


Darfur Humanitarian Update, February 10, 2005

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"We are speaking about a severely deteriorating situation. There is no place for optimism as far as the Darfur conflictual dynamics are concerned." (International Committee of the Red Cross, February 9, 2005)

Eric Reeves

February 10, 2005

[Includes updated Darfur global mortality assessment]

The bleakly abstract assessment offered by the Delegate-General for Africa of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is supported by an ominous series of recent reports, news dispatches, and announcements from humanitarian organizations. Together, they depict a catastrophe poised to grow rapidly, and in an important sense irreversibly: for it has become clear that the "world's greatest humanitarian crisis" (the UN description of Darfur) will now claim hundreds of thousands of additional lives no matter what the international community may decide to do.

The most recent report by Kofi Annan to the UN Security Council takes the form of a retrospective six-month summary of the Darfur crisis, and offers a terrifying, if partial, statistical update. The conflict-affected population in areas within Darfur that have been assessed by humanitarian relief organizations ("known to the humanitarian community") has "now reached approximately 2.5 million" (Paragraph 22 of February 4, 2005 Report of the Secretary-General on the Sudan pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1556 [July 30, 2004]).

To this figure we must add the 220,000 refugees in Chad (see below for an update on this figure), as well as the inaccessible rural populations within Darfur (those people not "known to the humanitarian community"). Given the pre-war population estimates of Darfur's population (approximately six million, with a number of estimates somewhat higher), and estimates defining camp populations and pre-war urban populations, it is difficult to imagine that the distressed rural population numbers fewer than 500,000, the figure offered in the UN's Darfur Humanitarian Profile No. 6, September 1, 2004---and dismayingly the last such UN estimate of these most beleaguered victims of Khartoum's genocidal campaign.

Darfur's rural population is beyond humanitarian relief and vulnerable to ongoing Janjaweed predations and Khartoum's continuing military offensive (explained now by the regime as "road clearances"). As a consequence of severe insecurity, these people are unable to deploy their superb foraging skills. These facts were stressed by the ICRC's Christoph Harnisch in yesterday's press release in Geneva ("Darfur: A deteriorating situation," February 9, 2005), with particular emphasis on the implications for food supplies in coming months. Indeed, the ICRC global food needs assessment must be juxtaposed to the very limited success of the UN World Food Program (WFP) and others in reaching needy populations in January 2005:

[1] "The ICRC concurs with WFP figures that estimate between 2.5 and 3 million people in Darfur will need food assistance this year." ("Darfur: A deteriorating situation," February 9, 2005)

[2] The UN World Program, straining hard in an exceedingly difficult logistical environment, reached 1.2 million people in January 2005 (according to UN sources), an extremely disturbing decline from the December figure of 1.5 million (it is the dry season and there are no obstacles of the sort encountered during July to September 2004).

In short, as many as 3 million people in Darfur and Chad are now food-dependent to a greater or lesser degree, and of these (even assuming fully adequate food distribution in Chad) over 1.5 million are going without any international food aid. Most of these people have not had adequate food assistance to this point in the crisis, and are thus badly weakened and acutely susceptible to disease and the effects of malnutrition.

The belated Darfur Humanitarian Profile No. 10 (which will bear the date January 1, 2005) has still not appeared, so for detailed humanitarian sectoral needs we must rely on Darfur Humanitarian Profile No. 9, December 1, 2004 (Annan's report is simply too general in its statistical summary). For the conflict-affected population of 2.2 million reported as of December 1, the following shortfalls were recorded:

- [1] shelter: 32% were without;
- [2] clean water: 54% were without;
- [3] sanitary facilities: 49% were without;
- [4] primary health care: 36% were without

Together, these realities reflect the culmination of Khartoum's genocidal policies in Darfur. Though violent death continues to be reported on a large and profoundly troubling scale, this is no longer the primary instrument in targeted human destruction of the non-Arab/African tribal populations in Darfur. Destruction has for some time best been defined by Article 2, clause [c] of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

(2)[c] "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

All evidence available suggests that genocidal destruction by attrition continues to accelerate in Darfur, with little prospect of meaningful international response to the growing security crisis that is so powerfully threatening of current humanitarian operations. The African Union, for all its weakness on the ground in Darfur, has put the nature of this threat clearly:

