

Fiddling While Darfur Burns

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EDITORIAL

It is enormously distressing to watch the sausage-making that passes for the world's attempt to do something about the carnage in Darfur. The United Nations is still dawdling over plans to replace the African Union force currently there with a well-armed U.N. peacekeeping force. An attempt last week by the United Nations' top official on humanitarian issues, Jan Egeland, to visit Darfur was rebuffed by the Sudanese government. With all of the raping, murdering and butchering going on in Darfur, why would Sudan want an eyewitness account from a high-ranking international diplomat?

While this goes on, Arab militias calling themselves the janjaweed and backed by the Sudanese government continue to raid villages in Darfur and now across the border in Chad. Not satisfied with the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children they've systematically raped and murdered as part of their ethnic cleansing campaign, the janjaweed are continuing their campaign to eliminate entire African tribes from the Sudanese countryside.

Where are the Muslims who took to the streets to protest Danish cartoons? Where are the African leaders who demanded boycotts of South Africa?

The Bush administration, to its credit, has finally stopped dragging its feet and is now trying to push the United Nations in the right direction. But the diplomats are moving too slow. For weeks, the Security Council's sanctions committee has been working on a list of Sudanese responsible for the bloodshed in Darfur. The State Department spokesman, Sean McCormack, said yesterday that America is pressing to get out the list, which he called a "down payment toward justice."

We're waiting. But time is one thing that what is left of the Darfur population doesn't really have. We're glad to see that a rally is planned in Washington on April 30. We're glad to hear that Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick invited Darfur refugees to the State Department. Now President Bush needs to do the same thing. A photo op at the White House with Darfur refugees would go a long way toward embarrassing the government of Sudan.

That should also embarrass the rest of the Security Council members, like China, Qatar, Ghana and Tanzania, that continue to give diplomatic cover to Sudan. Rwanda should have taught us all something; it's tragic that it apparently has not.

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