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SENATOR CARDIN DENOUNCES SLOW DEPLOYMENT OF DARFUR PEACEKEEPERS

Washington, DC – **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)**, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, described the slow deployment of the hybrid United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) as “deplorable and unacceptable.” Senator Cardin was responding a statement earlier this week by the head of UN peacekeeping, Mr. Jean Marie Guehenno that the full deployment of the 26,000 member force could take all year.

“The United States and the international community have struggled for almost two years to implement a force to protect civilians and improve security in Darfur” Senator Cardin stated. “The United Nations Secretary General, the African Union and the European Union must act to finish what we started by intensifying the diplomatic pressure now on Sudan to allow the UNAMID force into Darfur.”

A member of the Foreign Relations subcommittee on Africa, Senator Cardin is an active advocate for providing safe humanitarian relief to the people of Darfur and pressuring the Sudanese Government to cooperate with UNAMID by negotiating the requisite authority for full deployment.

“Time is not on the side of the many innocent men, women and children who are desperate for a reprieve from the violence and misery that is Darfur. We can act now, or be witness to a slow, painful and embarrassing humanitarian catastrophe,” said Senator Cardin.

Bringing a peacekeeping force to Darfur has been plagued by problems and government non-cooperation since August 2006 when the African Union first announced it would deploy soldiers to enforce the Darfur Peace Agreement. The African Union was only able to field 7,000 lightly armed soldiers in a region the size of the state of Texas. The UNAMID force is supposed to reach a total of 26,000 troops, but thus far only 9,000 have been deployed.

Additionally, the Sudanese government has not provided UNAMID the requisite clearance needed to provide logistics to equip and supply the force. On January 7, 2008, a Sudanese army unit attacked a UNAMID convoy on its way to Darfur.

Khartoum is not the only hindrance to UNAMID. The international community has failed to come up with the needed attack and logistics helicopters necessary to operate in remote Darfur. Many countries, including the United States, have not stepped forward to provide the helicopters despite consistent urging by the United Nations.

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