



## **Sudan Liberation Army–Minni Minawi (SLA–MM)**

### **Origins/composition**

SLA-MM evolved from a Fur–Zaghawa split in the SLA and is led by members of the Zaghawa tribe who took up arms less to oppose the government in Khartoum than to fight the ‘janjaweed’, their rivals in the camel trade in North Darfur. The split between Minawi and the Fur leader Abdul Wahid Mohamed al Nur was the first in a series of divisions along tribal lines that fatally weakened the SLA insurgency. It led to personal power struggles that undercut the credibility of the two groups among their own grassroots. By 2011, SLA-MM and SLA-Abdul Wahid—both much weakened and both under attack by government troops and airplanes—were reportedly considering a new era of cooperation. At the same time, however, SLA field commanders deeply disenchanted with the two men and their long absence from the field—Minawi in Khartoum and Abdel Wahid in Paris—were engaged in quiet behind-the-scenes talks to form a reunited SLA independent of its original leaders, and with structures, accountability, and a clear political vision.

### **Leadership**

Before the split in the SLA, Minawi, formerly a primary school teacher, succeeded in controlling the movement’s main military forces despite having no military experience. In May 2006 he signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) with the government, becoming senior assistant to President Omar al Bashir and chairman of the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority (TDRA). The positions were nominal, his power negligible. Minawi’s position as senior assistant to the president was not renewed after the general elections of April 2010 and at the end of 2010 he moved from Khartoum to Juba, declaring himself in rebellion again and the DPA dead.

### **Areas of control/activity**

After signing the DPA, Minawi had no access to rebel-controlled areas of Darfur but was able to move freely in government-controlled areas. Most of his forces were divided into companies (approximately 100 men) and stationed in the Zaghawa homeland in North Darfur—around the state capital, al Fasher, and the town of Um Berro—and in a pocket south-east of Nyala, the capital of South Darfur state. In the April elections, which were boycotted by DPA non-signatories, SLA–MM won parliamentary seats in North Darfur (Kutum) and South Darfur (Gereida).

On 3 December 2010, after Minawi’s move to Juba, an army spokesman declared that his forces had become a ‘legitimate target’. SLA–MM immediately came under heavy attack in North and South Darfur. Some of his men moved into the northern fringe of Southern Sudan, reportedly after defecting from SLA-MM to JEM.

### **Sources of financing/support**

Until Minawi moved to Juba, many of his men enjoyed government salaries and other benefits stemming from the DPA, including vehicles. The SLA–MM office in Khartoum was subsidized to the tune of USD 1 million per month, and SLA–MM fighters received logistical support from the government. In December 2010, however, all support to SLA-MM ceased. Offices, financial assets, and vehicles were

### **Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA)**

Small Arms Survey \* 47 Avenue Blanc \* 1202 Geneva \* Switzerland  
<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org>

seized, and Minawi himself was removed as head of the TDRA. Many former loyalists declared themselves against him and made overtures to JEM.

### **Status**

Minawi's return to the side of the rebellion divided his movement into three main groups: one that stayed in Khartoum, negotiating disarmament terms with the government; a second in North Darfur, composed of 70–75 men and 12 vehicles, negotiating an alliance with JEM; and a third, still aligned with Minawi, led by his longtime chief of staff, Juma Mohamed Haggar, and Mohamadein Osman 'Orajob', a field commander reputed to have been a *nahab* (highwayman) before the insurgency.

Targeted by government forces, abandoned by many Zaghawa who had remained loyal to it, and no longer a favourite of the US government, SLA-MM will have little impact in the fight for rights in Darfur unless it ends its isolation and builds alliances with other factions. The defection of senior commanders that began even before Minawi signed the DPA continued throughout his almost five years in Khartoum, during which he was perceived by many as enriching himself and his close relatives at the expense of others.

Updated March 2011