

Bush Urges Sudan to Continue With Peace Talks

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KHARTOUM, [Sudan](#), May 2 — President Bush called Sudan's president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, on Tuesday, urging him to send a senior representative back to peace talks in [Nigeria](#) intended to end the carnage in [Darfur](#), as international pressure mounted on Sudan and the Darfur rebels to reach an agreement.

At the [United Nations](#), Basile Ikouebe of the Congo Republic, president of the Security Council this month, announced that the leaders of five African states — the Congo Republic, South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal and Egypt, "and possibly others" — would converge shortly in Abuja, Nigeria, where the talks are being held, to press for an agreement.

And in Abuja, [Robert B. Zoellick](#), the deputy secretary of state, was joined by senior officials from Britain, Canada and the [European Union](#) in meetings with all of the parties to the talks. In a conference call with reporters in Washington, Mr. Zoellick said he told everyone, "Time is short; it's time to close."

African Union mediators presented the rebels and the government with a proposed peace agreement last Tuesday. Since then, the mediators have seemed reluctant to amend it despite ardent pleas from rebels that it be changed to address their concerns.

Mr. Zoellick said the mediators had told him they were extending the talks once again by at least a day beyond the deadline of midnight Tuesday, local time. But with Mr. Bush's phone call and a stream of national leaders and diplomats arriving in Abuja, the pressure on the Sudanese government and the rebels is intense and mounting, unlike any previous moment in the three-year history of the murderous Darfur conflict.

Still, at least one rebel leader said he was unfazed.

Ahmed Tugod Lissan, chief negotiator for the Justice and Equality Movement, said pressure from the international community, no matter how intense, would not force his group to sign the agreement.

"We have come under a lot of pressure," he said. "But now the international community realizes this is an impossible document for us to sign."

Mr. Lissan said the meeting with Mr. Zoellick focused on critical issues, including formation of a state legislature and executive controlled by the rebel groups.

"He listened carefully to us about the fears of the movements about this document, and said he would present them to the mediation team," Mr. Lissan said.

On Sunday, the mediators extended the deadline by 48 hours, to midnight Tuesday, after the Sudanese government said it would accept the agreement but rebel leaders said they had serious reservations. The mediators said the latest extension, to accommodate the African leaders and others on their way to Abuja, would be short.

In Washington, [Scott McClellan](#), the White House spokesman, said Mr. Bush, in his conversation with the Sudanese leader, "requested that President Bashir send Vice President Taha back to the peace talks in Abuja to help finalize a peace agreement."

Vice President Ali Osman Taha abruptly left the talks and returned to Khartoum on Monday. On Tuesday evening Mr. Zoellick, in the conference call with reporters in Washington, said he had been given no indication that Mr. Taha intended to return.

Mr. McClellan said, "We will be looking for the government of Sudan to follow through on what the president brought up in the call."

Mr. Zoellick said he had been told he could call Mr. Taha or Mr. Bashir in Khartoum whenever he needed to.

The Sudanese government, he added, "said they felt that they had already agreed and felt it was important for the parties that had not agreed to identify the problems they want to address."

The main problem the rebel groups mentioned about the proposal, Mr. Zoellick and others said, was security and disarmament — concern on the part of the rebels that they will be called upon to disarm before the government militias, which have terrorized the countryside for the last three years, have to do the same.

"After all the years of terrible bloodletting, there's not a great deal of trust," Mr. Zoellick said.

He noted that the proposed agreement had been the result of listening to both sides' concerns during almost two years of fitful negotiations.

"They are not averse to changes," Mr. Zoellick said. But now that the Sudanese government has already agreed to the existing text, to change it, the mediators "would have to bring everyone along in the process," he said.

More than 200,000 people have died since the Darfur conflict began in February 2003, and more than three million others are homeless or dependent on aid agencies for food.

Lydia Polgreen reported from Khartoum for this article, and Joel Brinkley from Washington.