

Russian Pilot of UN Copter Is Beaten

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UNITED NATIONS — A missing Russian pilot and three rebel commanders were beaten when their UN helicopter landed off target in Sudan's conflict-torn Darfur region earlier this week, a UN spokesman said Wednesday.

The helicopter lost contact after landing in a mainly Arab tribal area in Sudan's troubled west on Monday. It was carrying three Darfur rebels from the Liberty and Justice Movement on their way to peace talks, the United Nations said.

Sudan's army grounded the helicopter after it missed its destination because of bad weather, UN officials said Tuesday. They denied earlier reports that it had been seized by rebels.

"Three Liberty and Justice Movement commanders who were on board ... and the pilot, were beaten at the scene," UN spokesman Martin Nesirky said. "Subsequently, the crew and passengers, with the exception of the pilot, were taken to a government military camp."

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the beating. Nesirky said the United Nations was investigating.

He said the United Nations was worried about the fate of the missing pilot and that the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping force was searching for him.

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