

# Beyond Strong Words on Darfur

*The New York Times*

February 22, 2006

Editorial

It's good that President Bush is now talking tougher about the need for more robust military action, including increased support from the NATO alliance, to stop the killing in the Darfur region of Sudan. What would be even better would be a United States commitment to provide specialized reconnaissance and air support for the United Nations force being planned for Darfur later this year.

Mr. Bush should also ask NATO to provide an interim military force to supplement the small African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur until United Nations forces arrive. Otherwise, the next few months are sure to see tens of thousands of additional civilian deaths. More than 200,000 people have already died, and more than 2 million have been routed from their homes, mostly as a result of rampages by militias backed by the Sudanese government.

No one is suggesting that the United States send ground troops. American soldiers might arouse resentment in Sudan, where an Arab Muslim government is sponsoring warfare against its own black Muslim citizens. Fortunately, the military capabilities the United Nations needs most from Washington do not require ground-based troops.

What can no longer be ignored is that outside military help is clearly needed. The 7,000 African Union peacekeepers are clearly overwhelmed. Their numbers are too small and their mandate too restrictive to protect the civilian victims of this war.

The United Nations force could number as many as 20,000 and would operate under much tougher rules of engagement. But before it can be sent, enough countries must be lined up to contribute troops. A pledge of American military support would make that challenge considerably easier.

It's not America's job to police the world. But Darfur is a special case, which the Bush administration has rightly described as genocide. Mr. Bush has shown that he understands the scope and urgency of Darfur's crisis. The next step is for him to accept the role America needs to play in a timely solution, before thousands more people needlessly die.