


The Fate of Humanitarian Assistance in Darfur, January 4, 2005

(4735 total words in this text)

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Intolerable security risks and harassment by Khartoum bring aid organizations in Darfur to the brink of withdrawal

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January 4, 2005

News obsession with the catastrophic Indian Ocean tsunami, and the easy headlining of an impending peace-signing ceremony in Nairobi between Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), have led to significantly diminished attention to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. This is so despite the vast, genocidal nature of human destruction in Darfur, where present mortality far exceeds that caused by the tsunami. Almost 400,000 civilians have been killed because of actions by the Khartoum regime and its deadly Janjaweed militia allies. This is approximately half the total of the Rwandan genocide, and the human destruction shows no sign of slowing (see December 12, 2004 mortality assessment by this writer at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/print.php?sid=8>).

Indeed, we are obliged to bear in mind the terribly ominous figure for potential monthly mortality in Darfur that was recently suggested by Jan Egeland, UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs: if humanitarian organizations are forced to suspend operations because of insecurity---and because of Khartoum's increasingly menacing hostility toward international humanitarian aid---as many as 100,000 will die every month in the near future (statement by Jan Egeland, reported by The Financial Times [UK], December 15, 2004). Moreover, given the extremely bleak predictions concerning food supplies and agricultural production coming from the International Committee of the Red Cross (see below) and the US Agency for International Development, this figure may actually be low. All the conditions for massive famine-related deaths are in place---and these conditions are worsening, not stabilizing.

As a consequence, we may see in the next year a cumulative death toll from the Darfur genocide that exceeds that of Rwanda (1994). A key turning point occurred sometime in early- to mid-summer 2004, when the causes of genocidal mortality shifted from deliberate, ethnically-targeted violence (though this persists on a large scale) to destruction directly consequent upon Khartoum's "deliberately inflicting on the [Africa/non-Arab tribal groups of Darfur] conditions of life calculated to bring about [their] physical destruction in whole or in part" (1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article 2, clause [c]).

It is particularly significant that much of Khartoum's deliberate "calculation" now includes increasingly hostile attitudes toward international humanitarian organizations operating in Darfur. This is coupled with a disregard, at senior military levels, for issues of safety for humanitarian workers. For example, an aid worker for Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres was "murdered" (MSF's word) in Labado (December 17, 2004) during a massive, indiscriminate assault on a town well known to have a large humanitarian presence. This attitude of hostility to humanitarian operations, and indifference to the physical safety of humanitarian workers, comes from the same regime that is now speaking in Khartoum about the "dawning of a new day for Sudan."

KHARTOUM'S HISTORY OF HOSTILITY TO HUMANITARIAN RELIEF EFFORTS IN SUDAN

It should be noted first that the Khartoum regime has long had an attitude of contempt for the larger enterprise of humanitarian relief throughout Sudan. The operational terms for the UN's Operation Lifeline Sudan have been continually and seriously violated by the National Islamic Front regime for over a

decade. Many hundreds of thousands of southern Sudanese have been deliberately denied humanitarian access on numerous occasions. The terrible famine in Bahr el-Ghazal (1998) had as its primary cause Khartoum's deliberate disruption of humanitarian food relief; as many as 100,000 people died as a result of this famine. At two points in 2002 (April and September), the UN estimated that well over 1.5 million people were denied humanitarian aid by virtue of Khartoum's ban on flights by OLS relief-supply aircraft (see, for example, analysis by this writer at

<http://www.sudanreeves.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=printpage&articleid=115>). The large civilian population in the Nuba Mountains living beyond Khartoum's control was subject to a total humanitarian aid embargo for more than a decade.

Khartoum continued its renegeing even after signing the October 15, 2002 cessation of hostilities agreement, which stipulated that "the parties shall allow unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas and for people in need, in accordance with the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) Agreement." In fact, in highly revealing fashion, Khartoum began on January 30, 2003 the all too predictable process of violating yet another signed agreement. On this date the regime declared that OLS would no longer simply be required to give "notification" of humanitarian flights, but would have to make "requests" for such flights--"requests" which could of course be denied by Khartoum, as they had been many times in the past.

