

FHSMUN XXIX
ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

THE SITUATION IN DARFUR

Introduction

The continuing tragedies occurring in the Darfur region of Western Sudan are of grave concern to the entire world. Fighting that erupted just over 5 years ago has now turned into a prolonged conflict that has been labeled “genocide” by millions of people and even some governments. The government of Sudan has vigorously resisted that term and has consistently argued that the real responsibility for the violence in Darfur rests with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) rebels because of their initial attacks on Sudanese army outposts in February 2003 as well as the continued refusal of some rebel groups to accept the terms of recent negotiations. While the African Union (AU) and the UN Security Council (UNSC) have taken charge of the hybrid peacekeeping mission currently in Sudan, it is absolutely essential that the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) offer its good offices and resources to not only stem the violence but also devise and implement a comprehensive long-term solution that will ensure peace and stability throughout the region.

Background

Darfur is a very sparsely populated region of Western Sudan that is roughly equivalent in size to the country of France. Darfur was an independent sultanate for several centuries until it was joined to Sudan in the 20th century and has long been marginalized within Sudan because of its distance from the capital, Khartoum, its ethnic makeup, and the inhospitable climate of the Sahara Desert. In the mid 1980’s, Darfur experienced a massive famine that killed approximately 100,000 people out an estimated 1.3 million people in Darfur. Worse yet, according to French author Gerard Prunier, “everybody knew that it had been entirely preventable, but in addition to the grossly uncaring treatment the province had received once again at the hands of Khartoum its consequences were unevenly distributed.”¹ With the mounting death tolls and the continued involvement of Libyan President Mu’amar al-Gaddafi and the government of Chad, Darfur’s marginalized peoples became more radicalized in their opposition to the Islamist regime in Khartoum. This opposition would eventually crystallize into the various rebel militias that are currently fighting the Sudanese government and the infamous *Janjaweed* militia.

Sudan’s government continued its overall neglect of Darfur’s needs throughout the course of its twenty-year war with the Dinka and Nuer peoples of southern Sudan. But, as Prunier, notes “if Darfur had been forgotten at the time of the famine, it was not forgotten where its required contribution to the war effort in the South was concerned.”²

¹ Gerard Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* Cornell University Press Ithaca, New York 2005 p. 56.

² Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* 2005 p. 58.

As the war in the South dragged on, ultimately killing over 2 million people and creating millions of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP's), the toll on Darfur's scarce resources, including manpower, increased. The anger and frustration of many of the peoples of Darfur, including the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa, only increased as they saw the government in Khartoum become increasingly wealthy from oil revenues and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that poured in from countries around the world. In early 2003, this resentment boiled over and culminated in small-scale rebellions by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA).

Darfur enters the world's vocabulary

The initial attacks on remote Sudanese army outposts in western Sudan by Darfuri rebels generated relatively few headlines, especially as the international community was focused on the positive news that the civil war between northern and southern Sudan finally seemed to be winding down. According to recent testimony at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, the turning point in Sudan's response to these initial attacks occurred after a rebel attack on the el-Fasher airport in April 2003.³ Sudan's response soon became far more forceful and by the summer of 2003, the patterns of reprisals and overall repression became alarmingly routine. Prunier writes that "the GoS [Government of Sudan] had clearly decided on a military solution to the crisis, counting on being able to crush the insurrection fast enough for it to be over before the delicate process of bringing the SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army] into Khartoum could take place."⁴ Khartoum then confronted a serious obstacle to ending the rebellion in Darfur: a lack of available military resources, including soldiers. To overcome this problem, the government of Sudan embarked on a process of forming armed militias of former Sudanese army soldiers and paying them to raid Darfur; these militias quickly became known as the *Janjaweed*, or "devils on horseback."

As the attacks on civilian communities in Darfur mounted, and numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP's) increased very rapidly, the international community began paying far more attention to Darfur. In 2004, the US House of Representatives actually labeled the situation in Darfur "genocide" in a resolution and US President George W. Bush also called the situation "genocide" during a televised presidential candidate debate. Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) around the world began organizing on massive scales in efforts to publicize what was occurring in Darfur and to pressure the government of Sudan as well as the United Nations System to end the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Pressure from relevant international organizations, including both the African Union (AU) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) also helped to convince the government of Sudan as well as the various Darfuri rebel groups to begin seeking a negotiated settlement to the crisis in Darfur. To date, a number of different negotiated settlements have not yet produced a lasting peace. The recently enlarged hybrid UN-AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur has allowed for more humanitarian aid to reach some of the vulnerable populations in western Sudan, Chad, and the Central African Republic (CAR).

³ *BBC News*, "All talk and no action in Darfur" February 25, 2008.

⁴ Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* 2005 p. 97.

