

18 January 2007

## **Darfur Advocates Urge U.S. Congress to Press for U.N. Military Force in the Region**

By The Associated Press

Leaders of Darfur advocacy groups urged Congress on Thursday to hold hearings on whether the United States should use military force to protect citizens of the western Sudan region after four years of what the Bush administration calls genocide.

They also said Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir seems to be backing away from a commitment he made to former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in December to allow the United Nations to deploy of 22,000 peacekeepers in Darfur.

They suggested al-Bashir may be responding to what they said was an easing of U.S. pressure on Sudan in recent weeks.

The experts, who spoke during a conference call with reporters, were Lawrence Rossin of the Save Darfur Coalition; Amjad Attalah, a coalition adviser; and Kenneth Bacon of Refugees International.

The coalition sponsored a recent trip to Sudan by New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, who negotiated a 60-day cease-fire in Darfur.

Bacon said one success in Darfur has been that a massive humanitarian response by donor countries and private relief groups over the years has prevented outbreaks of disease and helped reduce infant mortality rates.

He said the Bush administration has been reluctant to impose sanctions against Sudan but urged that Congress take the lead by adopting measures that could stifle an oil-fueled economic upturn in Sudan, which possibly could induce the al-Bashir government to be more pliable on Darfur.

Overall, Bacon said, "The government of Sudan has not shown the ability to protect its own people." He recommended that Congress consider the use of force in Darfur, acknowledging that any such step would be "extremely controversial." Among advocates of such a policy are two Democratic members of the House of Representatives, Tom Lantos and Donald Payne. Lantos is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Bacon said the establishment of a no-fly zone over Darfur, despite risks, should be considered. He said the Sudanese have painted military aircraft used in Darfur hostilities the same color as planes used for humanitarian relief flights.

Rossin, a former U.S. ambassador to Croatia, said the humanitarian situation in Darfur has deteriorated further. "The government has been carrying out unabated hostilities," he said.

Rossin said deployment of the full complement of U.N. peacekeepers advocated by the U.N. Security Council is essential "because the African Union is not capable of providing the type of force needed in Sudan." The AU already has an ineffectual 7,000-strong force in the region.

Attalah cited a lessening of protection for women at camps housing some of the 2.5 million Darfurians displaced from their homes since 2003. African Union forces cannot ensure safety for women because the force is overstretched, he said.

He added that "gender-based violence and rape are used as weapons of war" in Darfur.

Copyright 2007  
International Herald Tribune