

Situation In Darfur

History

Open warfare erupted in Darfur in early 2003 when the two loosely allied rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), attacked military installations. This followed closely with peace agreements brokered by the United States to end the twenty-year-old civil war in the south of Sudan which allocated government positions and oil revenue to the rebels in the south. At that time, rebels in Darfur, seeking an end to the region's chronic economic and political marginalization, also took up arms to protect their communities against a twenty-year campaign by government-backed militias recruited among groups of Arab extraction in Darfur and Chad. These "Janjaweed" militias have over the past year received greatly increased government support to clear civilians from areas considered disloyal. Militia attacks and a scorched-earth government offensive has led to massive displacement, indiscriminate killings, looting and mass rape, all in contravention of the 1949 Geneva Conventions that prohibits attacks on civilians.

The war, which risks inflicting irreparable damage on a delicate ethnic balance of seven million people who are uniformly Muslim, is actually multiple intertwined conflicts. One is between government-aligned forces and rebels; a second entails indiscriminate attacks of the government-sponsored Janjaweed militia on civilians; and a third involves a struggle among Darfur communities themselves. Its implications go far beyond Darfur's borders. The war indirectly threatens the regimes in both Sudan and Chad and has the potential to inspire insurgencies in other parts of the country.

Current Situation

Two years into the crisis, the western Sudanese region of Darfur is acknowledged to be a humanitarian and human rights tragedy of the first order. The humanitarian, security and political situation continue to deteriorate: atrocity crimes are continuing, people are still dying in large numbers of malnutrition and disease, and a new famine is feared. The international community is failing to protect civilians itself or influence the Sudanese government to do so.

The international community is deeply divided -- perhaps paralyzed -- over what to do next in Darfur. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Darfur described the massive scope of atrocities carried out in the territory, primarily by the government and its allied Janjaweed militias. And the situation on the ground shows a number of negative trends, which have been developing since the last quarter of 2004: deteriorating security; a credible threat of famine; mounting civilian casualties; the ceasefire in shambles; the negotiation process at a standstill; the rebel movements beginning to splinter, and new armed movements appearing in Darfur and neighboring states. Chaos and a culture of impunity are taking root in the region.

The humanitarian situation remains catastrophic, due to ongoing state-sponsored violence, layers of aid obstruction, the lack of an overall humanitarian strategic plan, and the weakened state of displaced Sudanese. Refugees and internally displaced civilians (IDPs) have been displaced for long periods, they are in terribly weakened states, they are subject to sexual abuse and attack, they do not have adequate shelter, and a new famine is feared. Infectious diseases and dysentery will drive up the body counts rapidly. Conventional responses are simply inadequate to prevent increasing mortality rates, and the current response will fail unless buttressed by a number of bold and urgent actions.

As need far outstrips the ability of agencies to deliver aid, it is not too soon to sound a famine alert. Relief workers on the ground are convinced that few if any of the nearly 2 million IDPs will return to their homes in time for the next planting season, thus ensuring at least longer term food insecurity. The onset of the rainy season in late May will further restrict access.

Compounding the problem is that the numbers of at-risk civilians continue to increase. The Janjaweed continue to undertake attacks against villages, prey on IDPs, and obstruct aid activities. Many Janjaweed

have been integrated into the army and police; no one has been charged with any crime, and their actions are not being challenged. There remains a state of total impunity.

Not since the Rwanda genocide of 1994 has the world seen such a calculated campaign of slaughter, rape, starvation and displacement. It is estimated that at least 250,000 people have died. More than 2 million people have been displaced from their homes and over 200,000 have fled across the border to Chad. The Sudanese government continues to flout international law with impunity.

North-South Conflict ~~≠~~ Conflict in Darfur

On January 9, 2005, a peace deal was signed to end the long war between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLM). This war, which has raged for the past 20 years, is commonly referred to as the North-South conflict and is often confused with the violence in Darfur. This peace deal signed earlier this year did not address the issues in Darfur, where the genocide continues.

Significant portions of this document have been provided by the International Crisis Group (www.crisisgroup.org).

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