Though some were willing at the time to overlook this change in language, mistakenly believing it of no particular significance, there was no looking away from the implications of Khartoum's total flight denial--as of February 9, 2003---for all OLS "Buffalo" aircraft. This has been the workhorse for OLS in delivering non-food items, including survival kits for internally displaced persons. The timing of such denial could not have been worse for the many thousands of civilians that had recently been displaced by Khartoum's January 2003 offensive in the oil regions of Western Upper Nile, south and west of Bentiu.

Other effects of this deliberate interference with humanitarian aid delivery were just as serious. For example, the delivery of essential cooking oil to southern Sudan was seriously affected, leaving many populations without this critical staple. And there were yet other highly significant consequences to the denial of access to "Buffalos," particularly for humanitarian security assessment (see analysis by this writer at

<http://www.sudanreeves.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=printpage&articleid=135>). And this is but one of many examples of Khartoum's highly consequential, if often insidiously obscured efforts to impede humanitarian relief, despite signed commitments.

Other examples of interference with humanitarian operations are not so subtle. Earlier this year, Khartoum launched large offensives in the Shilluk Kingdom of Upper Nile Province, deliberately making the delivery of humanitarian assistance impossible in many places that were seeing large concentrations of displaced civilians (see analysis by this writer at

<http://www.sudanreeves.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&articleid=163>).

And in Darfur itself, from November 2003 through mid-summer 2004, Khartoum created a nightmare of bureaucratic obstacles for humanitarian assistance, fashioning multiple impediments to the deployment of international relief workers and to the distribution of aid supplies. Over the past two months, obstacles to humanitarian relief have again increased, as Kofi Annan was forced to acknowledge in his December 3, 2004 briefing of the UN Security Council:

"during the last two weeks [of November], [Khartoum's] process of issuing visas has slowed down for the nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] compared to previous months. In addition, some Government authorities seem to have hardened their position towards international NGOs in allowing them to continue their work unconditionally." (Section VII, paragraph 28)

This trend has clearly continued.

KHARTOUM'S PROPAGANDA OF INTIMIDATION

To understand fully Khartoum's strategy here requires understanding the perversity of the ways in which international humanitarian aid is characterized in the regime-controlled media, both for domestic consumption as well as for the larger Arab and Islamic worlds. In this vein, we should note recent comments from SUNA, Khartoum's state-controlled "news agency":

"Western churches are using humanitarian cover to proselytise among the distressed population of Sudan's Muslim-majority Darfur, the official SUNA news agency reported Saturday. The agency quoted a senior official in North Darfur state, Al-Nur Mohammed Ibrahim, as lashing out at 'missionary campaigns being launched by some Western church organisations under the cover of humanitarian action.'" (Agence France-Presse [Khartoum], December 25, 2004)

This is of course sheer fabrication, for which not a shred of credible evidence is, or could be, offered. Indeed, it is fabrication so transparent that we must be deeply concerned that it is serving as pretext for actions against humanitarian organizations---in particular, further expulsions of the sort that Khartoum recently ordered for the heads of country operations for Save the Children (UK) and Oxfam International. In the event, Save the Children first withdrew its entire expatriate staff because of intolerable insecurity; but Khartoum followed through in its efforts to force the exit of Oxfam's country head, Shaun Skelton.

Khartoum's absurd charge of humanitarian "proselytizing" must also be registered as a ghastly irony: for it is the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime that set up in Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, and Southern Blue Nile so-called "peace camps." As many journalists, UN workers, and other humanitarian aid workers have authoritatively established, these "peace camps" were concentration camps for displaced persons; and on countless occasions conversion to Islam was made a condition for receiving food and medical assistance---or evening being allowed to live.

In another example of the sheer perversity of accusations made by Khartoum, the regime has offered an extraordinary characterization of Germany, which has many humanitarian workers in Darfur, has shown a willingness to expedite the deployment of African Union monitoring forces--but whose government in September 2004 explicitly declared that genocide was occurring in Darfur:

"Sudan yesterday accused Germany of being a major obstacle in the way of way of peace in Sudan. State Minister at the Ministry of Interior, Mohammad Ahmad Haroun, said Germany is considered a major supporter to the Darfur rebels, harboring their leaders, providing them with facilities, and giving them access to all its towns to hold conferences hostile to Sudan. Haroun said Germany's history is full of human rights violation, racist practices, and double standard policies." (UN Daily Press Review, December 22, 2004; Al-Rai Al-Aam and Sudan Vision newspapers: "Germany a major supporter of Darfur rebels---Minister")

The irrelevant and tendentious invocation of German history is symptomatic of Khartoum's brazen willingness to indulge in the most shamelessly hypocritical propagandizing (this willingness offers insight into the real meaning of all publications emanating from the grotesque "European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council" [ESPAC], Khartoum's nasty and pusillanimous propaganda organ in the UK).

But the propaganda and tendentiousness extend to characterizations of international humanitarian organizations. The UN Daily Press review reports from Khartoum the views of NIF Undersecretary of Human Affairs Ministry, Dr. Abdul Rahman Abu Dom, concerning the arduously difficult decision of Save the Children (UK) to withdraw its humanitarian workers:

"[Undersecretary of Human Affairs Ministry Abdul Rahman] Abu Dom also criticized the decision of some NGO's to cease human relief activities in Darfur, noting that some organizations were traumatized by the

loss of their staff but adding, 'I don't think that this decision is based on the immediate reaction to the trauma they had.'" (UN Daily Press Review, December 29, 2004; Sudan Vision Paper [Khartoum], "Government position on Oxfam and Save the Children standing")

At the same time, The Independent (UK) reported:

"Mike Aaronson, the UK head of Save the Children, said pulling out of Darfur was 'the hardest decision I ever had to make.' He said the UN had done next to nothing to halt the 'endless ceasefire violations' and 'atmosphere of increasing lawlessness.'" (The Independent, December 26, 2004)

Undersecretary of the Human Affairs Ministry Abu Dom continued his propagandistic attack on humanitarian organizations operating in Darfur by declaring:

"I agree with those who have raised the issue that some people working in international humanitarian service get quite a lot of benefits compared to the work they do, compared to the expertise they have.' The Undersecretary was critical of measures that he considers wasteful, such as using planes to transport staff and goods to Darfur, which, he stressed, raise the cost of services to needy Darfurians." (UN Daily Press Review, December 29, 2004; Sudan Vision Paper [Khartoum], "Government position on Oxfam and Save the Children standing")

Abu Dom has of course conveniently ignored the realities that oblige the use of planes by many humanitarian staff:

"A number of organisations are reviewing their positions after a week which saw a further unraveling of security in what the United Nations has called the 'world's worst humanitarian crisis.' [] Oxfam staff now only fly by UN helicopters because the roads are considered too dangerous. A small African Union force, deployed to monitor a fragile ceasefire, grounded all its helicopters after one was damaged by ground fire." (The Independent, December 26, 2004)

The AU helicopter fired upon was investigating Khartoum's large offensive at Labado, South Darfur (which killed one MSF workers and left dozens unaccounted for). It was fired upon while over Khartoum-controlled territory. There can be little doubt that the aircraft was fired upon by Khartoum or its Janjaweed allies.

And even more extraordinarily, Abu Dom offers a "cost-efficiency assessment" of the very humanitarian organizations that the Khartoum regime had so relentlessly and "systematically" obstructed for months (Tom Vraalsen, UN Special Envoy to Sudan for humanitarian affairs, emphasized in December 2003 the "systematic" nature of Khartoum's obstruction of humanitarian aid to areas of the Fur, Massaleit, and Zaghawa):

"Considering that almost 800 million dollars has been spent by the international community in Darfur, if this money had been distributed to the 600 million Darfurians [sic], there should have been no problem." (UN Daily Press Review, December 29, 2004; Sudan Vision Paper [Khartoum], "Government position on Oxfam and Save the Children standing")

There is simply no mistaking Khartoum's contempt for the humanitarian enterprise as a whole, or the purposeful mendacity with which it distorts the ambitions of the world's finest humanitarian organizations, operating under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, and responding to the horrific consequences of the genocidal ambitions animating the very regime represented by Undersecretary of the Human Affairs Ministry Abu Dom. Nor is Khartoum beyond attempting even more brazen efforts at intimidating humanitarian workers:

"Officials from CARE International were arrested [by Khartoum officials] after an employee was stabbed

to death at Kalma camp by refugees who accused him of being a member of the Janjaweed. Sudanese authorities claimed the agency was criminally negligent in taking the man to Kalma." (The Independent, December 26, 2004)

Accusing officials of the highly distinguished CARE International, on such outrageously contrived criminal charges, speaks volumes about the real attitude of the Khartoum regime.

Why is the regime engaged in such strenuous propagandistic behavior and such patent efforts at intimidation? Again, one answer is that pretexts are clearly being prepared for further expulsions of the sort that have already seen the removal of Shaun Skelton, head of country operations in Sudan for Oxfam International. Khartoum is well aware of the consequences of such expulsions, and their effect on an already chaotic situation on the ground in Darfur (a number of reliable reports indicate that UN organizations are still working ineffectively with one another and with international nongovernmental humanitarian organizations). Between expulsions, intimidation, propagandistic attack, and renewed bureaucratic obstacles, Khartoum is clearly intent on attenuating humanitarian relief and international presence at the very moment in which it is most desperately needed. In these efforts, the regime is ably helped by various Arab proxies:

"The [Khartoum] government is also accused of setting up 'front' charities to undermine the work of the international organisations. Two such groups, Sugya and Ayya, are said to have approached refugees in areas such as Kass in south Darfur, asking them how much relief they received from international groups then offering them huge sums of cash to return to their villages. Arab charities, mainly from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, have also offered money to refugees to return to their homes." (The Independent, December 26, 2004)

Such induced or forced returns, without appropriate security, are simply death sentences; for humanitarian aid cannot reach the overwhelming majority of destroyed villages. As far back as July 2004, aid workers were making clear their warnings on this score:

"[Khartoum] wants the internally displaced to go home, the UN wants them to stay,' said an aid worker. 'There is no food in their villages: they will go back to die.'" (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, July 12, 2004)

"Humanitarian workers fear that a forcible mass return of some 1.2 million Internally Displaced Persons in Darfur [now twice this number---ER] could result in enormous fatalities." (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, July 13, 2004)

INSECURITY AS PRIMARY WEAPON AGAINST HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

Moreover, returnees continue to face deadly attacks by the Janjaweed. This is part of Khartoum's larger strategy of creating sufficient insecurity throughout Darfur to ensure the continuation of genocide by attrition. The Janjaweed in particular (significantly, not a party to any of the cease-fires that have been negotiated) continue their savage predations throughout the rural areas, as well as in the environs of camps for the displaced. The total breakdown in the most recently negotiated cease-fire (under African Union auspices in Abuja [Nigeria], November 9, 2004) allows the regime to feel impunity in mounting large-scale offensives and in deploying its military aircraft---both helicopter gunships and Antonov bombers.

Whatever the nature of violations or "provocations" by the insurgents (and it is simply no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between attack and counter-attack), Khartoum has made it clear that the military response will be dramatically disproportional. The insurgents for their part, seeing that there is no international will to introduce an effective peacekeeping force, fight with increasing desperation, and a growing cruelty in the diversion of humanitarian relief supplies.

The reach of humanitarian organizations is contracting, and the consequences all too predictably favor Khartoum's larger ambitions:

"Aid agencies are wary of criticising the Sudanese government in public, but a senior official said: 'We are going to continue to see the humanitarian organisations drawing back. It is simply too dangerous. This means that the Sudanese government is effectively winning in its campaign to keep independent observers out of Darfur. It'll also be even more of a humanitarian disaster than it is now. It is astonishing the outside world does not realise this.'" (The Independent, December 26, 2004)

But of course many have long recognized the threat posed by insecurity in Darfur, and the risk that humanitarian operations would have to be cut back. Jan Egeland, UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, warned as far back as July 2004 that, "Darfur was becoming too dangerous for aid workers" (BBC, July 14, 2004), and in a chilling moment of speculation, Egeland described, "my worst scenario [is that] that the security will deteriorate, that we will step back at a moment we have to actually step up [emergency relief]" (BBC, July 14, 2004).

This "stepping back" is precisely what Khartoum has engineered, albeit with too much assistance from the deeply irresponsible failures of command-and-control within the insurgency movements (the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement). This is precisely Egeland's "worst scenario," one that the UN's chief humanitarian officer has declared may lead to mortality rates of up to 100,000 civilians per month. In a sign of what is to come, attack and counter-attack have led the UN's World Food Program to announce that "about 260,000 people in Sudan's strife-torn Darfur region will miss their food ration this month because the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) has been forced to suspend its relief convoys" (UN News Center, December 28, 2004).

Though in this instance it was allegedly an insurgency attack that led to Khartoum's counter-attack, there is now such continuous violence, in so many locations, with such ineffective monitoring, that it makes increasingly little sense to speak of discrete or originating military operations. This in turn is a situation that sustains Khartoum's fundamental genocidal aims in Darfur.

CURRENT HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN DARFUR: Recent issues

[1] Ongoing violence and consequent insecurity for humanitarian operations, as well as Khartoum's harassment and intimidation of humanitarian organizations, are the context in which to consider the current human needs in Darfur, both in the camps and in inaccessible rural areas. Of particular concern are the massive shortfalls in food that have for months been increasingly in evidence. As food supplies continue to dwindle, and as humanitarian food relief faces growing insecurity, mass starvation becomes increasingly likely. Engineered famine, of the sort that claimed so many lives in Bahr el-Ghazal in 1998, is set to take many more lives in Darfur in the coming months.

Certainly by November the warnings were clear:

"International relief agencies are sounding the alarm about a looming food crisis in western Sudan as they report a growing number of people fleeing militias burning their villages and farmland. One relief official said the Darfur region suffers from the same factors that produced the famine in the Bahr al-Ghazal region in 1998: limited access for relief groups, marauding militiamen, and entrenched poverty. 'The parallels are evocative,' the official said on condition of anonymity." (Agence France-Presse, November 14, 2003)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had found the same ominous indicators in its October 2004 "Food-Needs Assessment: Darfur." Surveying villages in all three of Darfur's administrative states, the ICRC found:

"The situation assessed in the survey was found to be alarming as coping mechanisms developed over years of drought and conflict had been nearly exhausted. Most rural communities assessed were found by the survey to be suffering from food shortages, which are expected to become worse in the longer term." ("Food-Needs Assessment: Darfur" from the International Committee of the Red Cross, October 2004, page 2)

And in a dismayingly familiar conclusion, the ICRC found:

"Levels of physical insecurity were found to be the main cause of food shortages as people are reluctant to venture outside their villages for fear of attack" (page 2)

The ICRC food assessment also offers some chilling glimpses of impending food shortages in rural Darfur. Food markets were in October already seeing severe inflation in food prices of "150% to 300%" (page 9). And in concluding that "food insecurity was an obvious and vast problem among the resident rural population," and that "coping mechanisms were about to be exhausted," the ICRC declared bluntly that "Darfur is experiencing a long-term major food crisis" (page 14). In the early months of 2005, there will be large additional displacements in rural areas because there is simply no more food (page 11).

The most recent Darfur Humanitarian Profile from the UN (No. 9, December 1, 2004) indicates that within the accessible civilian population in need, only 61% received food in November (page 14). This occurs at a time when food needs are growing rapidly, and huge inaccessible and unassessed civilian populations are still not figuring in the UN's Darfur Humanitarian Profiles. Moreover, many of those in need are now desperate: the UN profile of November 1, 2004 (No. 8) noted that, "one in six households was severely food insecure with a food gap of greater than 50%" (page 11). Mortality in such populations will rise steadily as the cumulative effects of malnutrition make for much greater vulnerability to disease and ultimately starvation.

This threat is compounded by the continuing large sectoral gaps in non-food humanitarian assistance to the accessible populations, revealed in the most recent Darfur Humanitarian Profile: 29% of people in need remain without shelter; 53% remain without clean water; 46% without sanitary facilities; and 30% without any access to primary medical care (UN Darfur Humanitarian Profile No. 9, December 1, 2004).

[2] There are other increasingly grave threats to the civilian populations as well. Polio looms as a particular threat to the people of Darfur and other regions of Sudan, as well as other countries; inevitably, the greatest toll will be among the young, particularly those under 3 years. Khartoum's obstruction of humanitarian access earlier in the year, and present insecurity, have made an effective inoculation program impossible. As a consequence the medical situation is critical:

"The UN has warned that an outbreak of polio in Sudan could lead to a spread of the disease to other countries in the region unless it is quickly contained. UN and government officials held an emergency meeting on Thursday in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, to discuss how to contain the disease amidst reports that 79 new cases had been recorded across the country."

