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## **Rights Group Urges International Community to Back Charges Against Sudan's President, Cease Arms Sales Immediately**

New York – Today's decision by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for General Omar al-Bashir, President of Sudan, is a significant step towards ending impunity for crimes in Darfur—and one the international community must actively support, according to a leading rights group.

“For too long, the Government of Sudan has gotten away with atrocities in Darfur,” commented Julia Fromholz, Interim Director of the Crimes against Humanity Program at Human Rights First. “The international community must follow through on its commitment to ensure accountability for Darfuri victims, as a sustainable peace is impossible without justice.”

This morning, the ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber I found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Bashir is criminally responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in planning and overseeing the war in Darfur and the treatment of displaced Darfuris living in camps across Sudan. The Court accordingly issued a warrant for his arrest. This is the first time that the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for a sitting head of state.

The Pre-Trial Chamber, however, found that the evidence at its disposal insufficient to support the allegations of genocide raised against Bashir. The Prosecutor could seek to reintroduce the genocide charges at a later stage, provided he can strengthen the case against General Bashir on that specific crime.

“Whether they constitute genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, the atrocities committed in Darfur are among the worst perpetrated against civilians in the past decade,” declared Fromholz. “Today's decision should give Darfuri victims and their families more hope that the highest level of the Sudanese regime will finally be held to account for their suffering.”

Since 2003, at least 300,000 civilians have died in Darfur as a result of the violent military campaign unleashed against them by the Sudanese government forces and the government-backed Janjaweed militias. Over 2 million Darfuris have been rendered homeless by the conflict and live in camps as refugees or internally displaced persons. In his briefing to the Security Council in June 2008, the ICC Prosecutor asserted that the crimes committed in Darfur were so broad as to have required “the mobilization of the whole state apparatus, including the armed forces, the intelligence services, the diplomatic and public information bureaucracies, and the justice system”.

Human Rights First also urged those members of the international community that continue to arm the Government of Sudan to stop immediately in response to the recognition of the gravity of the charges. “As long as Bashir is in power, arming the Government of Sudan amounts to arming a known suspected war criminal,” Fromholz explained. “That was true when the ICC prosecutor referred the charges in July and this arrest warrant makes the case only more urgent. All suppliers of weapons to Sudan should immediately suspend arms sales.”

General Bashir is the third Sudanese national for whom the ICC has issued an arrest warrant. Since May 2007, warrants have been outstanding for Sudan’s Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs, Ahmed Harun, and Janjaweed leader, Ali Kushayb. The Government of Sudan has so far refused to hand any of the suspects over to the Court, despite its legal obligation to do so under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005).

“It is time for the Government of Sudan to face up to its responsibility for the atrocities committed in Darfur,” said Fromholz. “The authorities in Khartoum know that without a solid peace in Darfur, their country will not achieve the international acceptance they seek. It is therefore in Sudan’s interest to cooperate with the ICC to ensure that all suspects are surrendered to the Court as quickly as possible. Until then—until Sudan stops harbouring suspected war criminals—the international community will not be able to take seriously Sudan’s declared commitment to a peace process in Darfur. Likewise, any retaliation for the issuance of the arrest warrant—as the Sudanese government has threatened will take place—would only make clearer the chasm between the rhetoric and the actions of the Government of Sudan. For their part, the U.N. and the Obama administration must now make clear to the authorities in Khartoum exactly what punitive measures will be imposed in the wake of any retaliation.”

For a backgrounder on genocide charges and the ICC visit:

<http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/pdf/090303-HRF-bckgrndr-genocide.pdf>

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*Human Rights First is a leading human rights advocacy organization based in New York City and Washington, D.C. Since 1978, we have worked in the United States and abroad to create a secure and humane world—advancing justice, human dignity, and respect for the rule of law. All of our activities are supported by private contributions. We accept no government funds. Visit our website: [www.humanrightsfirst.org](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org)*

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