

## **Sudan Blocks UN Force from Investigating Deaths**

ABC News, Associated Press  
November 3, 2012

CAIRO -The international peacekeeping force in Sudan's Darfur region said Saturday that its forces were blocked by the military from reaching the destination of an alleged attack that killed 10 people.

The hybrid U.N. and African Union peacekeeping force, UNAMID, said in a statement that mourners brought 10 bodies reportedly killed in Friday's attack to the gate of its headquarters in Darfur on Saturday. The Sudanese military blocked its convoy from reaching the area of the alleged attack to gather information on the incident, it added.

Friday's attack reportedly took place in Sigili village, located in the Shawa area in North Darfur state. Hundreds marched in a symbolic show of unity through North Darfur's capital city of el-Fasher to protest the incident on Saturday.

It is not clear who was behind the killings. Sudan's government has been battling rebel groups in Darfur since 2003. More than 300,000 people have been killed in the conflict since rebels took up arms against the central government, accusing it of discrimination and neglect. Violence has tapered off, but clashes continue and peacekeepers remain a target.

Last month, the U.N. human rights office demanded that Sudan investigate the killing of five U.N. peacekeepers, four of whom were killed in an ambush while travelling to investigate reports of a September massacre of 70 civilians. The four dead were Nigerian peacekeepers who came under mortar and automatic weapons fire in Sudan's restive West Darfur region in late October. Separately, a South African U.N. peacekeeper was killed later the same month.

Meanwhile, Sudan blasted a recent renewal of U.S. sanctions, calling it harmful to Sudanese people and an attempt to obstruct "fighting of poverty and unemployment."

"These sanctions have always been pouring in favor of rebel groups and serve to exercise more pressure on the government of Sudan... to extract more concessions on the political stands of Sudan, particularly those stands related to American hegemony in the region," a statement by Sudan's Foreign Ministry said Friday.

The U.S. imposed economic, trade and financial sanctions against Sudan in 1997, citing the Sudanese government's support for terrorism, including its sheltering of al-Qaida founder Osama bin Laden in Khartoum the mid-1990s.

The U.S. State Department said Thursday that Washington had renewed the sanctions in large part due to ongoing conflicts in Darfur and other Sudanese states that "threaten regional stability."

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