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Sudanese Guards Rough Up U.S. Aides and Reporter as Rice Visits

By **JOEL BRINKLEY**

ABU SHOUK, Sudan, July 21 - Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's official visit with President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of Sudan on Thursday turned ugly after Sudanese security officers manhandled members of her delegation and the news media, blocking their way to the meeting in the presidential palace.

Ms. Rice said she was "outraged" and demanded an official apology, which the Sudanese foreign minister delivered by phone a little more than an hour later. But it was clear the incident left her angry and worsened an already difficult relationship.

"They had no right to manhandle my staff," she said afterward, adding, the Sudanese "still have a long way to go."

As James Wilkinson, her communications director, tried to join the meeting, security officers shoved him against a wall. "Diplomacy 101 says you don't rough up your guests," Mr. Wilkinson said afterward.

After Ms. Rice entered the meeting with Mr. Bashir, they sat in awkward silence for almost 10 minutes because Mr. Bashir speaks only Arabic and his security guards refused to admit Ms. Rice's interpreter.

Ms. Rice's deputy, Robert B. Zoellick, has visited Sudan three times in three months, pressing its leaders to end the violence in Darfur that has taken 200,000 lives in the last two years. The United States characterizes the deaths as genocide.

Andrew S. Natsios, director of the United States Agency for International Development, said government troops and government-backed militias have destroyed or heavily damaged 2,000 villages in the last two years. As a result, almost half of Darfur's five and a half million residents have been killed or fled to refugee camps.

When Ms. Rice, in her meeting with Mr. Bashir, asked him once again to disarm the government-backed militias responsible for most of the violence, he replied, "If you disarm only one side in this conflict, the result is going to be genocide," said an aide to Ms. Rice who was at the meeting. Another aide said Mr. Bashir's voice had no hint of irony. The other side, as Mr. Bashir sees it, is the rebels who began the Darfur conflict two years ago.

After the meeting, American and Sudanese reporters and photographers were allowed to enter the room to take pictures and observe. Mr. Bashir was telling Ms. Rice about the historical significance of his ancestral home when Andrea Mitchell of NBC News shouted a question to him: "Why should Americans believe your promises" regarding Darfur, when "your government is still supporting the militias?"

Two Sudanese security officers grabbed her from behind and dragged her from the room. Mr. Bashir did not respond to the question or otherwise comment. Ms. Rice boarded her plane a short time later for the 90-minute flight here, the site of the second largest refugee camp in Darfur. Her face grim, she said: "I am about the only person they did not rough up. I expect an apology before we land."

Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail called just before she landed to apologize for "the mistreatment of our delegation," an aide to Ms. Rice said. But when Ms. Rice stepped off the plane in El Fashir a few minutes later she was still not smiling.

Relations between the United States and Sudan have been strained for more than a decade. In 1997 the United States withdrew its ambassador, accusing Sudan of sponsoring terrorists, including Osama bin Laden, who lived here for part of the 1990's. Last year, however, the United States helped broker a peace agreement in a 20-year civil war between the central government and rebels in the south. But Darfur has overshadowed that accomplishment.

Under the north-south agreement, John Garang, the rebel leader, joined the new government two weeks ago as first vice president. Ms. Rice visited him on Thursday morning in his big new office, complete with crystal chandeliers and overstuffed chairs.

In Darfur, Ms. Rice greeted several hundred Rwandan peacekeeping troops who were standing in formation in the sun. Two United States Air Force C-130 transport planes attached to NATO that had brought them here from Rwanda this morning were directly behind, their engines running. As Ms. Rice and her entourage approached, several of the soldiers look puzzled.

The African Union has promised to increase its peacekeeping presence in Darfur to more than 7,000 from 2,700 by September. Because none of the African nations offering the troops have the capacity to airlift the soldiers here, though, Ms. Rice and her aides arranged this first airlift through NATO, timed to coincide with her arrival. More airlifts are planned, but it is unclear when.

In the Abu Shouk refugee camp, home to 71,000 to 100,000 people, depending on whose estimate is used, 200 children greeted Ms. Rice. They sang in Arabic, "Welcome, welcome, oh Condoleezza" over and over again.

She met with private aid groups and then with women who had been raped or otherwise abused by militia members, rebels or government troops. Violence against women has become a volatile issue between Sudan and the United States, and Ms. Rice said the Sudanese gave her a "whitepaper" explaining how they would deal with it. But she said she was skeptical about their

promises. Looking at children in the camp, she said, "We want these children not to grow up in a nursery of a refugee camp." But neither she nor anyone else here offered much optimism that security would improve so that refugees could go home.

Neils Scott, director of the Darfur office for the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said "there's still lawlessness out there."

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