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Looking at Darfur, Seeing Rwanda

By ROMÉO DALLAIRE

Montreal — Each day the world is confronted by new reports of atrocities in the Darfur region of Sudan. President Bush, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly last month, referred to the situation as "genocide," and he and Secretary General Kofi Annan pledged support for sanctions against the Sudanese government and a Security Council resolution to expand the African Union force on the ground there. But I am afraid that moral condemnation, trade penalties and military efforts by African countries are simply not going to be enough to stop the killing - not nearly enough.

I know, because I've seen it all happen before. A decade ago, I was the Canadian general in command of the United Nations forces in Rwanda when that civil war began and quickly turned into genocide. The conflict was often portrayed as nothing more than an age-old feud between African tribes, a situation that the Western world could do little to stop. All that was left to do was wait to pick up the pieces when the killing stopped and to provide support to rebuild the country.

Although the early stages of the Darfur situation received more news coverage than the Rwanda genocide did, at some level the Western governments are still approaching it with the same lack of priority. In the end, it receives the same intuitive reaction: "What's in it for us? Is it in our 'national' interest?"

Sudan, an underdeveloped, orphan nation, with no links to colonial masters of its past, is essentially being left to its own devices. The Islamic Janjaweed militias of Darfur, with the complicit approval of the government, are bent on ridding the region of its residents, primarily black Africans - killing, raping and driving refugees into camps along the border with Chad.

The United Nations, emasculated by the self-interested maneuverings of the five permanent members of the Security Council, fails to intervene. Its only concrete step, the Security Council resolution passed in July, all but plagiarized the resolutions on Rwanda 10 years earlier. When I read phrases like "reaffirming its commitment to the sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and independence of Sudan" and "expressing its determination to do everything possible to halt a humanitarian catastrophe, including by taking further action if required," I can't help but think of the stifling directives that were imposed on the United Nations' department of peacekeeping operations in 1994 and then passed down to me in the field.

I recall all too well the West's indifference to the horrors that unfolded in Rwanda beginning in April 1994. Early warnings had gone unheeded, intervention was ruled out

and even as the bodies piled up on the streets of Kigali and across the countryside, world leaders quibbled over the definition of what was really happening. The only international forces they sent during those first days and weeks of the massacres were paratroopers to evacuate the foreigners. Before long, we were burning the bodies with diesel fuel to ward off disease, and the smell that would cling to your skin like an oil.

Several African countries promised me battalions of troops and hundreds of observers to help come to grips with the relentless carnage. But they had neither the equipment nor the logistical support to sustain themselves, and no way to fly in the vehicles and ammunition needed to conduct sustained operations.

Today, to be sure, the international community is caught in the vicissitudes of complex political problems - particularly the fragile cease-fire between the Islamic government and the largely Christian population in southern Sudan. Powerful nations like the United States and Britain have lost much of their credibility because of the quagmire of Iraq. And infighting at the United Nations has bogged down an American proposed second resolution that probably wouldn't do much more than the one passed in July.

So in the end we get nothing more than pledges to support the international monitoring team of a few hundred observers from the African Union (on Friday, Sudan agreed that this force could expand to 3,500 soldiers). Nigeria and other countries are willing to send a larger intervention force, but they can't do so effectively without the kind of logistical and transportation support Western countries could provide.

Sudan is a huge country with a harsh terrain and a population unlikely to welcome outside intervention. Still, I believe that a mixture of mobile African Union troops supported by NATO soldiers equipped with helicopters, remotely piloted vehicles, night-vision devices and long-range special forces could protect Darfur's displaced people in their camps and remaining villages, and eliminate or incarcerate the Janjaweed.

If NATO is unable to act adequately, manpower could perhaps come individually from the so-called middle nations - countries like Germany and Canada that have more political leeway and often more credibility in the developing world than the Security Council members.

In April, on the 10th anniversary of the start of his country's genocide, President Paul Kagame told his people and the world that if any country ever suffered genocide, Rwanda would willingly come to its aid. He chastised the international community for its callous response to the killing spree of 1994, during which 800,000 people were slaughtered and three million lost their homes and villages. And sure enough, Rwanda sent a small contingent to Darfur. President Kagame kept his word. Having called what is happening in Darfur genocide and having vowed to stop it, it is time for the West to keep its word as well.

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