"The security situation in the western Sudanese states of North and South Darfur has deteriorated progressively over the past four months, with unacceptable consequences for the peace and tranquility of the civilian populations, according to the AU. 'While all sides to the conflict in Darfur were responsible for the situation, the worst perpetrators were the Janjaweed/armed militia,' [said the AU's] Baba Gana Kingibe." (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN], February 8, 2005)

Indeed, the AU is itself under attack by Khartoum and its militia allies. Annan notified the Security Council in his February 4, 2005 report of a series of attacks that were clearly initiated by Khartoum, including an attack of January 31, 2005: "[an AU patrol] investigating ceasefire violations in the area of Shangil Tobai [site of aerial bombardment by Khartoum on January 26, 2005; see below] was fired upon in the proximity of craters that appeared to confirm allegations of bombing" (Paragraph 41). Reuters had earlier reported on AU reports that Khartoum had obstructed an AU investigation to this area:

"'African Union observers in Darfur were denied access to investigate the death and damage caused by aerial bombings,' the AU source, who declined to be named, told Reuters at [AU] headquarters in Addis Ababa." (Reuters January 28, 2005)

At the same time, as indicated above and discussed below, there are now overwhelming shortfalls in humanitarian capacity, with staggering food, water, shelter, and medical needs that continue to be unmet in Darfur and Chad. Recent reports make clear that famine is impending and in some areas may have arrived; and it is famine that will be the greatest killer in Darfur, even given the staggering mortality already in evidence. For it is now impossible to foresee humanitarian operations catching up to the scale

of the crisis, even with a full and immediate commitment of resources. We have waited far too long, and the means of overcoming our belatedness simply are not available. We may diminish the scale of the continuing catastrophe; but mitigating, not averting massive additional genocidal destruction has become our greatest possible success.

THE NATO "RESPONSE"

To achieve even this shamefully limited success, NATO must press the African Union much more vigorously to accept assistance from the alliance---in various logistical, financial, material, and military forms. It is not enough for NATO simply to make vague suggestions:

"NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on Thursday suggested the alliance could play a supporting role in the Sudanese region of Darfur, but stressed that neither the AU nor the UN had asked it to do so." (Associated Press, February 4, 2005)

For regrettably, if unsurprisingly, there has been no unambiguous and public AU welcoming of this offer. This reflects in part sentiments evident at an October 2004 Tripoli summit, involving the presidents of Chad, Nigeria, Libya, Egypt and the Khartoum regime. At the conclusion of this diplomatically expedient summit, President Deby of Chad, Libyan President Ghaddafi, Egyptian President Mubarak, and Nigerian president (and AU Chairman) Obasanjo closed ranks on Darfur:

"In a joint statement issued after the overnight meeting the regional leaders stressed their 'rejection of all foreign intervention in this purely African question.'" (Agence France-Presse, October 18, 2004)

NATO must press hard to overcome this attitude. And for those wondering about the irresponsible belatedness of AU deployment to Darfur, we can do no better than to consider the terrifying implications of this joint statement---"rejecting all foreign intervention in this purely African question"---issued almost a third of a year ago.

The most important nations within NATO---Germany, Italy, the UK, the US, in particular---must make clear that the security threat to human lives in Darfur is morally intolerable, and that mortality consequent upon current shortfalls in humanitarian assistance is also morally intolerable. And it must be an intolerance that carries conviction. For despite the unspeakably grim statistics and assessments that follow, there is as yet no real evidence that such intolerance takes more than merely rhetorical form.

CURRENT STATISTICS OF HUMAN DESTRUCTION IN DARFUR

A number of recent reports, individual statistics, and accounts from the Darfur region paint a picture of accelerating human destruction. Emphasis here is given particularly to:

[1] February 4, 2005 Report of the Secretary-General on the Sudan pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1556 [July 30, 2004];

[2] Press Briefing [Geneva], International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC Delegate-General for Africa, Christoph Harnisch, on returning from his recent mission to Sudan, February 9, 2005); <http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/69FLU5?OpenDocument>

[3] Wall Street Journal extended dispatch [dateline: Fur Baranga (Darfur)], February 7, 2005; http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=7884

GLOBAL MORTALITY IN THE DARFUR

It is worth remarking initially that global Darfur mortality has recently seen significant news coverage.

