

Beat: Local

UN helicopter crashes in Sudan;s Darfur region, injuring 3

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USPA News - A United Nations (UN) helicopter carrying more than 20 people crashed in Sudan's troubled Darfur region on Sunday after developing technical problems, injuring three of those on board, the multi-national force said. The exact cause was not immediately known.

The helicopter, flying for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), had taken off from a helipad in Zalingei, a town in western Sudan, and was en-route to Nertiti when it developed technical problems. There were a total of 19 passengers and four crew members on board. "The pilot turned back to Zalingei helipad and during the emergency landing the aircraft crashed and was badly damaged," an UNAMID spokesperson said in an e-mailed statement. A photo from the scene showed the helicopter on its side, with its tail missing and several rotor blades broken off. Those on board were quickly evacuated from the aircraft, but three passengers who suffered minor injuries were transported to UNAMID's Level 1 hospital in Zalingei for further treatment. It was not immediately clear what sort of technical problems the aircraft experienced, but officials said an investigation had been launched. "UNAMID is conducting a check on all its rotary assets to ensure their technical safety," the statement added. The force did not disclose the type of aircraft involved in Sunday's accident, but photos from the scene appeared to show an Mi-8 medium twin-turbine transport helicopter. About 19,500 troops, military observers and police officers and nearly 4,500 civilians currently serve with UNAMID, which assumed peacekeeping duties from an earlier African Union mission at the start of 2008. A total of 51 UNAMID blue helmets have been killed in the line of duty while serving in Darfur. The UNAMID force is tasked with protecting civilians, promoting an inclusive peace process and help ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance across Darfur, an arid region on Sudan's western flank. Fighting and large-scale displacement has convulsed the region since 2003 when rebels took up arms against the Government, whose military forces responded with the support of allied militiamen.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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