

Statement on the Occasion of the Global Day for Darfur

*Most Reverend Thomas Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops*

September 15, 2006

When the Sudanese government and one of the main rebel groups in Darfur signed a peace agreement on May 5 of this year, real hope was kindled that the humanitarian crisis that has lasted nearly three years would finally be coming to an end. Instead, a resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council on August 31 to send a peacekeeping force with a robust mandate to bring peace and security to the long-suffering people of Darfur has been met with strong opposition from the Sudanese authorities in Khartoum.

As conflict mounts between rebel groups that are signatories to the peace accord and those who found it inadequate, the Sudanese military and its proxy militias known as the *janjaweed* have resumed attacks in a major offensive that has trapped innocent and defenseless civilians in the middle of the fighting. While the security situation continues to deteriorate in Darfur, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the 2.5 million who have fled their homes and the million more at risk of starvation has become a deadly challenge. A dozen aid workers have lost their lives since June.

Our Conference warned in early 2004 that Darfur was “rapidly becoming the newest symbol of human depravity and ethnic cleansing.” Since that time many well-intentioned attempts have been made to stop the cycle of violence that now threatens to spiral completely out of control. With more people being displaced, an already alarming state of insecurity that has hampered efforts to deliver humanitarian aid may degenerate completely. Our Conference welcomes the Administration’s support for the resolution authorizing the United Nations mission to take over and build upon the inadequately equipped and understaffed peacekeepers from the African Union who have sought to bring some measure of protection to the civilians of Darfur.

We renew last Easter’s plea from our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, that the international community “bring relief and security . . . to the peoples of Darfur, who are living in a dramatic humanitarian situation that is no longer sustainable.” With as many as 400,000 dead, we also renew our call to the Administration to redouble its efforts to end the intolerable moral and humanitarian crisis in Darfur through sustained, high-level engagement that will ensure the compliance of the Sudanese government with its obligations under international law. The most effective expression of this engagement would be the appointment of a special envoy who could focus diplomatic energies on attaining a comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict.

This weekend’s events in cities around the world should remind our leaders that our nation must work harder to end the killings, rape and wanton destruction. This Sunday our Conference joins its voice with calls from across the globe for the immediate transition of the African Union force in Darfur into a UN mission with a strong and clear mandate to protect the people. As our Conference has consistently asserted, anything less would be unworthy of us as a people committed to human life and dignity.