Research by this writer and, independently, by Jan Coebergh, MD (Parliamentary Brief [February 2005], at <http://www.thepolitician.org/>) now informs reporting and editorial writing on Darfur at the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Boston Globe, ABC News, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Bloomberg newswire, and a number of other news sources. Coebergh's figure of 305,000 is based on data through December 2004. Given the necessarily large margin of error in any Darfur mortality assessment, the Coebergh figure offers very considerable confirmation of the estimates that have led this writer, over the past ten months of research and publication, to argue that approximately 370,000 people had died as of the statistical time-frame governing Coebergh's analysis (see December 12, 2004 mortality analysis by this writer; at www.sudanreeves.org).

Because the December figures derived by Coebergh and this writer are statistically commensurate, and indeed are derived, by different methodologies, from essentially the same data (though weighting in slightly different fashion the significance of the data available), it has seemed statistically appropriate to average the two numbers by way of creating a new base figure for global mortality as of January 1, 2005 (this averaged figure thus supercedes that offered by this writer in a January 18, 2004 mortality assessment). Since both assessments have very significant margins of error, these margins are likely to be reduced at the high and low ends by a simple averaging. Thus the figure to be used heretofore by this writer, representing global mortality in Darfur as of January 1, 2005, is 340,000.

In the absence of future mortality studies that are derived from more or better data, or substantial correction to the methodologies used by Coebergh and by this writer, total mortality in Darfur will henceforth be estimated by adding monthly mortality figures to this beginning-year figure of 340,000 dead.

ALTERNATIVE MORTALITY NEWS REPORTING

Such a figure stands in very conspicuous contrast with the figure that continues to be most cited by news sources as a global figure for Darfur's mortality: "70,000." The exclusive source for this number, whether cited or not, is a UN World Health Organization (WHO) study announced on September 13, 2004, and supplemented by an October 15, 2004 WHO update and press release (see <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/briefings/2004/mb5/en/>).

Dr. David Nabarro, head of the WHO emergency response division, has made clear to this author by telephone and email communication---on repeated occasions---that the news media representation of this figure of "70,000" is very seriously inaccurate. Dr. Nabarro first emailed this writer immediately following the September 13, 2004 report and accompanying announcement:

"Dear Eric [Reeves],

I fear that remarks I made at a Press Briefing on September 13th 2004 were misquoted. I said that we estimate that at least 50,000 Internally Displaced Persons have died from disease (in some cases exacerbated by malnutrition) since April 2004. []

Best wishes, David Nabarro"

(received via email, September 15, 2004)

This was confirmed publicly in the October 15, 2004 WHO update:

"I estimate that up to 70,000 of the displaced people in the States of Darfur, Sudan, have died as a direct result of the conditions in which they are living since March 1st 2004. Further work will be needed to estimate the proportions of these deaths that are due to different causes, but most are due to diarrhoeal diseases exacerbated by malnutrition." ("WHO Mortality Projections for Darfur," October 15, 2005, presented by David Nabarro, MD)

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE W.H.O MORTALITY FIGURE

As a reading of the actual September WHO report and October press release/update makes fully clear, the figure of "70,000" represents only a fraction of Darfur's global mortality:

It does not include deaths prior to March 2004 (14 months of the two-year-old conflict): it purports to say absolutely nothing about mortality from disease and malnutrition---even in the very same camps that are part of the WHO study---prior to March 2004. During this period various humanitarian organizations, including Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres (the humanitarian organization that responded most effectively early in the crisis), reported "catastrophic" mortality rates in camps for the displaced.

The September WHO report and October update/press release do not include mortality in Chad, where conditions in some camps have been fearsomely destructive at various points over the past two years. Moreover, the number of refugees in Chad is quietly rising again: the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 213,000 people are now in camps in eastern Chad (figure cited in Fact Sheet #19, "Darfur: Humanitarian Emergency," February 4, 2005; US Agency for International Development). The very precision of this updated figure is both suggestive and troubling, for it clearly reflects actual UNHCR registrations: it does not represent new arrivals, or those who have chosen not to enter the camps or have not been registered, refugees who must push the total figure well over 220,000.

