



Department of Social Development and World Peace Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on the Sudan February 2007

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

The horrific situation in Darfur continues to demand a more consistent and effective response from the U.S. and the international community. More than 400,000 people have died, 2.5 million are displaced, 220,000 are refugees in Chad, and hundreds of thousands more go hungry every day. 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 situation between the north and the south is less dire, but still dangerous. 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. This agreement provides an opportunity for Sudanese to resolve the north-south conflict through a peaceful process.

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 more robust peacekeeping mission. Negotiations between the government and Darfur rebels have been hobbled by splintering of rebel groups, while the growing instability in Darfur has only resulted in the deterioration of the situation since September 2005. Although the government in Khartoum 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.

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.

Despite the signing of a Darfur Peace Agreement in May 2006, attacks on villages are increasing, and people are again fleeing their homes. The African Union (AMIS) peacekeeping force's mandate was extended through June

3211 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017. Tel: (202)541-3160 Fax: (202)541-3339

2007. However, there is still no international agreement on the timetable for transformation of AMIS into a more robust force with a stronger mandate. Over a dozen humanitarian aid workers have been killed since June. CRS access to IDPs and other vulnerable groups in West Darfur is increasingly imperiled due to fighting.

In September 2006, President Bush appointed Andrew Natsios to be the President's Special Envoy for Sudan. Ambassador Natsios has been working to bring a resolution to the conflict in Darfur. At the end of its session in 2006, Congress enacted the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act (DPAA). Among other important provisions, the DPAA presses the government of Sudan to disarm the warring factions, cease all attacks against innocent civilians, provide unimpeded humanitarian access and bring to justice those perpetrating crimes against humanity. At the same time, Congress passed a Defense Appropriations bill that includes an additional \$20 million for the African Union peacekeeping operations in Darfur.

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 what protections and exclusions will be provided to non-Muslims living in the north. The UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) has been monitoring compliance with 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 destabilized Chad, as well as Eastern Sudan, which would be flooded with refugees if hostilities were to break out between neighboring Ethiopia and Eritrea.

USCCB POSITION

Sudan remains an urgent priority for USCCB with active and ongoing advocacy work in solidarity with the people of Sudan. USCCB continues to work closely with the Catholic Church in Sudan so that violence might be stopped and 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. Last year the U.S. bishops urged 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. USCCB supported the successful passage of the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act and funding for peacekeeping operations in 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, education and other critical sectors.



ACTION REQUESTED

On Darfur

1. Ask the U.S. to pressure both the government and the rebels to respect a ceasefire and to intensify the search for a just and durable peace, while urging both Sudan and Chad to refrain from supporting each other's rebel movements.
2. Urge the U.S. to use its voice in the UN Security Council to continue and strengthen the mandate of the African Union in Darfur to monitor the ceasefire, protect innocent civilians and assist international

3211 Fourth St., NE, Washington, DC 20017. Tel: (202)541-3160 Fax: (202)541-3339

humanitarian relief organizations, while urging NATO to provide AMIS with all possible logistical support, until its transition to a more robust, well funded force with a strong mandate.

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 UN 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 USCCB statements, letters and alerts on Sudan at this website:

www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/callafrica/sudan.htm.

For further information: *Stephen Colecchi*, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB, 202-541-3196 (voice), 541-3339 (fax), SColecchi@usccb.org