

# Intervene to Save Darfur

By Ann-Louise Colgan | April 18, 2005

For the past two years, the destruction of Darfur has played out before the eyes of the world, and the member countries of the United Nations have remained largely paralyzed. Recent UN votes on sanctions and on a referral to the International Criminal Court are important steps forward on Darfur, but they are not enough. Unless there is a rapid and robust international intervention in Darfur, up to a million people could be dead by the end of this year. As the genocide continues, the need for immediate humanitarian intervention can no longer be disputed.

Up to 400,000 people have died in Darfur, and yet the U.S. and international response remains absolutely insufficient. Discussions on the crisis at the UN stalled for months, as the government of Sudan continued to wage its genocidal campaign with impunity. Recent reports confirm that the security situation on the ground is deteriorating, and that the humanitarian crisis is reaching desperate proportions.

Faced with this worst crime against humanity, the most powerful countries in the world have applied small humanitarian band-aids, but have been unwilling to mount a robust response to end the violence and provide protection to millions of vulnerable Darfurians. The international community has left the people of Darfur in what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently described as “little short of hell on earth.”

The African Union (AU) force on the ground in Darfur is doing what it can in the face of growing insecurity, but it remains ill-equipped to respond to a crisis of this magnitude. Its 2,200 troops are too few to cover an area the size of France, and its mandate does not extend to an ability to provide life-saving protection to civilians. The AU effort also faces grave financial and logistical challenges. The African Union has provided important leadership on the crisis in Darfur, but it cannot and should not have to shoulder this enormous burden alone.

The growing humanitarian crisis in Darfur must also be clearly understood as part of the government-sponsored genocide. Up to 3 million Darfurians are currently described as “conflict-afflicted,” having

been driven from their homes as a result of the scorched-earth policies of the Khartoum government and its proxy militias. The growing humanitarian need far outstrips the capacity of humanitarian agencies operating on the ground, and there are indicators of imminent famine. The government continues to drive civilians from their homes and into situations of desperate need, and then obstructs the humanitarian response with devastating human consequences.

In the face of this ongoing genocide, the international community has been consistently unwilling to accept its responsibility to take urgent action, and has instead settled on what lowest-common-denominator response UN members can agree on. The UN Security Council continues to hesitate largely because of economic and political interests of its permanent members, especially China and Russia, and no country has been willing to expend the diplomatic capital required to overcome their objections and impel urgent action.

The U.S., for its part, has invested nowhere near the efforts that its acknowledgment of genocide last September should dictate. Even as thousands continue to die in Darfur, a White House official recently claimed that the President “has more pressing priorities.” But increasing numbers of people across the country are raising their voices to ask: what can be more pressing than genocide?

Genocide is an international crime and it requires an international response. The U.S. and other countries must no longer be allowed to hide behind the slogan of “African solutions for African problems,”



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abdicated their own responsibility in full knowledge that the AU cannot respond to this crisis alone. The situation in Darfur requires a strong international presence on the ground to reinforce and expand upon the efforts of the African Union. This is what the U.S. should be calling for at the UN.

To stop the genocide, the UN must work with the AU to strengthen its mandate under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to enable the AU mission to enforce the cease-fire in Darfur and protect civilians. A robust international force must also be quickly assembled to complement and bolster the AU. Such an intervention would: (1) stop the killing and provide security for millions of internally displaced people (IDPs); (2) facilitate the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance; (3) enforce the cease-fire and provide a stable environment for meaningful peace talks to proceed;

and (4) facilitate the return of IDPs to their land and the reconstruction of their homes by providing a secure environment.

Kofi Annan recently noted that the situation in Darfur is “unacceptable,” but indeed it has been considered “acceptable” by the international community for far too long. Nothing short of international intervention will stop the genocide in Darfur and this must be the immediate priority. Many thousands of lives can still be saved if the international community acts quickly and with determination.

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