There are no data for deaths from malnutrition and disease in Chad, even as conditions have in some of the refugee camps have been horrific for much of the conflict. Indeed, at times Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates, especially for children, have been higher in Chad's camps than in Darfur's. Moreover, large populations of vulnerable Darfuris, such as that in the Masteri area of West Darfur, continue to be poised to flee into Chad. The UNHCR reported in September 2004 that at least another 100,000 people would flee to Chad over the subsequent seven months:

"100,000 is the figure [of Darfuris fleeing into Chad] we think we will reach before the next rainy season, that is to say, May 2005. And that's on the optimistic side, it could be as many as 150,000, [UNHCR coordinator for Chad Kinsley Amaning] told IRIN." (UN IRIN, September 27, 2004)

Tensions between indigenous Chadians and Dafuri refugees have flared on a number of occasions, as resentment builds over the food available from humanitarian organizations for Darfuris but not their impoverished hosts. Competition over the exceedingly scarce resources of water and pasturable land in the difficult environment of eastern Chad have led to violence in the past, and may well do so again as the number of refugees continues to increase.

Most importantly, the WHO figure does not include violent mortality, even as violent mortality continues to be the largest single cause of death over the course of two years of brutally destructive conflict (the figure for the December 2004 mortality assessment by this writer is "over 200,000"; the Coebergh figure, which assumes that violence is the cause of "56.4% of 306,130 excess deaths" [Parliamentary Brief, February 2005, page 6] is approximately 172,000 deaths).

Though mortality from disease and malnutrition likely overtook violence as the leading cause of death by summer 2004, violence continues to claim a great many civilian lives. We have only to look at recent aerial bombings by Khartoum's Anonovs against villages, or reports of Janjaweed attacks, to see that any meaningful mortality assessment must continue to include deaths from violence. The New York Times recently reported that:

"As many as 25 [villages] have been burned to the ground in recent days in this restive patch of Darfur, a vast arid region roughly the size of France. On January 14, [2005], an attack on the town of Hamada left more than 100 people dead, including many women and children, said foreign military and aid officials in Darfur." (New York Times [dateline: Labado, South Darfur], January 24, 2005)

Jan Pronk, UN special representative to Sudan, recently spoke of these attacks:

"[Pronk] said the government bombers and helicopter gunships fly regularly over north and south Darfur, and 40 villages had been hit by pro-government militia. [These 40 villages] had been attacked by government-linked Janjaweed militia in the area around Labado in South Darfur." (BBC, January 28, 2005)

The AU futilely attempted to investigate Khartoum's bombing of Shangil Tobaya (near the North Darfur/South Darfur border):

"AU monitors have been trying to investigate the report air attack on the town of Shangil Tobaya since Wednesday [January 26, 2005, the day of the attack], where 100 people are believed to have died. The were turned away by Sudanese soldiers on Thursday [January 27, 2005], an AU official told the BBC earlier." (BBC, January 28, 2005)

Khartoum's military campaign has continued elsewhere, including an especially destructive bombing of Hamada (South Darfur):

"On January 14, [2005] an attack on the town of Hamada left more than 100 people dead, including many women and children, said foreign military [i.e., AU] and aid officials in Darfur. Thousands more have fled their homes." (New York Times [dateline: Labado], January 24, 2005)

This account comports with that offered by the Sudan Organization Against Torture (SOAT):

"On 16 January 2005, the air forces and the Janjaweed militias attacked and destroyed Hamada, Birgid tribe village, 50 km northeast of Nyala, Southern Darfur state using Antonov aircrafts. Reportedly, at least 69 civilians were killed and 10s were wounded during the attack including five children." (SOAT, "Darfur: Hamada Village Destroyed," January 19, 2005)

These are but the most conspicuous examples of continued violent mortality within the civilian populations of Darfur.

Finally, returning to the WHO mortality assessment and the sources of total mortality that are excluded from the WHO figure, we must consider mortality among the inaccessible rural populations of Darfur. Annan, in his report to the Security Council, frankly acknowledges the severe limitations on what we know of this desperate population:

"Owing to insecurity and the limited capacity of agencies, serious assessment of the condition of the population outside the internally displaced persons gatherings covered by humanitarian assistance has not been possible." (Paragraph 25)

Without the benefit of humanitarian assistance---food or non-food items---these people are extremely vulnerable, though of course most of their deaths are invisible and unreported. But we know, in part because of the limited presence of the ICRC in some rural areas, that the situation is desperate:

"The most vulnerable [people in Darfur] are those living in rural areas, said [ICRC Delegate-General for Africa Cristoph] Harnisch, where there is no protection system in place at all other than that provided by the ICRC and a few NGOs active among these isolated communities."

