

# Disposable Cameras for Disposable People

*The New York Times*

February 12, 2006

Op-Ed Columnist

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Meet some of the disposable people of Darfur, the heirs of the disposable Armenians, Jews, Cambodians, Rwandans and Bosnians of past genocides. Look carefully, for several hundred thousand people like these have already been slaughtered in Darfur in western Sudan — and the lives of two million more are in our hands.

On my fifth and last trip to Darfur, in November, I smuggled in 20 disposable cameras to hand out to these disposable people. While taking photos without a permit is illegal in Sudan, two aid groups agreed to distribute the cameras, teach the genocide survivors how to use them, and then send me the pictures (for their own protection, I'm not naming those aid groups).

Many of the resulting photos were unusable, for those shooting the pictures had mostly never held a camera before. Many of them were living until recently in thatch-roof mud huts, and their first direct encounter with the modern world came when Sudanese military aircraft strafed their villages.

The photos were taken in makeshift camps near the town of Zalingei where survivors have lived since fleeing their villages. Taking a photo more publicly might have led to an arrest or a beating. These scenes reflect the banality of waiting — for food, for protection, for death. In short, such photos are a bit like those from the Warsaw Ghetto in the early 1940's.

The photo in the upper left shows Assim, 5, Asiel, 3, and Salma, almost 2; Assim says he misses the village trees he used to climb, for in the camps the trees have all been cut for firewood. The photo in the upper right shows a man named Adam in his tailor "shop."

The photo in the lower left shows Aisha and Fatima, preparing their "stove." And in the lower right is Halima, a 27-year-old widow whose husband and brother were murdered when the government-supported janjaweed militia attacked her village. An aid group helps her and other women make biscuits and cheese to sell in local markets — so they won't have to venture out of the camps and risk rape by the janjaweed.

Granted, people like these die all the time in Africa of malaria or AIDS. And it's true that it's probably as wrenching for a parent to lose a child to malaria as to a machete. But when a government deliberately slaughters people because of their tribe or skin color,

then that is a special affront to the bonds of humanity and creates a particular obligation to respond. Nothing rips more at the common fabric of humanity than genocide — and the only way to assert our own humanity is to stand up to it.

President Bush is doing more about Darfur than most other leaders, but that's not saying much. The French are being particularly unhelpful, while other Europeans (including, alas, Tony Blair) seem to wonder whether it's really worth the expense to save people from genocide. Muslim countries are silent about the slaughter of Darfur's Muslims, while China disgraces itself by protecting Sudan in the United Nations and underwriting the genocide with trade. Still, even Mr. Bush is taking only baby steps.

Here are some grown-up steps Mr. Bush could take: He could enforce a no-fly zone to stop air attacks on civilians in Darfur, lobby Arab leaders to become involved, call President Hu Jintao and ask China to stop protecting Sudan, invite Darfur refugees to a photo op at the White House, attend a coming donor conference for Darfur, visit Darfur or the refugee camps next door in Chad, push France and other allies for a NATO bridging force to provide protection until United Nations troops arrive, offer to support the United Nations force with American military airlift and logistical support (though not ground troops, which would help Sudan's hard-liners by allowing them to claim that the United States was starting a new invasion of the Arab world), make a major speech about Darfur, and arrange for Colin Powell to be appointed a United Nations special envoy to seek peace among Darfur's tribal sheiks.

With Mr. Bush saying little about Darfur, presidential leadership on Darfur is coming from ... Slovenia. The Slovenian president, Janez Drnovsek, has emerged as one of the few leaders who are actually organizing an international effort to stop the genocide.

"You ask, Why Slovenia?" he told me. "I can ask, Why not Slovenia?"

Mr. Drnovsek came to the United States recently to talk about Darfur with Kofi Annan, Bill Clinton and Chinese officials. But he says that President Bush declined to see him; if Mr. Bush were more serious about Darfur, he would be hailing Slovenia's leadership — indeed, emulating it.

On Tuesday, Mr. Bush spoke movingly at the funeral of Coretta Scott King. I hope he'll look at these photos and ruminate on an observation of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.: "Man's inhumanity to man is not only perpetrated by the vitriolic actions of those who are bad, it is also perpetrated by the vitiating inaction of those who are good."