

# HARD REALITIES FOR CHILDREN IN DARFUR



Photo: Jerry Fowler / courtesy of [www.USHM.M.org](http://www.USHM.M.org)

A backgrounder on issues facing kids in the crisis

By Save Darfur Canada, updated on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2008

## THE DARFUR CRISIS

The Darfur crisis has entered its 5<sup>th</sup> year in 2008, with alarming increases in violence, ongoing displacement of populations and continued devastating consequences for civilians.

The splintering of armed groups and the flow of violence into neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic threaten current prospects for peace, as does the precarious state of peace in South Sudan. UNAMID, a joint United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission has yet to fully deploy, undercutting the abilities of peacekeepers to protect vulnerable populations and humanitarian operations. Civilians and humanitarian workers are regularly targeted in attacks in violation of international law.

The United Nations considers the humanitarian crisis in the conflict's wake the 'worst in the world today.' 4.5 million people are directly affected, and most depend on international relief for their day-to-day survival. 40% of those affected are children, threatening the physical, mental and social welfare of Darfur's youngest generation. 500,000 people in need cannot access aid because insecurity prevents relief agencies from reaching them.



Photo: [www.MiaFarrow.org](http://www.MiaFarrow.org)

## THE EFFECTS OF DISPLACEMENT ON CHILDREN

3.5 million Darfurians have been displaced in the current crisis as a result of violent attacks and insecurity. Children among them are traumatized by what they have seen and experienced, and many face the loss of family and support structures at a time when they are most in need. Displaced kids have few or no resources available to help them cope with trauma, ongoing fears of violence, and grief from loss of family and friends. They are vulnerable to violent attacks, health problems and recruitment by armed groups.



## SEXUAL VIOLENCE TARGETING YOUNG GIRLS

Sexual violence targeting women and young girls in Darfur is frequent and widespread, with reports of attacks on girls as young as 8. However, the social and cultural stigmas around sexual crimes keep many from reporting occurrences, and even from seeking essential medical care after the fact. It is not uncommon for rape victims to be ostracized from their families and communities, or to be branded as unfit for marriage. When pregnancies result from sexual attacks, both mother and child face the social repercussions. There is no legal recourse for victims of sexual crimes in Darfur.

## ACUTE MALNUTRITION

In December, the UN revealed an alarming increase in malnutrition rates in children under 5 in Darfur, surpassing the World Health Organization's 15% emergency threshold for the first time in 3 years. Increasing insecurity and attacks targeting aid operations are largely responsible, as most relief agencies have had to downsize and even discontinue services in some areas in response.

16-20% of children under 5 are acutely malnourished in Darfur, with figures increasing in younger infants. Malnutrition can impair the growth, cognitive development and immune responses of children while afflicted, and for years after recovery. When therapeutic feeding programs are available only the sickest kids are eligible, so those with early symptoms still go untreated.

## RECRUITMENT TO ARMED GROUPS

Facing the psycho-social effects of trauma, displacement, separation from family, violence and ongoing fear, Darfuri children – particularly boys – are vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Humanitarian organizations in the region confirm children are among the ranks of several armed groups and the Sudanese military forces. Being a child soldier may lead to poor health, serious injury or death, abuse or exploitation and severe psychological or social problems.

