

# [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Committee on Conscience](#)

## [Issues A Genocide Warning for Sudan](#)

### **Carnage In Sudan**

By Irving Greenberg and Jerome Shestack

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The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, America's memorial to victims of the Holocaust, is meant to be a living memorial, responding to the future even as it remembers the past. The sacred trust of memory requires us to confront and work to halt genocide today. That is why we are compelled to speak out on the continuing slaughter in Sudan, where the museum's Committee on Conscience has determined that government actions threaten genocide.

One does not lightly invoke the specter of genocide--the intentional physical destruction of national, ethnic, racial or religious groups as such. But the horror that afflicts Sudan is staggering: some 2 million dead; another 4 million to 5 million driven from their homes; government toleration of the enslavement of women and children; mass starvation used as a weapon of war; churches and mosques destroyed; hospitals and clinics bombed; widespread discrimination and persecution on account of race, ethnicity and religion. Primary responsibility for this devastation belongs to the Sudanese government, a military regime based in the north. The principal victims include the Dinka and Nuer peoples in the south and the Nuba in central Sudan.

The conflict is often described as pitting the Arabic-speaking, Islamic north against the African south, where Christianity and traditional religions predominate. But the reality is more complex. For example, the Nuba, who have suffered so much, live in the center of the country, and many are Muslims. And one pernicious government strategy has been to encourage fighting among ethnic groups in the south, especially the Dinka and Nuer, with devastating effects for the civilian members of those groups. Sudan's diversity means that the carnage defies easy characterization. But the effects in terms of shattered lives are all too plain.

Indeed, many see the appalling toll and say that genocide is not a threat, it is a reality. Whether genocide is actual or threatened, the moral imperative to respond is overwhelming. We cannot remain bystanders as this remorseless fire consumes the people of Sudan.

Recent events indicate that the government is poised once again to use mass starvation as a tactic. Threats this summer by Sudanese President Omar Hassan Bashir to cut off U.N.-sponsored relief flights to the south were followed by government bombing attacks on

civilians, humanitarian workers and relief planes on the ground. The resulting disruption of U.N. and other aid operations put thousands of civilians at risk of starvation. A 1998 famine in the southern province of Bahr el-Ghazal that was attributable to human rights abuses and flight bans killed tens of thousands of Dinka and others.

And as bad as the situation already is, it promises to get worse. In late 1999, the Sudanese government began earning hundreds of millions of dollars from new oil production, made possible in part by Western oil companies such as Talisman Energy. This hard currency gives the government both greater means and greater motive to accelerate its assault on targeted groups. As one Sudanese cabinet minister said, "What prevents us from fighting while we possess the oil that supports us in this battle even if it lasts for a century?"

The problem is that the government "possesses" the oil only if it cleanses ethnic groups such as the Dinka and Nuer from the land under which it sits. The government's desire to secure oil fields has fueled a vicious scorched-earth campaign, laying waste to a broad swath of territory. Amnesty International has documented what it calls "the human price of oil" in Sudan: "a pattern of extrajudicial and indiscriminate killings, torture and rape--committed against people not taking active part in the hostilities." Tragically, there will be more to come: The government does not yet control the richest oil deposits.

A Sudanese government "charm offensive" has softened its international image. But its practices have not changed. For example, a government plane dropped a dozen bombs on a Catholic-run medical dispensary in the south, destroying the clinic and injuring six people.

For too long, the devastation in Sudan has been largely invisible to the world, and remote from the concerns of the American public. We must make it more visible. To that end, the museum's Committee on Conscience will be undertaking a determined campaign to alert the national conscience to this catastrophe--through public programs, through a display in the museum that will open Nov. 15 and through communications with policymakers.

We cannot do otherwise. Remembrance of the Holocaust has instilled in us a profound appreciation for the cost of silence.

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