

UNAMID: Tabit Integrated Field Mission

09/11/2014

1. Introduction

On 3 November 2014, Radio Dabanga reported that “More than 200 women and girls were collectively raped in their village on Friday 31 October 2014 evening, reportedly by Sudanese soldiers belonging to a military garrison south of El Fasher in North Darfur. 80 of the victims were schoolgirls, 105 were unmarried girls. The other victims were married women. The residents of Tabit have not been able yet to transfer the wounded to other towns or medical centers.

The number of women allegedly raped in Tabit was quite high. Sexual violence in Darfur, since the start of conflict (2003), is a key issue. However, it can be said that since the early days of conflict, allegation of such massive rapes were not received. This allegation was a serious cause of concern for UNAMID as well as for international community because even during the intense fighting between GoS forces and SLA/MM and JEM in December 2010 and January 2011, such violations were not reported. The Rapid Support Force (RSF) activities in South and North Darfur created a lot of concerns and allegations of violations were raised. However, even during RSF actions, such heinous and massive allegations were not received.

These concerns led to a UNAMID verification attempt via Shangil Tobaya team-site on 4 November 2014. This verification field mission was denied access outside Tabit by GoS military on the pretext of not obtaining permission from GoS authorities.

On 05 November 2014, SN organized a joint visit to Zam Zam IDPs camp including HRS, RoL, Humanitarian Section, Child Protection Unit, CAS and UNPoL. The purpose of the visit was to verify the information received that there were new arrivals in the camp from Tabit area, following an alleged mass rape of about 200 girls which may have occurred in that area. The team interacted with the Omda of Tabit Mr. ADAM and the Chief of Omdas of Zam Zam Mr. ALI ISHAG. According to them, there is no new arrivals in the camp and the situation is normal.

UNAMID SN then intensified its engagement with GoS authorities in El-Fasher to gain access to Tabit via El-Fasher route. The access was achieved on 9 November 2014.

II. Particulars

Date: 9 November 2014

Coordinates of Tabit: (N 13018'00" E 25005'00")

Distance: About 48/50 km (Vehicle speedometer reading, end and start: 77679 – 77622 = 57. The vehicle was used for moving inside the town; also came to town after departure to conduct interview with SAF commander).

Time: The field mission arrived in Tabit at 1316 hours, left at 1618 hours

Population: The number of population is not certain. Different estimates provided by different interlocutors. The maximum was about 7/8 thousands individuals.

Tribes: Not exact numbers or figures. But it was mentioned that Fur (Basinga), Tama and Tunjur are the main tribes.

III. Methodology of information collection

The UNAMID field mission was an integrated type; 18 representatives from different sections/units participated in the mission; most of the team was from Sector North with some from HQ.

Due to shortage of time, as well as the issue of GoS curfew after 1600 hours, the team was divided into sub-teams to facilitate wide reach and to obtain higher quantity of interviews. It was decided to seek out and conduct interviews with citizens, students, native administrators, females, persons present in Tabit market, students and other groups. It was also decided to attempt to trace the family, which was allegedly detained by SAF and also to meet with the SAF commander in the end of field interviews.

The interviews were conducted in group as well as isolation format. Attempts were made to conduct the interview in confidential setting but it was not always possible. The sub-teams introduced themselves and explained the purpose and objective of the mission; consent were sought before the interviews and the interviewees were given time to ask question or pose comments.

Beside access issue, significant challenges were faced on the ground during verification exercise. The SAF personnel were present in sizable numbers – in uniform and civil clothing – in Tabit. They followed the sub-teams during the verification exercise. Some of the sub-teams reported the interviews being captured on recording devices (mobile phone) by the SAF members. The behavior and responses of interviewees indicated an environment of fear and intimidation. Some of the sub-teams had to ask the military personnel to stop following them and also asked them to allow the conduction of interviews in some privacy.

The integrated mission was launched suddenly. A short debriefing was done but the lack of time to properly organize created logistical and substantive challenges. The format or types of interviewing tools were not finalized. An agreed set of questions were not developed and deployed. Each sub-team had to rely on their own previous experience and expertise to find the information required.

The issue of GoS curfew after 1600 hours on the movement of UNAMID convoys also limited the time available at the verification site.

IV. Consolidated Assessment

The sub-teams attempted verification in different parts of Tabit town. A consolidated assessment of the situation, issues and events are as follows:

Security

- The overall security situation was observed to be okay.
- The area is under robust control of GoS military forces.

Environment during mission

- During the verification exercise, there were a high number of military personnel, in civil clothing and in uniform present in the Tabit village.
- The sub-teams also observed a small number of adult population (male and females) available in the town. It was informed that a lot of people go out to farms in the morning but compared to the SAF personnel numbers present, the low number of town people was quite conspicuous.
- The public was shy to openly discuss the allegation of mass rape in Tabit. An environment of fear and silence prevailed. A number of interviewees refused to interact or responded that they were unaware of the incident.
- One of the professional (teacher) in Tabit informed UNAMID that SAF had previously informed community not to provide information to UNAMID forthcoming field mission. Reportedly a committee was formed to interact with UNAMID field mission.
- The military personnel attempted to follow each sub-team and to remain present during interviews. There were complaints of recording and picture taking of the sub-teams during interviews by military [sic].
- One sub-team observed that local population consider SAF to be the lesser evil as compared to SLA forces. The improved economic conditions in Tabit (good fertile land, Qatar developmental projects, etc.) may also influence locals not cooperate frankly with UNAMID field mission.

Mass rape

Most of the persons interviewed denied the allegation of mass rape. However, one sub- team was informed about 15 illegitimate pregnancies in the town.

The incident of an affair between a local girl and a military soldier was widely reported with some discrepancies.

The disappearance of SAF soldier was also widely reported.

The detention and interrogation by SAF of the family of the girl including the girl was generally reported. Though there are important discrepancies about the number of people detained as well as the length and location of this detention.

V. Recommendations

Integrated Field Mission

- In the future to avoid delays in the reaching areas that need verification, UNAMID flight as means of transport is highly recommended to ensure timely protection of civilians.
- Delay of UNAMID fact finding mission to Tabit is due to the late government permission for UNAMID to access the area a trend that resulted in disappearing of material evidence. Thus, it is highly recommended that UNAMID should be able to move freely and as soon as possible to the affected areas without hindrance from the government authorities as SOFA stated.