

## **In Sudan, a Sense of Abandonment**

Victims See Little Help From Outside

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Washington Post Foreign Service

Tuesday, November 16, 2004; Page A01

NEW AL-JEER SUREAF, Sudan -- The Bush administration has called it genocide. Other governments have labeled it ethnic cleansing and the world's worst humanitarian crisis. There have been calls for collective action and promises of relief. There have been somber reminders of the slaughter in tiny Rwanda a decade ago and solemn vows not to let such a thing happen here, in Africa's largest country.

But months later, the displaced inhabitants of Darfur, in western Sudan, find themselves consoled by little more than words. No Western country has been willing to commit troops to a small peacekeeping mission mounted by the African Union, while aid donors have been distracted by the conflict in Iraq, and U.N. sanctions have been frozen by diplomatic disputes.

The depth of the crisis can be felt in this steamy, desolate camp for the displaced, where Fatina Abdullah's family is still on the run from marauding Arab militiamen. She fled her village weeks ago, and her current home is under a wooden cart. Her son Bakheit, 8, is weak from diarrhea, anemia and a chest infection, afflictions that have killed dozens of children here.

"No one cares," said Abdullah, 45, burying her face in work-scarred hands. The ailing boy lay by her side, gasping for air and perspiring heavily. "No one is protecting us."

Since Sept. 9, when Secretary of State Colin L. Powell declared that the events in Darfur constituted genocide, U.N. officials estimate that the death toll has nearly doubled, to 70,000, in a region where African rebels have been battling government troops and Arab militiamen known as the Janjaweed for the past 20 months.

Violence and crime are surging, with almost daily reports of assaults against aid workers and civilians, while squalid tent cities continue to swell. More than 1.4 million people have fled their farms and villages.

In a recent agreement with rebel forces, the government agreed to establish a no-fly zone and the fighters promised to allow food convoys to reach thousands of displaced families. But U.N. officials said both sides had repeatedly violated a long-standing cease-fire, and some fear the new agreement may also collapse.

Meanwhile Jan Pronk, the top U.N. envoy to Sudan, has warned that Darfur "may easily enter a state of anarchy." Pronk said there were "strong indications" that war crimes had occurred "on a large and systematic scale."

In addition, according to U.N. officials, almost half the families in Darfur still do not have enough to eat, and 200,000 people are unable to receive food rations because of

armed attacks on convoy routes. In one turbulent area called Zalengi, some 160,000 civilians have been cut off from food aid since Sept. 25 because roads are blocked.

"We need a political solution quickly here," said Bettina Luscher, a public affairs officer with the World Food Program. "Things are getting far worse and more complicated by the day. We are really concerned about how we will feed these people by the end of the year."

The continuing international reluctance to address the Darfur crisis has led critics -- including diplomats and former peacekeeping officials -- to complain that the United States and other powers have cynically substituted dramatic rhetoric for meaningful actions. One such critic is Romeo Dallaire, the Canadian general who led the stymied U.N. peacekeeping mission during the 1994 Rwanda massacres.

"The use of the word 'genocide' was nothing more than the U.S. playing politics with a term that should be sacrosanct," said Dallaire, who argues that the American government should back up its words with deeds, in part by "putting a lot more pressure" behind efforts to bolster the African Union mission.

Charles R. Snyder, the State Department's senior representative on Sudan, defended the U.S. role in Darfur, saying the Bush administration took the lead when no other country was willing to do so and has been the largest donor of aid.

"The word 'genocide' was not an action word; it was a responsibility word," Snyder said in a telephone interview. "There was an ethical and moral obligation, and saying it underscored how seriously we took this. . . . If I didn't believe the U.S. was doing enough, I would resign."

### **An Underfunded Mission**

With Darfur edging toward chaos and no Western country willing to send in troops, the burden of trying to contain the situation has fallen to the 700 African observer forces stationed there. The fledgling African Union says it needs \$220 million to finance the mission for one year and is still \$80 million short.

Beginning late last month, in its first and only regional operation to date, the U.S. military airlifted several hundred African soldiers from Nigeria and Rwanda into Darfur as part of a plan to increase troop strength to about 3,000.

