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**Written statement* submitted by Human Rights First, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 December 2006]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Protection of Non-Governmental Organizations and Human Rights Defenders in Darfur

For too long there has been far too little international attention paid to the human rights crisis in Darfur. Over the last three years, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed or have lost their lives as a result of the fighting. Over two million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, largely as a result of a military campaign against the civilian population by Sudanese government and allied militia forces. This special session on the human rights situation in Darfur offers the Human Rights Council an opportunity to document and publicize the gross human rights abuses that have been committed in the region and to propose concrete steps to address this ongoing pattern of violations. Human Rights First (HRF) commends the Council for taking this step.

Over the past two years, much of Human Rights First's attention to the crisis in Darfur has focused on advocacy for a political solution to the conflict. This work has become significantly more difficult as the conditions under which humanitarian workers and human rights defenders operate have deteriorated. HRF wishes to draw the Council's attention to these horrendous conditions and to urge the Council to use this special session to take concrete steps to push for an improvement in them, in order that human rights and humanitarian aid workers can assist the victims of the widespread human rights violations that continue in the region.

Since the beginning of 2006, there has been a significant deterioration of the already difficult conditions faced by many of these non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The humanitarian operation in Darfur is the world's largest, with 14,000 aid workers from both Sudanese and international NGOs on the ground. Other NGOs in Darfur work to monitor and expose the grave violations of human rights that have been commonplace throughout the conflict.

The Sudanese government has a long history of persecuting NGOs and human rights defenders. It has consistently interfered with efforts of those organizations and individuals to bring relief to Sudan's large conflict-affected populations and has been particularly harsh on those attempting to document and publicize human rights violations. It has also demonstrated a long-held suspicion of international organizations operating within its borders, as exemplified in a law passed in February 2006—the Organization of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act—which is used by the government as a pretext to threaten, interfere with and punish humanitarian and human rights workers.

This kind of official obstruction of NGO activities has intensified since the outbreak of conflict and the beginning of the massive relief operation in Darfur in 2003. In addition to facing governmental obstruction, humanitarian aid agencies have frequently been victims of attacks, usually robberies of food and equipment, by government-backed militias and rebel groups.

Jan Pronk, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Sudan, stated in August 2006 that the number of attacks on NGOs in Darfur was 75 percent higher in the first half of 2006 than in the previous year.¹ He also reported at that time that the number of attacks on members of the African Union peacekeeping force had increased by 900 percent

¹ United Nations Special Representative in Sudan Jan Pronk, Press Conference, Khartoum, 9 August 2006 <http://www.unmis.org/english/2006Docs/PC-09aug.pdf>

compared with 2005.² Since the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in May 2006, bouts of inter-rebel fighting and military operations by the Government of Sudan have brought about a drastic increase in the overall level of violence in the region. July was the worst month to date for attacks on humanitarian workers, with nine deaths.³ By October, a total of 12 humanitarian workers had been killed this year.⁴ Operating in such conditions, NGOs and humanitarian aid workers are often unable to seek safety for themselves or for the victims whom they are trying to help.

Human Rights First has compiled the following table to document incidents of attacks on NGOs in Sudan since January 2006, as reported by NGOs in the field and by the United Nations. Although not exhaustive, it serves to highlight the gravity of the problem by demonstrating the volume of incidents and the range of difficulties faced by NGOs.

http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/international_justice/darfur/table/ngo-table.aspx#

Human Rights First recommends the Human Rights Council should:

- Reiterate its call for the Government of Sudan and other parties to the conflict in Darfur to allow for the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance;
- Call on the Government of Sudan and other parties to the conflict not only to cease interference with those who provide humanitarian assistance and conduct human rights monitoring and reporting in Darfur, but also to articulate and implement policies and practices that protect and support their activities;
- Request the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the U.N. Security Council to take additional steps to promote the safety of humanitarians and human rights defenders; and
- Dispatch an assessment mission to Darfur and request that it report to the Human Rights Council at its fourth session.

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² Ibid.

³ Last month Darfur's worst-ever for violence towards aid workers, Oxfam Press Release, 8 August 2006 http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/pressreleases2006/pr060808_sudan

⁴ SUDAN: Darfur insecurity much worse than last year, IRIN News, Nairobi, 5 Sep 2006 http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=55400&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa