

Genocide Emergency: Darfur, Sudan

**By Dr. Gregory H. Stanton
President, Genocide Watch**

(April 2, 2004) Ten years ago, the world abandoned Rwanda's Tutsis to genocide. 800,000 people were murdered by their Hutu neighbors. Although a heroic Canadian general, Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire requested reinforcements for the 2,500 United Nations peacekeepers in Rwanda and a mandate to stop the genocide, the U.N. Security Council instead voted to withdraw U.N. troops. We watched and washed our hands.

Today 800,000 Africans from Darfur, Sudan have been driven from their homes by Arab militias, supported by Sudanese government air strikes, in the worst case of ethnic cleansing since Kosovo. 700,000 are in camps inside Sudan closed to relief organizations and the press. Over 100,000 have fled across the desert border into Chad, where over 10,000 have already died of hunger and thirst.

Armed by the Sudanese government, the Arab "Janjaweed" militias murder, rape, and pillage African villages with impunity. Their leaders from the "Arab Gathering" credit the "Arab race" with "civilization," and consider black Africans to be "abd" (male slaves) and "kahdim" (female slaves.) In Tweila, North Darfur, on 27 February 2004, according to the U.N. Darfur Task Force, the Janjaweed and Sudanese army murdered at least 200 people and gang-raped over 200 girls and women, many in front of their fathers and husbands, whom they then killed. The Janjaweed branded those they raped on their hands to mark them permanently so they would be shunned.

Genocidal massacres and mass rape are the tactics of ethnic cleansing. Their intent is to terrorize Africans such as the Fur, Massaleit, and Zaghawa into leaving Darfur, where an African kingdom and sultanate ruled for 2000 years.

The Genocide Convention defines genocide as "the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group." Ethnic cleansing is distinguishable from genocide, because its intent is expulsion, rather than physical destruction of a group. But genocidal massacres are a common tactic in ethnic cleansing. Genocide and ethnic cleansing are not mutually exclusive.

A common misconception about genocide is that it requires the intent to destroy an entire group. But the Genocide Convention clearly states that it only requires that a part of an ethnic or racial group be destroyed for the term genocide to apply. If the victims of mass murder are selected solely because they are members of an ethnic or racial group, that is genocide. Both genocide and ethnic cleansing are now underway in Darfur.

The Arab militias of Darfur want to drive out black Africans in order to confiscate their grazing lands, water resources, and cattle herds.

Farther south, the Sudanese government wants to confiscate rich oil reserves under the lands of the Nuer, Dinka, Shilluk, Nuba and other black African groups. A twenty year

civil war has driven thousands of Africans into refugee camps, which the Sudanese air force has regularly bombed. The Khartoum government has repeatedly cut off food aid. Over two million people have died.

A “peace process” mediated by the U.S., U.K., Norway, and Italy is hammering out an agreement to end the civil war in the south. Recently there was much exultation when the Sudanese government and southern rebel leaders agreed to divide up the oil revenues. You can be sure no African peasants will ever see a penny of the money. You can also be sure that in five years, when the southerners are to decide on “self-determination,” the northern Arabs won’t let them decide.

For Darfur, many governments and human rights groups now call for another “peace process.” They also call for another U.N. relief program for the refugees and displaced persons. Both are needed. But neither will solve the fundamental problem, which is the genocidal nature of the government in Khartoum. Genocides and ethnic cleansings in Sudan will end only when the al-Bashir government is overthrown.

Diplomats always prefer “peace processes” because they’re what diplomats are trained to do. But in Arusha in 1993 – 1994, the “peace process” was a sideshow that distracted attention from preparations for genocide in the main tent in Rwanda. In Sudan, as in Rwanda, diplomats see their job as “conflict resolution.” They fundamentally misunderstand genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Genocide is not conflict. It is one-sided mass murder. Jews had no conflict with Nazis. Armenians posed no threat to Turks. Bengalis did not try to massacre Pakistanis. Tutsis did not advocate mass murder of Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. Yet all were victims of genocide. Conflict resolution is laudable, but it is not genocide prevention.

