

Peace Unattainable in Darfur

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For UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Darfur, that province of western Sudan where large-scale massacres have been unfolding since 2003, is "hell on earth."

During the last twenty years, the international community has stood by, impotent, while massive massacres in southern Sudan have killed 2 million people since 1983. Today, the international community must make the crimes against the black civilian populations of Darfur cease. The Janjaweed militias, allied with the Islamist regime in Khartoum, use "Arab" Muslim tribes to massacre the "African" Muslim tribes who dispute the west of the country.

According to a devastating report by the International Criminal Court's Procurer General presented to the UN on June 14th, more than 200,000 civilians out of 6 million Darfurians have been killed since 2003, at a rate of 10,000 victims a month. Today, 2.5 million refugees and displaced persons live in battered camps, maintained by hobbled international aid and terrorized by the Khartoum regime. Since June 2004, 7,000 under-equipped soldiers from the African Union have been confined to the difficult role of simple observers in a region as large as France.

Moreover, the African Union, which is no longer financed by the international community, does not intend to continue its mission beyond September 30. This departure risks sparking an intensification of the attacks, which continue today in spite of a "second" peace agreement for disarmament and democratization signed in May in Abuja, Nigeria, between the Sudanese government and the main Darfur rebel militia, the Movement for the Liberation of Sudan.

Last May 16, the UN Security Council finally adopted a resolution authorizing the principle of a Blue Helmet operation in Darfur to replace the African Union mission. That resolution was adopted by virtue of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter that makes provision for the possibility of economic or military "coercive measures." But that eventuality remains theoretical, since Russia and especially China remain very "non-committal" about any use of force. Sudan, in fact, represents 6% of Chinese oil imports.

In consequence, the United Nations desperately seeks to obtain Khartoum's agreement for this peace-keeping operation. Sudan has certainly accepted a UN evaluation mission on Sudanese territory, attracting some thunder from al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri, but it still opposes Blue Helmet access to Darfur. The blockage is total. The assistant UN secretary general has, in fact, declared: "All peace-keeping operations in Africa are effected with the cooperation of the receiving country."

The UN has been unceasingly active since the beginning of the conflict, and yet, the situation on the ground does not improve. The Sudanese government gains time while the massacres continue. The Khartoum regime - which originated from a 1989 coup d'état that occurred when its party, a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot, received only 15% of the votes in the country's first free elections - has distinguished itself by its brutality for close to seventeen years, first in southern Sudan, then in Darfur. In the face of this dictatorship, it is no longer conceivable to imagine a way out other than its ouster from power. Only a united front from the international community will allow the massacres to be stopped and democracy to be restored to Sudan.

To overcome the Chinese veto, there is, therefore, only one possibility: rally China to an international mobilization by reassuring it about the continuity of its oil operations in Sudan. The lives of the great majority of the Sudanese people, too long oppressed, depend upon it.

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