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Bush to Name Envoy for Darfur

Natsios Will Lead U.S. Effort to Quell the Violence in Sudan

By Colum Lynch and Glenn Kessler

UNITED NATIONS — President Bush has decided to name Andrew Natsios, a former administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, as his special envoy for Darfur in the hope of reviving a diplomatic effort to end a 3 1/2 -year spree of violence in Sudan that has left hundreds of thousands dead, according to senior administration officials.

Bush is expected to announce Natsios's appointment Tuesday in a speech to world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly. The initiative follows increasing pressure from Congress and human rights advocates to do more to halt what the Bush administration has termed the world's only ongoing case of genocide.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moller on Monday invited counterparts from nearly two dozen governments to participate in a high-level meeting on Darfur at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on Friday afternoon.

Rice and British Prime Minister Tony Blair also have appealed to senior Chinese officials in recent days to pressure the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, to allow a U.N. peacekeeping force of nearly 20,000 troops into the Darfur region. China, a major consumer of Sudanese oil, has routinely resisted efforts by the United States to persuade the U.N. Security Council to punish Khartoum for its role in the violence.

John R. Bolton, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the United States is planning to introduce a new Security Council resolution aimed at expanding a U.N. peacekeeping force in southern Sudan into Darfur. The U.N. group would replace 7,000 African Union peacekeepers who have struggled with few resources and limited success to stem the bloodshed in Darfur.

African leaders will meet Wednesday in New York to decide whether to extend the AU's mandate, which is set to expire on Sept. 30. The United States and the United Nations are pressing the Africans to remain in Darfur in the hope that Khartoum will ultimately agree to invite the U.N. blue helmets.

The conflict in Darfur began in February 2003 when two Darfurian rebel groups took up arms against the Islamic government in Khartoum, claiming mistreatment of the region's primarily black tribes.

Sudan responded by arming, equipping and supporting Arab militias, known as the Janjaweed, that attacked thousands of villages suspected of supporting the rebels. The attacks have driven more than 2 million people from their homes.

The U.N. special representative to Sudan, Jan Pronk of the Netherlands, declared Monday that the U.S.-brokered peace agreement "is nearly dead. It is in a coma. It ought to be under intensive care, but it isn't." He said fighting has flared up again, with the Sudanese government again launching a major military offensive and a growing number of rebel factions vying for power.

The spiraling violence has heightened criticism of the Bush administration's handling of the Darfur crisis two years after then-Secretary of State Colin L. Powell first called the killing there a genocide.

It has also spurred bipartisan congressional support for greater international action in Darfur. Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Norm Coleman (R-Minn.) visited the United Nations on Monday, meeting with Sudan's ambassador to press for greater international scrutiny of the atrocities in Darfur.

But Bush had resisted international calls for a special envoy. By selecting Natsios, the administration has chosen a blunt representative with considerable backing among the American aid community and a long record of butting heads with the Sudanese over the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

When Powell traveled to Darfur in July 2004, he was accompanied by Natsios, then USAID administrator. As the plane flew over the blackened remains of ravaged villages, Natsios described his dismay at the Sudanese government in a stream of expletives.

"I think he won't be fooled by these guys," said John Prendergast of the International Crisis Group, a sharp critic of the Bush administration's Darfur policy.

Still, some U.N. officials privately expressed concern that Natsios may pursue a confrontational approach that will harden Khartoum's opposition to a U.N. force in Darfur.

Pronk, meanwhile, joined the British government in proposing that the international community consider offering Sudan a series of incentives—including debt relief, the lifting of sanctions and greater trade access to Western markets—in exchange for cooperating with U.N. peace efforts. He also scolded Sudan's leaders for describing U.N. peacekeepers as a Western invasion force. "We do not intend to recolonize, nor are we laying the carpet for others to do so," he said.