

Destiny of Sudan's Bashir lies with ICC
By Luse Kinivuwai, The Australian
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Last month, a special panel of judges in The Hague found former Liberian president Charles Taylor guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone. It was the first time a former head of state had been convicted by an international court since the Nuremberg trials after World War II.

It puts on notice all those on the long list of individuals indicted by the International Criminal Court.

One person on this list who rightly deserves his day in court is the sitting President of Sudan, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir.

Under Bashir's dictatorship and bloody reign, more than 400,000 people have died since 1989 as a result of direct attacks and conflict-related malnutrition and disease.

A further 2.7 million displaced Darfur residents living in camps are dependent on limited international humanitarian assistance in what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

From 2007 to last year, four top officials in Sudan's current government, including Mr Bashir, have been indicted and warrants issued for their arrest by the International Criminal Court.

All four continue to serve in the government in North Sudan, they continue to commit crimes against the people of Darfur and other parts of Sudan, and continue to travel in and out of countries which have ratified the founding Rome Statute of the ICC. Meanwhile, the humanitarian and economic situation of the people in Darfur and the rest of Sudan continues to deteriorate.

About 3000 Darfuris live in Australia under the refugee program. Many of them encountered horrific violence and fled to bordering countries before being accepted in Australia.

The recent visit to Australia by ICC deputy prosecutor Fatou Bensouda gave the Darfur community an opportunity to give her an Action for Darfur petition.

The petition urged the ICC to work swiftly to bring the men to justice, among other actions. Painfully obvious, though, is the limitation of the ICC to enforce its warrants -- state parties are responsible for making arrests.

The Australian government welcomed the Taylor conviction, having helped fund the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

This is now an opportune time for Australia to use its increasing diplomatic ties with the African Union and African states to encourage them to stop enabling Bashir to evade accountability at the ICC for his crimes.

In her address in Melbourne, Ms Bensouda said, with grim determination: "I believe that al-Bashir's destiny is the ICC."

Charles Taylor's conviction will indeed bring hope to Australia's Darfur community.

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