"Although the distribution of essential food and non-food items is now well established for hundreds of thousands of people sheltering in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) nearer to cities, rural residents are still highly exposed. This led to the ICRC shifting its emphasis from IDPs to the rural

population during the course of 2004." ("Darfur: a deteriorating situation," ICRC Press release, February 9, 2005)

"In these rural areas, populations live in an environment where there is no elementary protection mechanism," Harnish said." (Associated Pressed February 9, 2005)

Nonetheless, this population was not intended to figure in the WHO Darfur assessment mortality.

Though the extremely limited relevance of the WHO study and update should be fully clear to all, and though there are alternative sources of mortality data and estimates available (and in use by major news organizations), news reports continue in most cases to represent the WHO figure of "70,000" as a global mortality estimate.

This is journalism at its very worst. As Coebergh rightly observes: "Counting the dead also values them. And it allows us to properly estimate the cost in lives the war will claim in the months ahead. After all, these were, and are, preventable deaths." Journalistic refusal to accept the obligation to report responsibly on Darfur's mortality contributes to ignorance about the immense human destruction consequent upon continuing war, and thus makes this destruction more likely.

THE KHARTOUM REGIME'S ATTITUDE TOWARD MORTALITY ASSESSMENTS

The importance of mortality studies is confirmed indirectly by efforts the National Islamic Front regime in Khartoum has made to forestall more comprehensive research by the WHO:

"The World Health Organization has been in tense negotiations with Sudan for about a month over allowing a team of international epidemiologists to conduct a study of mortality in Darfur. A UN official familiar with the discussions said Khartoum has so far refused to grant visas to the agency's specialists because Sudan is 'just terrified' that a new mortality study will heighten international criticism of the government. 'They think any attempt to look at mortality is going to lead to a new headline figure that is going to dominate the news for the next couple of weeks,' said the official." (The Washington Post, February 8, 2005)

Khartoum's "terror," while fully understandable, must not be allowed to govern the work of international epidemiologists seeking to register the level of genocidal destruction.

DARFUR HUMANITARIAN UPDATE

Humanitarian Capacity:

It is widely accepted by the UN, humanitarian organizations, and international political actors that insecurity on the ground in Darfur is the primary limiting factor for greater humanitarian reach and efficacy (see below). But there are also huge shortcomings in total capacity that must be much more honestly acknowledged than at present. For statistical context, it should be borne in mind that humanitarian logisticians estimate monthly food needs for a population of 1 million people at 17,000 metric tons (MT).

3 million people in need of food in Darfur and Chad would thus require monthly food capacity and transport---into and within the humanitarian theater---of over 50,000MT. In addition to this, we must estimate the significant tonnage requirements for critical non-food items: medicine, shelter, water-purification equipment and supplies, cooking fuel. Current capacity, estimated on the basis of deliveries of food and non-food items, is variable but ranges up to about 25,000-30,000MT in Darfur and Chad. In short, there is only about half the sheer humanitarian capacity presently required in the greater humanitarian theater. This is so despite the blunt reality declared of Darfur's population as a whole by

the ICRC: "Food shortages in the next few months will affect most people in most areas [of Darfur]" (Associated Press, February 9, 2005).

Khartoum's renewed assault on humanitarian relief efforts:

Annan speaks of this extremely ominous development at some length in his report to the Security Council:

"December and January saw increasing harassment of international nongovernmental organizations by [Khartoum's] local authorities [in Darfur], particularly in South Darfur. In a worrying sign that earlier progress is being rolled back, systematic arrest, false and hostile accusations through the national media outlets, and outright attacks were combined with renewed restrictions on travel permits and visa applications. Almost all NGOs operating South Darfur faced some form of intimidation that delayed and restricted their operations." (Paragraph 21)

Annan, in remarking on abuses by the insurgencies, also notes that the Khartoum regime is "responsible for the overwhelming majority of incidents" (Paragraph 21).

