

The horror of events unfolding in Darfur, to which my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II referred on many occasions, points to the need for a stronger international resolve to ensure security and basic human rights. Today, I add my voice to the cry of the suffering and assure you that the Holy See ... will continue to do everything possible to end the cycle of violence and misery.

-Pope Benedict XVI, November 2005

BACKGROUND

After more than two decades of civil war, the government in Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) signed a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) in January 2005. While this agreement provides an opportunity for Sudanese to resolve the north-south conflict through a peaceful process, it does not address the crisis in the Darfur region of western Sudan, where more than 400,000 people have died, 3.5 million are hungry and 2.5 million are displaced, both inside the country and in refugee camps in neighboring Chad. Talks sponsored by the African Union aimed at opening a dialogue have stalled. The situation on the ground has grown increasingly untenable for humanitarian efforts to alleviate massive suffering. This new wave of violence points to a collective failure on the part of the international community to stem what can only be described as a catastrophe.

The North/South Peace Agreement: The CPA provides for a six-year interim period during which the people of the south will create a functioning government, healthcare and educational institutions, a regional army and police, and viable economic institutions, as outlined in a regional constitution signed into law in December 2005. After this interim period, the people of the south will have the right to decide whether to remain part of Sudan or to declare independence. Other provisions of the peace agreement include a wealth-sharing mechanism to manage an equitable distribution of petroleum revenues, representation in the national government and the parliament and guarantees of civil and religious liberties. Although the shari'a Islamic penal code will apply only in the north, concerns remain over the sort of protections and exclusions that will be provided to non-Muslims living in the north. The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) has been monitoring compliance by all parties to the peace agreement, but SPLM withdrawals scheduled under the CPA have stoked fears of renewed fighting between government forces and remaining rebel groups. Other concerns center on the deepening disaster in Darfur, that lies on the border with an increasingly belligerent and destabilized Chad, as well as Eastern Sudan, which would be flooded with refugees if hostilities were to break out between neighboring Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Crisis in Darfur Despite regular discussions in the UN Security Council and the ongoing African Union (AU) mission, reports indicate that large-scale attacks on civilians, including the rape of women and girls and the burning of villages, continue unabated, as thousands more join the 2.5 million people who have already fled their homes. Proposals have been made to fortify the AU presence until its projected transformation into a UN mission in October. Negotiations between the government and Darfur rebels have been hobbled by an internal leadership struggle within the main rebel grouping, while the growing instability in Darfur has only resulted in the deterioration of the situation since September 2005. At the end of March, the European Union unveiled that 50-million euros had been committed to help finance a six-month extension of the AU mission (AMIS), while NATO announced separately that it was exploring avenues of non-combat support for AMIS at the request of the UN Secretary General. Although the government in Khartoum

Facts about Sudan

Geography: At 2.5-million square kilometers, Sudan is the largest country in Africa and nearly equal in area to the US east of the Mississippi River (Darfur Region, comprised of 3 states, is approximately the size of France)

Population: 40.2 million (2005 est.), with over 6 million in Darfur

Life Expectancy: 58.5 years

Religions: 70% Sunni Muslim (official); 22% Indigenous Traditional Beliefs; 8% Christian (south, Khartoum)

Ethnic Groups: 52% Black African; 39% Arab; 6% Beja; 2% foreigners

Economy: 80% of Sudanese work in agriculture; oil production equals 250,000 barrels per day; \$2 billion in annual exports, chiefly petroleum

continues to reject allegations of links with the Arab militias known as *janjaweed*, undeniable military action by the government has contributed to the wave of violence. A resurgence in fighting among the various warring parties and renewal of scorched-earth tactics of the militia groups mean that prospects are bleak for ending the cycle of violence without a focused and concerted international effort.

USCCB POSITION

Sudan remains a priority for USCCB with ongoing advocacy work in solidarity with the people of Sudan. USCCB continues to work closely with the Catholic Church in Sudan so that the benefits of peace and stability might be extended to all Sudanese. Our Conference has repeatedly visited northern and southern Sudan, as well as Darfur, while playing an active role in the U.S. policy debate. The U.S. bishops recently reiterated their commitment by encouraging American Catholics to participate in the *Million Voices for Darfur Campaign*, in alliance with over 150 faith-based, humanitarian and human rights organizations that seek to collect one-million postcards encouraging the President in his call for a stronger multinational force to protect the people of Darfur.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has extended its services to Darfur, where it is providing desperately needed food and other basic assistance. In addition, CRS manages the Southern Sudan Agricultural Revitalization Project, the largest agricultural development program in the country. In partnership with local and international organizations, CRS also supports initiatives focused on peace-building, health and education.



ACTION REQUESTED

On Darfur

1. Urge your representatives to retain urgently needed funding for Sudan in the FY 2006 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, as well as to support the “Darfur Peace and Accountability Act” (H.R. 3127 / S. 1462) to press the government in Khartoum to disarm the warring factions, cease all attacks against innocent civilians, provide unimpeded humanitarian access and bring to justice those perpetrating crimes against humanity.
2. Ask the U.S. to pressure both the government and the rebels to respect the existing ceasefire agreement and to intensify the search for a durable peace during ongoing negotiations in Abuja, while simultaneously urging both Sudan and Chad to refrain from any escalation that might lead to threatened hostilities.
3. Urge the U.S. to use its voice in the U.N. Security Council to ensure the continuation of the mandate of the African Union in Darfur to monitor the ceasefire, protect innocent civilians and assist international humanitarian relief organizations, while urging NATO to provide AMIS with all possible logistical support, until its transition to full-fledged UN peacekeeping force can be completed.

On the Comprehensive Peace Agreement

1. Encourage the U.S. Administration to hold the signatories to the peace agreement accountable and to honor its promise to provide substantial financial and political support to the government of national unity to undertake the reconstruction of the country and its civil society.
2. Urge the U.N. Security Council to continue its support for the peacekeeping mission that is working with all parties to the national-unity government to implement the peace accord. The United States should provide adequate funding and logistical support so that peace and security might be achieved.

RESOURCES: See the action alerts of March 17 and 31, 2006, Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, “Statement on National Day of Action for the People of Darfur” (September 21, 2005) and other related statements on Sudan at: www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/callafrica/sudan.htm.

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