"This is quite dramatic, considering there were no reported cases of polio last year,' Ben Parker, communication officer for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Sudan told IRIN on Friday [December 24, 2004]. 'Sudan was well underway to being officially declared polio-free, but the country has now become the number two or three in the world in terms of the number of polio cases reported this year.' 'Give the insecurity in certain regions of Sudan, there has not been full access to all areas during previous polio campaigns,' Parker added. (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, December 24, 2004)

Darfur, where a number of the cases have been reported, is presently an extremely forbidding environment in which to conduct a polio vaccination campaign. Indeed, the most recent UN Darfur

Humanitarian Profile offers a startling finding concerning another vaccination campaign:

"Unexpectedly, the [Action Contre Faim report on Abu Shouk camp in North Darfur] indicates that only 12% of the children in the Abu Shouk IDPs camp had been vaccinated against measles, a disturbing finding given the risk of measles outbreak." (page 10)

There are certainly large populations of children in which there have also been very low vaccination levels for polio. Many of these populations are beyond humanitarian reach, and thus represent the risk that this highly contagious disease will spread uncontrollably. The consequences will be measured in many thousands of crippled or lost lives.

[3] The more than 200,000 Darfuri refugees in Chad continue to be excluded in most reporting on the greater Darfur crisis (these refugees are completely excluded even in the UN's Darfur Humanitarian Profiles), though the humanitarian situation there is critical as well, and poses some especially daunting challenges. Water and pasturable land are simply not abundant enough for the indigenous population and this large refugee population, many of whom have been in Chad for well over a year. With between 100,000 and 200,000 new refugees a distinct possibility in the coming year, according to the UN High Commission for Refugees, there is very considerable potential for violent conflict over essential resources. We catch a glimpse of the growing problems in a recent dispatch from Voice of America:

"The UN High Commission for Refugees says it's trying to overcome a dire water shortage in eastern Chad. It says the shortage could undermine efforts to cope with additional refugees from Sudan's Darfur region. Rupert Colville, a spokesperson for the UNHCR, explains why it's so hard to get water into eastern Chad. He says the region is extremely arid, with some areas desert and others semi-desert. 'There are a number of villages and small towns clustered around what little water supply there is and ever since this refugee movement began in Darfur, we've really been struggling to find enough water to sustain a much bigger population in an area that can't really handle that population.'"

"The areas have received stocks of tents, sheeting, and blankets but, 'the trouble is water. Water is just key. You can bring all the materials you want, but if you don't have water to drink, then it's no good,' says Colville. 'The situation is critical.'" (Voice of America, December 23, 2004)

DARFUR OBSCURED

Massive genocidal destruction in Darfur, which has already claimed approximately half as many lives as the Rwandan genocide and gives every sign of claiming hundreds of thousands of additional civilian lives, has evidently lost much of its newsworthiness. Tsunami reportage, important though it is, has overwhelmed foreign news coverage. And the facile optimism in news accounts of the north/south peace agreement to be signed on January 9, 2004 in Nairobi can typically manage to include Darfur only as an afterthought.

No matter that the final security arrangements agreed to in the Naivasha (Kenya) peace agreement allow Khartoum an ominously long two and a half years to keep its massive military presence in Southern Sudan. No matter that Khartoum's brutal militias in the south have been given a full year to decide whether they will jump with Khartoum or to the SPLM/A. No matter that a credible UN peace-support operation is nowhere in sight, and that commitments to adequate transitional assistance for the people of Southern Sudan are equally invisible. No matter that the people of the Nuba Mountains (an area the size of Austria) rightly feel that the Naivasha agreement does not offer them justice. And no matter that there is no evident way in which the SPLM/A can share power in a government that remains committed to genocide as a domestic security policy. These realities seem excessively inconvenient for most news accounts and diplomatic story-telling.

But this is, in any event, to take a prospective view. What we know now, with complete certainty, is that

in the absence of meaningful international intervention in Darfur, genocide will continue and the suffering and destruction of innocent civilians will accelerate.

How Darfur's agony is now represented to the world, or simply elided from view, tells us all too much about how this unconscionable human catastrophe has progressed as far as it has.

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