Ethnic cleansing and political mass murders are also not the result of conflict. Nor are they the result of “state failure.” Instead, they result from too much state power, from state-ism. The man-made famines in China, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and North Korea could not have been prevented by diplomacy or humanitarian relief.

The United Nations can seldom prevent genocide. It is an association of states, represented by governments that wave the flag of national sovereignty whenever anyone intrudes into their “internal affairs.” The Sudanese government evidently believes it has the sovereign right to commit genocide and ethnic cleansing. Who will stop it?

The Darfur ethnic cleansing has already spilled over the Chad border, and is a threat to international peace and security. It should be on the agenda of the U.N. Security Council. The Security Council may pass hortatory resolutions. But forceful intervention will be blocked by the Arab League and non-aligned movement. Canada and the European Union will not intervene without U.N. authorization. The U.S. and U.K. have all they can handle in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Why, ten years after Rwanda, has the world reacted so slowly to ethnic cleansing in Sudan?

Racism: African lives still do not equal the value of the lives of Kosovars and other white people, who are inside our circle of moral concern.

National sovereignty: The norm of international law is still against intervention, even when a government has forfeited its own claim to legitimacy by committing genocide or ethnic cleansing against its own people.

Impunity: The world's leaders know they can still get away with mass murder. The International Criminal Court does not have universal jurisdiction unless a situation is referred to it by the U.N. Security Council. The U.S. will prevent that. Sudan has not ratified the I.C.C. treaty, so is not subject to it.

Indifference: We still don't care enough to demand that our political leaders send our very best, our sons and daughters, to prevent and stop genocides.

Two years ago, Genocide Watch and the International Campaign to End Genocide called for the appointment of a U.N. Secretary General's Special Advisor for Genocide Prevention, to warn the U.N. Security Council of incipient genocide and ethnic cleansing. In Stockholm in January, Kofi Annan responded positively to the idea. On April 7, 2004, the anniversary of the beginning of the Rwandan genocide, he will announce that he will name the Special Advisor. The International Campaign to End Genocide now hopes to help create a Genocide Prevention Center in New York to work closely with the Special Advisor in giving early warning of genocide and mobilizing political action to prevent it.

For Darfur, Sudan, however, the early warnings have come too late. The parallels to Rwanda are chilling. The same lawyers at the State Department who avoided calling the Rwandan genocide by its proper name are debating whether to call the Darfur atrocities genocide. While they argue, the people in Darfur die. Fortunately, Secretary of State Powell recognizes that whether genocide or ethnic cleansing, massive crimes against humanity are underway in Darfur and they must be stopped.

Early warning is useless without early response. In Darfur, as in Bosnia and Rwanda, the world has spoken loudly, but carried no stick at all.

We need military forces that can intervene with heavy infantry to prevent or stop genocides when they begin. Canada has led the way in preparing its armed forces for international peacekeeping. (If the U.S. had supported Canada's 1996 plan for a U.N. force to take control of the Rwandan refugee camps, the devastating war in the Congo might have been avoided and three million lives saved.) We are hopeful about the European Union's creation of a Rapid Response Force, and the E.U. deployment to the Eastern Congo. The African Union's announcement that it will create a similar force is a sign that "Never Again" may become more than an empty slogan.

But even if forces to intervene are created, world leaders must exert the political will to use them. For that to happen, they must feel the pressure of voters who demand that they act.

We need a world movement to prevent genocide and ethnic cleansing. It will have to be as big as the anti-slavery movement. Ultimately, preventing genocide and ethnic cleansing means creating the political will in our leaders to lead. We must tell them that never again will we believe them when they say they didn't know. Never again will we excuse them when they fail to act. Never again will we forget that we are all members of the same race, the human race.

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