

# Sudanese Killings Must be Stopped

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What is being called the world's greatest humanitarian disaster today is occurring in Sudan, 10 years after the genocide in nearby Rwanda.

Arab militias (the "Janjaweed"), backed by the Sudanese government, are carrying out deliberate mass murders, deportations, rapes and abductions of black Africans, belonging to the Fur, Massaalit and Zaghawa farming communities, in the western province of Darfur. Tens of thousands have died and more than 1 million people have been driven from their homes.

And, as in Rwanda before, the international community still has no effective means of stopping the violence, which is all part of a racially motivated ethnic cleansing campaign.

A cease-fire agreed to by Sudan's government on April 8 has not ended the strafing and burning of villages and the destruction of irrigation systems and crops. Behind the attacks is both the desire of Arab herders to take over the black Africans' land and the Khartoum government's attempt to suppress demands for more resources and more power sharing for the impoverished Darfur region.

A senior American official predicts that 100,000 to 400,000 people will die in Darfur from starvation and disease if relief workers cannot reach those forcibly pushed into squalid camps where they remain subject to severe abuse. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, President George W. Bush and other world leaders have issued appeals, but the government of Sudan continues to block humanitarian workers from reaching many of the men, women and children at risk.

Clearly, stronger measures will be needed if 10 years from now Darfur is not to become the object of regrets and apologies, just like Rwanda. The UN secretary-general has called for "swift" action, including military force as a last resort, should full access to Darfur be denied. But these words need to be backed up by enough diplomatic and political muscle to make the Khartoum government take notice.

The United States has been one of the driving forces behind the peace process in Sudan between the Islamic government in the north and the largely Christian animist south, represented by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Indeed, the Bush administration has invested heavily in a prospective peace settlement while the Sudanese government has looked to normalizing its relations with America and getting sanctions lifted. The United States has thus far refrained from using its full leverage to confront the government out of fear that pressing the Darfur crisis could jeopardize the north-south peace process, but it should not be in the position of helping negotiate a peace agreement with one group of rebels while the Sudanese government

commits atrocities against another. It should make clear that unless the atrocities are stopped, and a political process set up to deal with Darfur's grievances, the Sudanese government can forget about normalized relations.

At the same time the United States should seek action by the UN Security Council, which to date has been reluctant to put pressure on Sudan. The council should insist upon an end to attacks on defenseless people, full and immediate access in the region for humanitarian aid workers, and the deployment of peacekeepers to ensure that aid is delivered and that the displaced refugees can return home in safety. It should also call upon France, with troops in neighboring Chad, to protect Darfurian refugees from cross-border attacks.

The United States should also urge African leaders to play a far greater role in putting out the fires in the heart of their own region. Africa's regional body, the African Union, helped the parties in Darfur to agree on the cease-fire, but it still has not deployed a commission to monitor compliance with the agreement, although it has finally sent in a reconnaissance mission. African states should be the first to offer peacekeepers, under a Security Council mandate.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid will be needed to address this emergency. Given America's focus on Iraq, European donors as well as Japan, with its human security fund, should be encouraged to contribute the lion's share of humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance.

Darfur may seem a faraway place, but if the history of the 20th century has taught any lesson it is that the world community cannot afford to stand idly by while large numbers of people are subject to killings and starvation. Even in the most remote corner of the globe, such crises rarely stay contained. They spill over borders, as the Darfur crisis is now doing in Chad. Ultimately they affect us all.