

15 March 2007

Blair: World Must Act on Darfur to Prevent Spread of Extremism

The international community should take a "far tougher line" against Sudan over atrocities in Darfur to prevent extremism spreading across Africa, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Thursday.

In an interview on Sky News television which focused mainly on Iraq, Blair offered a robust defence of his views on combating radicalism and said countries needed to act to prevent future security threats.

"I would today take a far tougher line on Sudan," he said after reaffirming his belief in what he called the "worldwide link" between "global terrorism".

Asked if that meant sending in British troops, he said: "I don't think we are able to send troops in but I certainly think the international community should be.

"They should be saying to the Bashir government in Sudan: if you're not prepared to comply with what the United Nations are saying, we're going to get progressively harder with you..."

Blair's comments came after Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir last week backed away from a deal reached in November last year to allow a 20,000-strong UN peacekeeping force into Darfur alongside African Union troops.

Khartoum has repeatedly prevented international intervention in the troubled western region, where more than 200,000 people have been killed and at least two million displaced in a four-year civil war.

Most of the violence against the ethnic African people in the region has been blamed on militia backed by the Arab-led government.

Amid international calls for an end to the bloodshed and the threat of sanctions, Blair said: "I believe if Sudan descends much further into the chaos that is already there, it'll spread across that part of Africa, you will get new radicalisation going on because this extremism is now preying on all of these conflicts.

"And my view is, at some point the world has got to wake up and understand we are in a fundamental conflict with these people and we are going to win when we stand up to them.

"If we carry on apologising for ourselves leaving them the excuse of saying, it's because of George Bush that they're doing these terrible things or ridiculous nonsense like that,

the more we give in to their propaganda and ideas the less chance we have of protecting our security."

Copyright 2007
Agence France-Presse