

# Human Rights Groups Call on the U.S. to Lead Troops Into Sudan's Darfur and End Genocide

By Jim Lobe | June 22, 2004

A range of U.S.-based advocacy groups, such as Africa Action and Human Rights Watch, as well as the United Nations, are calling for international intervention to stop "ethnic cleansing" in western Sudan. U.S. groups are calling for the Bush administration to demonstrate leadership on the issue.

"The failure of the U.S. and the international community to act in Rwanda a decade ago cost 800,000 lives," said Africa Action Director Salih Booker. "Now, up to one million people face a similar fate in Darfur. Unless there is an immediate military intervention to stop the killing and facilitate a massive humanitarian operation, the loss of life in Darfur may even dwarf the horrific toll we saw in Rwanda." Booker said Washington could easily mobilize a multinational force to secure the region and facilitate the flow of humanitarian assistance to needy people until UN peacekeepers can be assembled or the government-backed militias known as Janjaweed are disarmed. He noted that almost 2,000 U.S. troops are stationed in nearby Djibouti.

According to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the administration of President George W. Bush is considering a declaration that the repression of African peoples in Darfur by the ethnic Arab Janjaweed is "genocide." He told the New York Times on June 18th that government lawyers were considering the question. If so, the United States could be under a legal obligation under the 1948 Genocide Convention to intervene in the country with military force, an option that has been urged for several weeks by a number of human rights and activist groups.

UN officials, who thus far have declined to denounce the situation as genocide, continue to deplore Khartoum's failure to fully cooperate with international efforts to get relief to the hundreds of thousands of members of three African tribes who

have fled attacks by the Janjaweed, or "men on horseback."

"We've been working for many, many weeks in a race against the clock, and we see that the government, which should do its utmost to help us, is still not helping," the UN's top humanitarian official, Jan Egeland, said Monday, June 14.

## Ethnic Cleansing

While UN relief officials have generally been able to travel in Darfur without problems, he added, international relief groups, which hope to ship in thousands of tons of relief supplies, have been held up. "Nowhere else in the world are so many lives at stake as in Darfur at the moment," said Egeland, UN under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs, adding that as many as two million people displaced by the repression may need food aid, as well as other supplies. "I think it's not genocide yet, and we can prevent it from becoming one," according to Egeland, who called the raids against the African tribes who make up most of the settled population of the region — the Fur, Masaalit and Zaghawa — "ethnic cleansing."

The director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Carol Bellamy, who travelled in Darfur earlier this week, also declined to use the word genocide to describe the situation but called it a "race against time to provide children and their families with basic, life-saving services."

"It is clear to me that a worsening crisis is upon us," Bellamy said. "We must do all we can to avert a humanitarian disaster. The number of displaced people — already estimated at close to one million men, women, and children — continues to grow."

The fighting began in February 2003 when two loosely allied rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation



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Movement/Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), attacked government military installations to protest raids by the Janjaweed against their communities, as well as Khartoum's neglect of the region.

Fleeing Janjaweed raids, some 120,000 of the displaced have crossed the border into neighboring Chad, according to independent human rights and relief groups, where the United Nations has established camps. But the vast majority of the displaced remain within Darfur, unable to safely return to their homes, let alone plant crops, despite a formal ceasefire reached two months ago between Khartoum and the two rebel groups.

### Scorched Earth Campaign

In a report published last month by Human Rights Watch (HRW), a delegation that visited West Darfur said it had been subject to a scorched-earth campaign. "Villages have been torched not randomly, but systematically — often not once, but twice," said the report, noting that most of the civilians have been driven into camps and settlements outside the larger towns "where the Janjaweed kill, rape, and pillage — even stealing emergency relief items — with impunity." The report, which includes testimony from victims, found that the Janjaweed almost always outnumber regular soldiers during attacks, but that the government forces "usually arrive first and leave last."

Since that report was released, another by an inter-agency UN team that visited Kailek camp in South Darfur described participants as "visibly shaken" by the conditions in which they found the residents. The team found evidence, it said, of "a strategy of systematic and deliberate starvation being enforced by the (government) and its security forces on the ground." Such reports, as well as the increased media attention to the crisis, have clearly heightened concerns about the situation.

Meeting in early June, the leaders of the Group of Eight (G-8) called on Khartoum to immediately disarm the Janjaweed, which have been carrying out "gross human rights violations" against the African groups. It also appealed to the United Nations to avert a "major disaster" in the region.

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The UN Security Council continues debating a resolution on the issue, while the European Union has pledged nearly \$15 million to fund an observer mission to help keep the peace.

But the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has warned that it may already be too late to save as many as 300,000 people who are suffering severe malnutrition.

Bush, who publicly demanded two months ago that Khartoum also "immediately stop local militias from committing atrocities against the local population ... and provide unrestricted access to humanitarian aid agencies," has not spoken out since that time.

U.S. negotiators have been playing a key role in helping to conclude a peace agreement between Khartoum and a 21-year-old insurgency in the southern part of the country, although the White House has warned repeatedly that full normalization of ties between Sudan and Washington could not be achieved without an improvement in Darfur.

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Africa Action

[www.africaaction.org](http://www.africaaction.org)

Darfur Destroyed

By Human Rights Watch (May 2004)

<http://hrw.org/reports/2004/sudan0504/>

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