

What next for the African Union in Darfur?

Background

Over the course of the last year and a half, it is estimated that a campaign of ethnic cleansing has killed more than 200,000 people and as many as 10,000 people are dying each month in the Darfur region of Sudan. In addition, according to UN estimates, more than 200,000 refugees have been registered in neighboring Chad and more than 1.8 million people are internally displaced in Sudan itself.

The United Nations Commission of Inquiry that was appointed by the UN Secretary General with the support of the Security Council to investigate the crisis in Darfur concluded in its January report that the Sudanese Government and the Janjaweed militias were largely responsible for the violence and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

On April 8, 2004, the Sudanese government and Darfur-based rebel movements agreed to a ceasefire, but neither party has followed through on its end of the bargain. The New Year began on an optimistic note for Sudan: on January 9, 2005, representatives from the Sudanese government and the Sudan's People Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed an agreement to end the two-decade long civil war between North and South Sudan. Unfortunately, the signing of the historic peace accord has done nothing to abate the atrocities in Darfur committed by the Government-sponsored Janjaweed militia.

The conflict in Darfur has to be resolved immediately or it may lead to the complete collapse of the North-South peace accords, according to Jan Pronk, the U.N. special representative for Sudan. Meanwhile, new tensions are rising in the east, where government security forces opened fire on demonstrators last month. Establishing peace and security in Darfur will not only lead to political, economic and social stability in Sudan but will also have a positive impact on neighboring countries and the region. Moreover, if peace is not achieved throughout Sudan, it could emerge as a failed state and offer breeding grounds for terrorism and international crime, much as it did in the 1990's, when Osama bin Laden made Sudan the international headquarters of his growing Al-Qaeda network. Preventing destabilizing events in Sudan is indisputably in the interests of the United States and the rest of the world.

African Union Mission – Current Situation

- According to an African Union (AU) press release, on May 28, 2004, the AU committed a ceasefire monitoring mission to the Darfur region. Currently, the mandate of the African Union (AU) troops is to oversee the ceasefire and protect the monitoring force on the ground. Their mandate does not extend to the protection of civilians whose lives are in constant danger; AU troops can only protect civilians from imminent threats during accidental "encounters."

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- To date, the AU has deployed approximately 1,700 of 3,200 personnel and military observers to Darfur; the rest of the troops are not expected to be deployed until April. While the AU is receiving increased support from donors and has seen an improvement in its transportation and other capacities, there remain considerable gaps in accommodation for observers, police forces and communications support.
- The Sudanese government continues to bombard villages in Darfur in clear violation of the ceasefire, killing scores of civilians. Although the Sudanese government has persistently denied responsibility, AU officials point out that the Janjaweed militia, which does not maintain an air force, is incapable of orchestrating and carrying out air attacks on its own. A bi-partisan congressional delegation comprised of Representatives Ed Royce (R-CA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Diane Watson (D-CA) returned from Darfur in January, infuriated that an aerial bombing, which killed about 150 people and rendered scores of others homeless, had taken place during their visit. In addition, pillaging of villages, raping of women and the displacement of families continues unabated.
- Access to humanitarian assistance is in decline. Due to the constant fighting and dire economic situation in the region, the number of people at risk has increased faster than the resources available for humanitarian assistance. Moreover, there has also been an increase in the abduction of local humanitarian staff which disrupts the distribution of food and aid creates an air of insecurity. Many effective humanitarian organizations have pulled out due to human losses and a deteriorating security situation.

Recommendations

- The international community must keep up the pressure on the Sudanese government and the Janjaweed militias to end the carnage. According to John Prendergast, Special Advisor to the President of the International Crisis Group, the raping and pillaging had declined in the summer of 2004 in advance of the African Union mission and visits to the region by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and then Secretary of State Colin Powell. However, the Janjaweed militias view the current mission as “toothless” and perceive no real threat of sanctions or other action by the international community; as such there has been an upsurge in violence and human rights abuses.
- The international community should encourage the AU to expand its current mandate and increase the number of troops to at least 8,000, and should also pressure the Government of Sudan to accept an expanded AU mission and allow it unrestricted access. The logistical capacity for such a mission would require massive and prompt support from donors to expand accommodation of camps and contribute vehicles, helicopters and communications support.
- The international community should pressure the Sudanese government and its allied militias not to attack the monitoring force and to give the monitors access to all areas of Darfur so it can function effectively. To this point, the Sudanese government has been extremely uncooperative with the AU mission. For instance, in January, not only were AU officials denied access to investigate the ceasefire violation caused by an aerial bombing in Shangil Tobai, but an AU patrol was later fired upon while investigating the bombardment.
- Expand the mandate and size of the African Union monitoring force. As immediate first steps, the Security Council needs to give the AU force a Chapter 7 mandate to protect civilians and facilitate an expansion of the force. In the short run, expanding the mandate and increasing the number of troops on the ground will help deter violence, even if the AU force does not have the capacity to enforce a broader

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mandate immediately. In the longer term, developed countries must support the AU force through commitment of funds, assistance with command and control, provision of communications capacity, and other high-value contributions that can increase its effectiveness.

- At the moment, about 80% of direct casualties are caused by aerial bombardments and it is crucial to ensure the Sudanese government halts its aerial raids. The international community and the African Union should work with the Sudanese government to enforce a “no-fly zone,” as agreed in the ceasefire. The Security Council should pass a resolution authorizing NATO involvement in the event of a violation.
- On February 3, 2005, Secretary General Kofi Annan formally stated that the United Nations should push for a peacekeeping mission in Sudan to maintain the North-South ceasefire according to the Naivasha peace agreements signed in January to end the two-decade civil war in Sudan. He requested that member states contribute about 10,000 troops and 700 civilian police, a portion of which should be sent to Darfur for the protection of civilians. Since the African Union lacks the resources to operate as a peacekeeping mission, the international community should support the Secretary General and pass a resolution to start the process that he has outlined.

Call to Action

Following the holocaust, the Rwandan genocide and countless other horrific acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing the world has vowed “Never Again,” but the killing continues yet again in Darfur. The U.S. administration and Congress declared the situation genocide in September 2004, but little action has taken place since then to end the killing. "Too little, too late" has become the rule rather than the exception. The conflict in Darfur is an opportunity for the United States and the international community to take a principled stance and demand that Sudanese government halt the atrocities in Darfur.

Experts Consulted

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Last updated March 15, 2005