

MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA  
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN  
CORY GARDNER, COLORADO  
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH  
LINDSEY GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA  
JOHNNY ISAKSON, GEORGIA  
JOHN BARRASSO, WYOMING  
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO  
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY  
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA  
TED CRUZ, TEXAS

ROBERT MENENDEZ, NEW JERSEY  
BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND  
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE  
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO  
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT  
TIM Kaine, VIRGINIA  
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS  
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON  
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY

## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 21, 2019

Ambassador Jonathan R. Cohen  
Acting Permanent Representative to the United Nations  
U.S. Mission to the United Nations  
799 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Cohen:

I write to urge the U.S. to support a technical rollover of the mandate of the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) when the mandate renewal is considered by the Security Council at the end of the month. Sudan holds significant geostrategic importance in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea corridor. U.S. strategic interests—including counterterrorism, the free flow of maritime trade and U.S. naval assets and broader regional stability, and countering Russian influence—are best met by taking steps to ensure stability in Sudan during the current crisis, including through UNAMID's continued presence at current levels. As you know in 2017 the UNSC and AU Peace and Security Council decided to dramatically reduce the number of UNAMID troops and in 2018 authorized the mission's withdrawal over a two-year period culminating in UNAMID's exit by June 2020. The mission has since closed the majority of its bases and reconfigured the remainder of its troops to focus on the protection of civilians in the Jebel Marra region of Darfur, where the human rights and protection concerns have been greatest.

However, the overall security situation in Sudan is uncertain since longtime head of state Omar al-Bashir was forced out of office in April, and now is not the time for a further reduction. The situation in Darfur, in particular, calls for a continued presence at the mission's current levels for the next 12 months. The AU Peace and Security Council recently expressed deep concern over the safety of civilians and UNAMID staff in Darfur, noting that the "drastic change on security and political developments" has "contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in Darfur." Thousands of people in Darfur rely on the mission for protection. A decision to further drawdown the mission at this juncture would remove the only safeguard against government security forces and allied militia linked to war crimes, and gross violations of human rights, including crimes against humanity. The May 14<sup>th</sup> looting of UNAMID's West Darfur headquarters on the eve of its scheduled handover—by military and police personnel—underscores concerns about the unstable conditions under which the drawdown is occurring.

According to the UN, over 2 million people remain displaced by violence in Darfur, many of whom remain refugees in neighboring Chad, reluctant to return to an insecure environment. Amnesty International has documented continued abuses by security forces, including unlawful killings, sexual violence, systematic looting, and forced displacement; and it has new evidence,

including satellite imagery, showing that Sudanese government forces, including the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias have continued to commit war crimes and other serious human rights violations in Darfur. As you are aware, the RSF was formed from the former “Janjaweed” militia, which was responsible for crimes against humanity in Darfur’s Jebel Marra region, and is believed to be chiefly responsible for killing scores of protesters in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum on June 3, 2019. Satellite evidence and testimonies collected by Amnesty confirm that government forces and associated militias damaged or destroyed at least 45 villages in Jebel Marra between July 2018 and February 2019.

According to the United Nations, 9 of 10 UNAMID team sites closed to date-- which were supposed to be handed over to the government to be used for civilian purposes-- are instead being used by security forces, specifically the RSF. This same paramilitary force carried out crimes against humanity in North and South Darfur in 2014, in Jebel Marra in 2015 and 2016, and continues to carry out war crimes and human rights violations in Jebel Marra. Sudan’s current governing body – the Transitional Military Council (TMC) – has demanded that the remaining UNAMID bases be handed over directly to the RSF, which is led by the deputy head of the TMC, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka “Hemeti.” Despite recent reports that Sudan has suspended the decree demanding UNAMID hand over the sites, if the UN Security Council authorizes the continued reduction in UNAMID’s force, it could give the RSF further control over facilities intended for civilian use, providing a base of operation from which additional civilian abuses could be carried out.

Sudan is in the middle of a political crisis. Those currently in power are the very architects of many of the most violent campaigns during the Darfur conflict. They have already demonstrated that they are willing to engage in the same tactics in Khartoum, and may do so in other areas of the country. Now is not the time to alter UNAMID.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
Ranking Member