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Dallaire Pleads for Action on Darfur

By Beth Gorham

WASHINGTON – Retired Canadian general Romeo Dallaire blasted the U.S. and Canada on Monday for failing to rally the world and provide the political will to save people in Darfur.

The reason so many people have been allowed to die in Sudan already, Dallaire told a Senate subcommittee, is simple.

"There's no self-interest. Who cares about Darfurians? They're sub-Saharan Africans. They're like Rwandans."

"(It's) the fear of casualties in a country that doesn't count in an area that doesn't count," he said.

"Not one of us is more human than the other . . . Why did the Yugoslavians count when we poured in tens of thousands of troops and billions of dollars? Why do others count and why do these Africans in Darfur not count?"

Dallaire also said it's not up to the United States to send troops to end the genocide in Sudan.

"Why do you always want to set yourselves up?" asked Dallaire, who led the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Rwanda in 1994.

"Why should you necessarily have to commit all those capabilities? Why can't the Chinese provide (soldiers)? They've got them."

Dallaire, who pleaded unsuccessfully for 5,000 UN troops to stop the Rwandan genocide that killed some 700,000 people, was hailed by Senator Dick Durbin as a "hero."

"If more people had listened to him, maybe things could have been different in Rwanda. I hope people listen to him now."

Durbin, a Democrat, chairs a new Senate subcommittee on human rights, a first for the country.

While U.S. President George W. Bush was quick to call the Darfur violence genocide, little has been done to quell it.

The United Nations says more than 200,000 people have been killed and 2.5 million driven from their homes in four years of fighting, rape and plunder.

Durbin introduced legislation Monday authorizing state and local governments to divest funds from businesses working in Sudan.

He noted that Bill Clinton has said his inaction on Rwanda was the worst foreign policy mistake of his presidency.

"Now that we have acknowledged for more than four years that this horror is happening on our watch, we must summon the courage and act to stop this carnage."

Dallaire, who was appointed to the Canadian senate in 2005, said there's a lot of untapped means to intervene in Sudan, where the government has refused to allow reinforcements for African Union soldiers.

State sovereignty isn't an unalienable right, he said, pointing to NATO's 1999 campaign to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

And the UN has passed a Canada-backed resolution on the responsibility of other nations to protect during times of such crisis. Now, he said, it needs teeth.

The U.S. should "squeeze" other members of Group of Eight countries at the upcoming annual meeting to provide soldiers, he said.

Dallaire was joined at the hearing by Don Cheadle, an actor who portrayed a Rwandan businessman in Hotel Rwanda who saved more than 1,200 people during the 100 days of slaughter.

He agreed with Dallaire that U.S. soldiers shouldn't go to Darfur, saying there are others who have key interests in Sudan, like Egypt and China.

"Other countries could provide the troops if the political will is there," he said.

"We are all bark and no bite."

The UN and others accuse Sudan's government of countering local rebel groups by unleashing militias of Arab nomads known as janjaweed to commit atrocities against farmers from the region's ethnic African tribes.

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