

Darfur rebels call for equal representation at talks

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By Jack Kimball

ASMARA, July 23 (Reuters) - A newly formed Darfur rebel group on Monday said a meeting of rebel leaders in Tanzania next month must give "equal representation" to all insurgents in Sudan's conflict-torn western region.

The United Front for Liberation and Development (UFLD) -- formed in the Eritrean capital this month -- said it was prepared to attend the meeting in Tanzania aimed at starting peace talks to end the four-year conflict.

"In an attempt to redefine the crisis and depart from the limited focus on individual leaders with their narrow self-interest, the UFLD insists on equal representation for all resistance movements," it said in a statement on Monday.

"The Front is opposed to preconditions that exclude other forces and thereby create unnecessary complications; and, also condemns the wasteful tactics of showmanship and grandstanding."

Darfur rebels fractured into more than a dozen armed groups after an unpopular peace deal last year with Khartoum that only one faction signed.

The United Nations and the African Union called a meeting in Tanzania, to be held from Aug. 3-5, to consult rebels on when and where they might hold peace talks with Khartoum, and to get them to agree on a common negotiating platform.

The group's statement came after a weekend meeting between a joint U.N.-AU delegation and the group in the Eritrean capital.

Experts estimate some 200,000 people have died in Darfur in what the United States has termed genocide.

Khartoum denies this and puts the death toll at 9,000.

The violence flared after mostly non-Arab rebels took up arms in 2003 accusing Sudan's central government of neglecting the remote, arid western region.



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