But some experts assert that a force 10 times that number is needed, and that the troops need a stronger mandate so they can intervene in fighting and criminal activity. Some experts and diplomats have also raised concerns that the Africans, who lack military vehicles and helicopters, may not be adequately equipped for the task.

"Sudan is something that all members of the international community have to deal with," said Howard F. Jeter, who was U.S. ambassador to Nigeria from 2001 to 2003. "The

Nigerians . . . are willing to risk their own lives to bring stability on the continent. We have to help them do it right."

Dallaire said Darfur needed a force of up to 44,000 peacekeepers, who would set up checkpoints and safe aid corridors, disarm combatants and be given the power to protect civilians. To date, the government of Sudan has refused to permit a peacekeeping force to enter the country.

"The mission of observing will do nothing except destroy the credibility of African Union troops," Dallaire said. He said it was unfair to criticize observer troops as "inept when it's not their fault. Observing people getting beaten up and dying is useless."

Already, the African troops have faced volatile situations in which they are greatly outnumbered and unable to help. Last week, more than 100 Sudanese police officers with guns, sticks and teargas overran a refugee camp in an attempt to force occupants to move to another location. Some refused to leave and took refuge in a mosque, while the soldiers careered through the camp in trucks, swinging their batons.

Two African Union officers arrived from a nearby base to investigate, but they were armed only with notebooks and cameras. Lt. Col. Henry Mejah, a Nigerian, said he tried to interview a Sudanese commander, but the man yelled at him and stormed away. Other police officers screamed at Capt. Rex Adzagba Kudjoe, a Ghanaian, when he tried to take photographs of the site. Shortly afterward, the two officers left.

Two days later, another bulldozer rammed into the camp, crushing homes that had just been rebuilt. Residents said they were beaten when they refused to leave for a new camp in a remote and vulnerable location. An 8-year old girl, Manahula Jacob Ali, was shot in the foot. Sadia Hamiss Adriss, 16, had a zigzagging gash in her cheek.

"Why are they still bulldozing and shooting and beating people?" Matina Mydin, a nurse treating victims in a nearby clinic, demanded angrily. "Where is the will of the international community?"

### **Shifting Deadlines**

Several factors have contributed to the lack of international attention to Darfur, according to experts and officials.

The Bush administration has backed a peace deal in an older, separate conflict between the Sudan government and rebels in the south. Even though it has accused the Khartoum government of genocide, it is reluctant to jeopardize that agreement by pressing too hard on Darfur.

Proposed U.N. sanctions have been frozen because of a veto by China, a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. Sudan is China's fourth-largest supplier of oil. Meanwhile, deadlines for the imposition of sanctions keep slipping.

First, the Security Council set an Aug. 30 deadline for Khartoum to rein in the Janjaweed. One month later, the council voted to consider unspecified sanctions if the situation did not improve. Last week, the European Union warned Sudan it would impose sanctions if security in the Darfur region did not improve within two months.

There is also widespread international disagreement over whether genocide has occurred.

The Bush administration had weakened its hand, critics said, by its narrow interpretation of the 1948 U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which calls on signatories to prevent and punish genocide. The administration's position is that the convention does not require a government to take action after it makes a finding of genocide.

"It's like taking an accused murderer to court," said Ted Dagne, an African analyst with the Congressional Research Service. "The judge declares him guilty, but then he says, 'Sorry, there are no prisons, so you are free.'"

According to Pronk's report, both the Khartoum government and the Janjaweed may be implicated in mass crimes. The report cited human rights observers who said armed security forces had dug up over 40 bodies from a mass grave in northern Darfur.

African rebel groups, in turn, have been stepping up attacks on government outposts. A new group called the National Movement for Reformation and Development is not a party to the cease-fire agreement and is now reportedly fighting another African rebel faction.

Relief officials said there was also insufficient international funding for food and medical aid. Donors have been slow to respond to calls for help, and U.N. officials said their relief agencies had received only about 75 percent of the \$534 million they needed to provide food, water and emergency supplies for one year.

Without a political solution, aid officials said, people may remain locked in camps and dependent on food aid for years.

"If the international community continues to waver and equivocate," said Sam Totten, an American expert on genocide, "there is no doubt in my mind that 10 years from now the international community will [be apologizing] to the victims of Darfur [as it once did to] the Tutsis of Rwanda."