

Spineless on Sudan

By Nicholas D. Kristof

The New York Times - July 9, 2007

Reprinted here: <http://peaceandjustice.org/article.php/20070709081626960/print>

In May 2006, President Bush declared: “The vulnerable people of Darfur deserve more than sympathy. ... America will not turn away from this tragedy.”

Since then, Mr. Bush has turned away — and 450,000 more people have been displaced in Darfur. “Things are getting worse,” noted Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, a human rights campaigner in Sudan.

One of the most troubling signs is that Sudan has been encouraging Arabs from Chad, Niger and other countries to settle in Darfur. More than 30,000 of them have moved into areas depopulated after African tribes were driven out.

In the last few months, Sudan’s government has given these new arrivals citizenship papers and weapons, cementing in place the demographic consequences of its genocide. And if Sudan thinks it has gotten away with mass murder in Darfur, it is more likely to resume its war against southern Sudan — which seems increasingly likely.

Within Darfur, aid groups have increasingly become targets, and in April alone three aid workers were shot and 20 were kidnapped, while hijackers tried to seize aid workers’ vehicles at a rate of almost one a day. As for African Union peacekeepers, seven of them were shot dead the same month — so they’re in no position to rescue aid workers.

The cancer has also been spreading into Chad and the Central African Republic, compounding each country’s intrinsic instability. Last month a 27-year-old French woman, Elsa Serfass, on her first assignment with Doctors Without Borders, was shot dead in C.A.R. as she drove through an area where militias had been burning villages. So Doctors Without Borders has had to suspend much of its work in the area.

Something similar is happening in eastern Chad. Mia Farrow, the actress — who has shown a toughness about genocide that no Western leader has — has just returned from her sixth visit to the region and says that eastern Chad now feels like Somalia.

“Pick-ups with machine guns bolted onto the rear and loaded with armed, uniformed men careen through the dusty streets terrorizing people,” she told me. “No one knows who they are.” While Ms. Farrow was visiting the town of Abéché, an elderly guard at a U.N. compound there was killed and two people were badly beaten.

Then there’s rape. Ever since Sudan began the genocide, it has been using rape to terrorize populations of Africans — and then periodically punishing women who seek treatment on charges of adultery or fornication.

So far this year, at least two young women have been sentenced to death by stoning for adultery. As Refugees International puts it in a new report: “The government is more likely to take action against those who report and document rape than those who commit it.”

Much of the news on Darfur has been a bit optimistic lately, because it has focused on recent flurries of international diplomacy. While it’s true that China is belatedly putting some pressure on Sudan to admit international peacekeepers, at the same time China continues to supply Sudan with the guns used to slaughter Darfuri children. China also just signed a 20-year agreement to develop offshore oil for Sudan, and in April China pledged “to boost military exchanges and cooperation” with Sudan.

Let’s hope that athletes who go to Beijing for the Olympics next year will wear T-shirts honoring the victims of the genocide that China is underwriting.

In the burst of diplomatic activity, one person who stands out is Nicolas Sarkozy, the new president of France. Mr. Sarkozy is pushing to send a European Union force, including many French troops, to stabilize Chad and the Central African Republic. If they arrive by October, as planned, they just might pull those two countries back from the brink of collapse.

In contrast, Mr. Bush has been letting Darfur rhyme with Rwanda and Bosnia. For years, Mr. Bush’s aides have discussed whether he should give a prime-time speech on Darfur to ratchet up the pressure; he still hasn’t. Laura Bush just completed a four-nation swing through Africa, but she didn’t include a visit to any of the areas affected by the Darfur crisis.

Ultimately, the only way the genocide will end will be with a negotiated political settlement — but the only way to get that is to put much more pressure on Khartoum.

So how about if Mr. Bush invites Mr. Sarkozy — along with Gordon Brown, Hu Jintao and Hosni Mubarak — for a joint visit to Chad and C.A.R. to meet Darfuri refugees? Maybe Mr. Sarkozy could lend Mr. Bush and the others a little backbone.