

Darfur Needs U.N. Peacekeepers Now

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Editorial

The events of the last week demonstrate just how critical it is to get a well-armed and well-trained United Nations peacekeeping force on the ground in the Darfur region of Sudan. President Bush is right to press the U.N. to expedite the deployment of soldiers to take over the role currently performed by an ineffectual African Union force. If the United Nations is to have any hope of repairing its tattered image around the world — particularly in America — its diplomats must quickly eliminate any bureaucratic hurdles in the way of a peacekeeping mission.

The Security Council agreed in February to plan to replace some 7,000 African Union soldiers with U.N. forces. But when the Sudanese government objected, the planning for a peacekeeping force stopped.

Meanwhile, the genocide has spread, as Arab militias who call themselves the janjaweed and are backed by the government of Sudan have continued to raid villages in Darfur, and now villages across the border in Chad as well. More than 200,000 men, women and children have been slaughtered in this conflict, and women in refugee camps are routinely raped as they do simple chores like fetching water.

A peace deal reached last week between the government of Sudan and the largest rebel group is a good first step. But that deal is utterly meaningless without a strong U.N. force on the ground to back it up.

Any doubt of that should have been dispelled on Monday, when a tour of a Darfur refugee camp by Jan Egeland, the U.N.'s top humanitarian official, was followed by riots. The refugees attacked an aid worker in Mr. Egeland's entourage, believing that he was in the janjaweed. The aid worker escaped, but rioters later turned on a translator with the African Union force and hacked him to death. This is yet another reminder of the ineffectiveness of the African Union force: it was unable to protect its own translator from enraged refugees, just as it has been unable to protect refugees from the janjaweed.

Sudan's government has indicated that with the peace deal now signed, it no longer objects to the deployment of a U.N. force. Diplomats should take this and run with it, straight to Darfur with a contingent of at least 20,000 well-armed multinational soldiers, from both Arab and African countries. The negotiations are over, and the peace deal is in effect. Now is the time for action.

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