Bashir, wanted by ICC, arrives in Morocco for a 'private visit'

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By AFP

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Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, wanted on genocide charges by the International Criminal Court, arrived in Morocco late Thursday for a "private" visit.

Bashir arrived at Tangiers airport, accompanied by ministers and other senior Sudanese officials, according to the Le360 news site, considered close to circles in Morocco's royal court.

Earlier in the day the official Sudanese news agency said the president was making a "private" visit of several days to Morocco, without giving details.

Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for genocide and other crimes, charges he steadfastly denies.

He faces 10 charges, including three of genocide as well as war crimes and crimes against humanity and charges relating to the conflict in the western Darfur region.

Sudan's deadly conflict broke out in 2003 when ethnic minority groups took up arms against Bashir's Arab-dominated government, which launched a brutal counter-insurgency.

**Human rights**

The UN Security Council asked the ICC in 2005 to investigate the crimes in Darfur, where at least 300 000 people have been killed and 2.5 million displaced, according to UN figures.

The long-time Sudanese president has denied the charges against him and continues to travel to various countries with impunity.

Last month war crimes judges ruled that South Africa had failed in its duties to the ICC in 2015 when it refused to arrest Bashir during a visit.

Later this month the Sudanese leader will travel to Moscow at President Vladimir Putin's request, according to Khartoum.

The Morocco trip, announced a week ago in the Sudanese press, has angered human rights defenders in Morocco who wrote to their government calling for the visit to be scrapped.

"The visit by someone with blood on their hands does no honour to our country," the 40 signatories said.

Morocco, which was not one of the 124 signatories of the Rome Statute which established the International Criminal Court, has hosted Bashir before.

Last November he attended an African summit in Marrakesh, on the margins of the COP22 international climate conference.