This is much more than "worrying," as Mr. Annan declares in absurd understatement: this represents Khartoum's resumption of a highly active role in reducing the effectiveness of international efforts to mitigate the consequences of the regime's genocidal ambitions. All the efforts described by Annan are certainly costing innocent lives---a great many innocent lives. Indeed, so many hundreds of thousands of lives are poised precariously between survival and destruction that we may be sure this deliberate, systematic obstruction of humanitarian relief efforts is costing thousands of lives, presently and in the near future.

These lives are the victims of genocide just as certainly as those killed by Janjaweed attacks on non-Arab/African villages, or by Antonov bombing attacks on these same villages, or by other violent means currently deployed against what is perceived by the regime as the civilian base of support for the insurgencies.

Food production:

Too little attention has been paid to the larger dynamic by which food production has ground to a halt in Darfur, or to the short-, medium-, and longer-term implications of agricultural collapse. Thus the particular importance of a lengthy recent dispatch from the Wall Street Journal (February 7, 2005). The article (available at: http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=7884) gives an excellent account of growing food inflation, the cumulative effects of poor crops over the past two years, and the effects on WFP deliveries:

"The window of opportunity [for ensuring pre-positioning of food before the beginning of the next rainy season in May/June 2005] is narrowing,' says [WFP's] Veloso. If enough food isn't available for Darfur, the WFP may be forced to reduce the size of the monthly rations, or limit the number of recipients." (The Wall Street Journal [Dateline: Fur Baranga] February 7, 2005)

Moreover, the urgent need for farmers to plant their seeds prior to the heaviest rains is presently overwhelmed by fear of attack by the Janjaweed and Khartoum's regular military forces:

"With surviving farmers huddling in domestic refugee camps, two harvests have already been lost. And a third ruinous year looms, as farmers too afraid to leave the camps are giving up on this spring's planting season. [] Farmers in the refugee camps say they have given up hope of returning in time to plant, fearing attacks from the same militias---known as the Janjaweed---that drove them away in the first place. 'No way I'm going back this year,' says Matair Abdall, emphatically shaking her head." (The Wall

Street Journal [Dateline: Fur Baranga] February 7, 2005)

Collectively, food inflation, the inability to pre-position sufficient humanitarian food aid, and a collapsing agricultural economy portend gruesome famine:

"All the indicators are there for a famine,' says Marc Bellemans, the Sudan emergency coordinator for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. In a report to fellow UN agencies late last year, the FAO warned 'a humanitarian crisis of unseen proportions is unfolding in the Darfur region.'"

Unfathomable, perhaps, but certainly not unseen: it is visible even now.

CONCLUSION: "It is. It's another Rwanda,' [Major General] Dallaire [UN peacekeeping force commander in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide]"
(CTV [Canada], February 8, 2005)

Dallaire has for several months argued for an international peacemaking force for Darfur on the order of 44,000 NATO-quality troops, this to supplement the hopelessly inadequate AU contingent, which the AU now admits won't be fully deployed until April. Dallaire's forthright honesty is finally finding at least a faint echo within the UN. Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland---long the most stalwart of senior UN officials with responsibility for Darfur---today declared of current levels of humanitarian assistance:

"A plaster [i.e., band-aid] on a wound. A wound that can only be healed by much tougher political pressure and a stronger military presence. I think more than 5,000 troops are needed to disarm the militias,' he said." (Reuters, February 10, 2005)

Even Jan Pronk, so often hopelessly expedient in dealing with Khartoum, is reported two days ago,

"[appealing] to all parties, including the AU and members of the Security Council, 'to find a creative way to expand the present third force into one which can stop all attacks.'" (Reuters, February 8, 2005)

Given such growing consensus on the need for humanitarian intervention in Darfur, it is intensely dismaying to find so much international attention presently devoted to arguing about the appropriate legal venue in which to try Khartoum's genocidaires---especially since so much of this debate has to do with issues extraneous to Darfur, and is certainly largely irrelevant to halting genocide in this tortured land.

To be sure, the Bush administration, on the one hand, and human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch on the other, have large vested interests in the fate and legitimacy of the International Criminal Court, and are trimming their arguments about Darfur accordingly. But Darfur at the present moment is not the appropriate context for this debate, certainly not when First Vice President Ali Osman Taha and other of Khartoum's genocidaires are adamantly and repeatedly insisting that no Sudanese citizen will be tried abroad for international crimes in Darfur.

Justice and accountability are essential issues in the longer term; but stopping Darfur's genocide in the present should be all that matters now.

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