since the conflict began in 2003, around 300,000 people have been killed and almost three million more have had to flee their homes.

BACKGROUND

Darfur is a province of Sudan – one of Africa's largest countries – and is approximately the size of Spain. Sudan has two major distinct cultures: Arab and non-Arab. The Sudanese government is dominated by people with an Arab background, while the majority of Darfur's population is non-Arab. The conflict in Darfur began in 2003, when Darfuri rebel groups began attacking the government. These groups claimed that the government was neglecting the people of Darfur and discriminating against them. As a result, the province was underdeveloped and its population was poor and marginalised. In response, the Sudanese government – along with militia groups supportive of the government – launched a military campaign in Darfur that killed thousands and displaced millions of civilians.

THE ONGOING PLIGHT OF DARFURI CIVILIANS

Along with an estimated two million civilians displaced in Darfur itself, around 250,000 Darfuris were forced to cross the border into neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic to escape the fighting. They remain there as refugees in makeshift camps in the desert. Over 150,000 of these refugees are children – more than half of them are of primary school age. The camps have very few resources – such as food, clothes, toys etc. They offer little protection, leaving children at risk of being abused, abducted for forced labour or recruited as child soldiers by rebel groups.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

A joint UN and African Union peacekeeping force arrived in Darfur in January 2008 to try to protect the civilians at risk. However, the peacekeeping mission is struggling to do its job. This is in part because the Sudanese government refuses to work with it, and in part because the international community has not provided the mission with enough peacekeepers and vital equipment such as helicopters. As of March 2012 there were 19,555 peacekeepers in Darfur, much less than its target of 26,000.

CURRENT SITUATION

Despite the UN's best efforts, the region remains insecure. Civilians and aid workers are regularly attacked by armed groups. Ongoing violence makes it difficult for the UN to provide for the civilians caught up in the conflict. It also makes it impossible for refugees – many of whom fled Darfur years ago – to return home. Some aid agencies have been forced to temporarily suspend their operations. One of the major obstacles to finding a lasting solution to the conflict is the reluctance of the rebel groups and the government to hold talks with each other.