


## **"A slow-motion genocide," The Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 24, 2004**

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"A slow-motion genocide"

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In the Darfur region of far western Sudan, a cataclysm of human suffering is slowly coming into the world's view. The war that is the engine for this destruction pits Khartoum's National Islamic Front regime against rebel insurgency groups, although in Darfur the conflict is not between Khartoum and the non-Muslim rebels of southern Sudan.

In fact, in a perverse irony, the north-south conflict appears to be on the verge of resolution. But because this agreement makes no provision for other marginalized populations and regions in Sudan, many of these people believe that they will continue to be excluded from political power and economic development. The Darfur insurgents are demanding greater political and economic justice.

Darfur is almost impossibly remote; Khartoum's brutal regime has counted on this fact in attempting to crush the insurgency without international scrutiny. The regime is battling long-neglected and abused African tribal populations, virtually all of whom are Muslim. Fighting broke out in February 2003, and following initial victories by insurgency groups, Khartoum changed strategies, seeking not to destroy the military opposition but its civilian base of support.

Khartoum recruited the Janjaweed, militia forces drawn from the largely nomadic Arab populations of Darfur. Working in concert, Khartoum's regular military and the Janjaweed have engaged in what Jan Egeland, United Nations Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, has called a "scorched-earth" campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Thousands of villages have been systematically destroyed. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International report mass executions of African men; women and girls are often gang-raped; food stocks, seeds and agricultural implements are burned; and cattle are looted. Water wells and irrigation systems are blown up or poisoned by corpses---extraordinarily destructive acts in this arid region. Khartoum's bombers attack not only villages but fleeing civilians.

The United Nations estimates that more than 1 million people are internally displaced in Darfur, and Refugees International estimates another 200,000 people have fled into Chad. The United Nations also estimates that 2 million people in Darfur are "war-affected"---this is the population now vulnerable to famine, disease and exposure. Khartoum is using the denial of humanitarian access as a weapon of war---"systematically" denying aid to the African populations of Darfur, one senior U.N. official has asserted.

The consequences are all too apparent. The U.S. Agency for International Development recently published data indicating that without humanitarian access, between 300,000 and 400,000 people will die of starvation and disease by next spring. At the peak of the famine thousands will die every day, as was the case in Rwanda exactly 10 years ago.

These African tribal populations---primarily the Fur, the Massaleit and the Zaghawa---will also be victims of genocide. For we must remember that the 1948 U.N. Genocide Convention specifies not simply acts of direct human destruction, but those which "deliberately inflict on [an ethnic or racial] group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." This is precisely what Khartoum has done.

The displaced populations have been forced to seek refuge in what can only be called concentration camps. There is no humanitarian access to most of these camps, even as their populations continue to swell. Food and water are exceedingly scarce and often deliberately denied. There are no sanitary facilities, and people are dying in large numbers from disease. The impending seasonal rains will bring an explosion of water-borne diseases. U.N. officials have described conditions in the camps as imprisonment, with a policy of "systematic starvation." The Janjaweed, often the sole authority, are guilty of unspeakable cruelties, including executions and rape.

What is the answer to this humanitarian crisis, described by U.N. and humanitarian officials as the greatest in the world?

Humanitarian intervention is all that can provide the food and medical supplies that are rapidly being exhausted. And these supplies cannot be transported through Chad once seasonal rains close the only roads presently open. A multilateral force, ideally under U.N. auspices, must internationalize Sudan's rail line, which runs from Port Sudan on the Red Sea through Khartoum and on to Nyala, a regional capital in Darfur. From there, overland and air transport becomes practicable, if difficult. The concentration camps must be liberated and put under international protection.

The only long-term solution is a negotiated settlement between the insurgency groups and the repressive Khartoum regime. This will require substantial international diplomatic investment and a willingness to follow through with robust monitoring. The Janjaweed must be disarmed and brought under control or the African peoples will be too fearful to resume agricultural production.

Peace between Khartoum and the southern opposition will be a significant achievement, but it will mean little if genocide continues in Darfur.