

America should do more to help stop genocide around the world

By Juan Lopez

Fredericksburg, Virginia Free Lance-Star

January 18, 2006

IMAGINE AN ARMED militia coming into your neighborhood and randomly attacking the homes on your street. Imagine armed troops storming your home, torching it, and ordering your family to leave the area--or simply killing them.

Transplant yourself a few thousand miles to Darfur, Sudan. This exact situation has been occurring for months, and the United States has made paltry attempts to stop it. After former Secretary of State Colin Powell took the historic step of calling the action "genocide," the United States has largely ignored the situation.

True, America supported the African Union's effort to intervene--but there are no real efforts to stop the genocide.

The House recently passed a \$453 billion defense-spending bill. Shockingly, it omitted \$50 million in logistical support for Darfur.

Voting on spending bills usually involves partisan rancor. Republicans and Democrats try to include provisions benefiting various constituents. Sadly, genocide victims are no one's constituents.

American politicians need to come together make a bipartisan effort to end genocide.

One hundred and fifty years ago, a group of Americans stood up for human rights and opposed the institution of slavery. Eventually, they succeeded.

Genocide is even more horrific. It is the major human rights issue of the modern era.

Why are Americans not doing more? Why is it so hard to see the moral implications in allowing the deaths and brutal displacement of thousands of innocent civilians to occur? A few nonprofit organizations, including Genocide Watch and Human Rights Watch, are taking a stand. Unfortunately, they are in the minority.

Americans have a tendency to look at events that don't directly affect them with a peripheral disregard and think to themselves, "It's sad, but what can we do?" The answer is: a lot.

We can write to our representatives in Congress to show that their constituents have an interest in seeing their country take steps to end genocide. We need Congress to have the political will to take a stand.

The same holds true for the executive branch. When President Bush took office, his aides brought him a memo outlining the failure of the Clinton administration to end the genocide in Rwanda. Reportedly, Bush responded by writing the words "NOT ON MY WATCH" at the top of the memo. He implied that he would not allow genocide to occur.

But he has.

Calling it "genocide" is not an effort to end the problem. Making relatively small contributions to the African Union is not enough to end genocide. Ending genocide is not a half-hearted effort consisting of politically safe moves and tough comments.

It is a long-term effort that involves some risk.

Although Condoleezza Rice lobbied the Congress to restore the \$50 million for the AU, the proposal was rejected. President Bush must take a stronger stance. He needs to make better efforts to enlist the support of the general public and members of Congress.

Innocent people are losing their lives every day. Why did America get involved with efforts to end the genocide against the Jews (and more recently, in Eastern Europe) but not in Rwanda or Darfur? Are the lives of whites more valuable than blacks? Of course not.

Americans need to tackle the racial issue and its correlation to our tendency to intervene. This initiative should include an effort to educate people about genocide. Education and awareness are important components of any serious effort.

Once Americans are aware of what is going on, it is harder to turn their backs and be bystanders.

We can all take a stance against genocide in our own ways. These efforts don't require a lot of time and money. All we need is a pen, paper, and a stamp to make a difference.

Genocide is occurring all over the world--including Darfur, Ethiopia, and Congo, just to name a few.

President Bush needs to make the words "not on my watch" actually mean something.

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