

## **Arab League Nations Offer Peacekeeping Troops for Darfur**

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CAIRO, Oct. 8 -- Arab countries have launched a new effort to push Sudan toward a compromise over U.N. peacekeepers for Darfur, offering to dispatch a force of Arab and Muslim troops to the troubled region, diplomats said Sunday.

The Arab League diplomats said Sudan's president rejected the initial proposal -- as he has all suggestions for a U.N.-affiliated contingent, regardless of the makeup -- but promised to suggest an alternative soon, in a sign that the Arab effort might show more promise than other attempts to stop the humanitarian crisis.

"The situation is deteriorating and needs intervention," said Hesham Youssef, a top aide to the league's secretary general, Amr Moussa.

Youssef said the Arab negotiators believed that the world community and the United States should be flexible.

"The Americans should realize that there should be a compromise," he said.

The new push could be a significant step in the stalled effort to reach a compromise over Sudan's rejection of a U.N. Security Council resolution that would let the United Nations take control of and significantly expand a peacekeeping force in the western Darfur region, run so far by the African Union.

The two sides are still far apart, however. And it was unclear how much leverage the Arab countries -- close neighbors and supporters of Sudan's Arab-dominated government -- have or how strongly they intended to press the proposal.

The United States has asked its moderate Arab allies such as Egypt to take a greater role on Darfur, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice making it a key mission of her Mideast trip last week.

The violence began in 2003, when the Sudanese government, backed by a local Arab militia called the Janjaweed, mounted a bloody military campaign against civilians suspected of supporting Darfur rebel groups. War and disease have left as many as 450,000 people dead, and 2 million have been displaced.

Fears that the tensions could spread were highlighted this weekend when Sudanese soldiers crossed the border into eastern Chad to fight a group of Darfur rebels, leaving more than 300 people injured, an aid worker said Sunday, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not allowed to divulge information to the news media.

Chadian government spokesman Hourmadji Moussa Doumgor said he had no information about the battle.

Some analysts have said they believe Arab countries will be loath to press their proposal too hard unless the United States makes progress on other issues important to them, such as Israeli-Arab peace efforts.

Another possible negotiator, China, is believed to have strong leverage with Sudan because it is Sudan's main oil partner. But China so far has indicated it believes Sudan has the right to keep the peacekeepers out.

African-Arab nations such as Algeria, Egypt and Mauritania already have small contingents operating in Darfur with the African Union peacekeepers.

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