The OIC and the International Community

While the international community has consistently called for an end to violence in Darfur, it is by no means united as to how that would best be accomplished. Muslim countries have typically been loath to label the violence in Sudan as genocide. Nadim Hasbani, the Arab Media Officer for the International Crisis Group (ICG), noted that while on the UN Security Council, Algeria opposed the creation of an International Commission of Inquiry to determine if genocide had been committed in Darfur and that Qatar abstained from voting on Security Council resolution 1706 (S/RES/1706) that called for enhancing the existing African Union peacekeeping mission by bringing UN peacekeepers into the region.⁵ Sudan has consistently lobbied many African and Muslim countries, as well as its major trading partners, including China, to support its positions on Darfur and to oppose further outside intervention. Many of these countries have issued statements condemning the violence without condemning the government in Khartoum but Sudan must be especially concerned about the possible political fallout from continued cross-border conflict with Chad. According to recent reports in *The New York Times*, “The government has carried out a series of coordinated attacks in recent weeks, using air power, ground forces and, according to witnesses and peacekeepers stationed in the area, the *Janjaweed*, as their allied militias are known here. The offensives are aimed at retaking ground gained by a rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement, which has been gathering strength and has close ties to the government of neighboring Chad.”⁶

Sudan and Chad recently signed an agreement to discontinue any support for rebels in each other’s territory and it is hoped that the end of any proxy wars will improve the possibilities for peace in the region.⁷ This Dakar Agreement between Chad and Sudan was signed just before the 11th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference; crucially, Darfur was one of the key topics at the Summit.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed the assembled delegates at the OIC Summit and he reminded the dignitaries that “the OIC is well placed to support this [peace negotiations] process.”⁸ In the Final Communiqué from the Islamic Summit Conference in Dakar, Senegal, the OIC officially welcomed the establishment of the hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur as well as the October 2007 peace talks in Libya. The OIC also reiterated the need for member states to continue providing humanitarian assistance to the peoples of Darfur and called for the convening of an international conference on reconstruction and rehabilitation of Darfur to be hosted by the OIC and the Islamic Development Bank.⁹ The OIC must accelerate the pace of its humanitarian aid shipments to Darfur, however, if it intends to save thousands of innocent people from starvation and disease.

⁵ Nadim Hasbani, “About the Arab Stance Vis-à-vis Darfur” *Al-Hayat* March 21, 2007.

⁶ Lydia Polgreen, “Scorched-Earth Strategy Returns to Darfur” March 2, 2008.

⁷ Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), “OIC Secretary-General welcomes the signing of the Dakar Agreement between Sudan and Chad” March 14, 2008.

⁸ Ban Ki-moon, “UN Secretary-General’s address to the 11th Summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference” Dakar, Senegal March 13, 2008.

⁹ “Final Communiqué of the Eleventh Session of the Islamic Summit Conference (Session of the Muslim Ummah in the Twenty-first Century)” Dakar, Senegal March 13-14, 2008 p. 11.

Unlike the OIC, however, the UN and much of the international community have not witnessed the encouraging progress in terms of the overall security situation in Darfur. To the contrary, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted in February 2008 that “over the past two months, the security situation in West Darfur deteriorated significantly.”¹⁰ Secretary-General Ban further noted that Chad, Sudan, and various rebel groups had continued their attacks on both military and civilian targets and that UN humanitarian aid workers had come under attack by Sudanese Armed Forces personnel on January 7, 2008.¹¹ African Union and United Nations peacekeepers have come under direct attack at various points over the past 4 years, including an attack in late 2007 that killed 10 AU peacekeepers. Sudan continues to object to the presence of non-African and non-Muslim peacekeepers in its territory; to avoid complicating the situation further, Norway and Sweden withdrew their offers of troop contributions to the peacekeeping mission in Darfur in January 2008. Sudan continually refers to the Addis Ababa Agreement as well Security Council resolution 1769 (S/RES/1769) to bolster its claims that non-African peacekeepers should not be deployed in Darfur if at all possible. While the UN System is striving to create a mostly African force for Darfur, the delegates to the OIC must bear in mind that the African Union peacekeeping mission was unable to effectively stop the fighting or to protect civilians, particularly considering that its peacekeepers were mostly unarmed observers.

The government of Libya has been amongst the most proactive of all OIC member states in the current crisis in Darfur, but is instructive to recall that Libya has at times played a very destructive role in Darfur, as it did during the famine of the 1980’s. Libya has hosted several key negotiations and the most recent sessions in October 2007 seemed to garner important pledges from many of the warring parties, including a unilateral ceasefire declared by the government of Sudan. Unfortunately, given the nature of the conflict, including the continued splintering of the various rebel groups and the brutality of the *Janjaweed* militia, Sudan’s declaration did little to quell the actual fighting on the ground. Recent reports suggest, too, that Sudan’s ceasefire declaration is not still in place and that the humanitarian situation in Darfur could deteriorate even further if humanitarian aid supplies are stolen or if the convoys are prevented from reaching the vulnerable populations that desperately need their assistance. The OIC must provide concerted leadership that will bring the warring parties to an agreement that at the minimum will allow all humanitarian aid shipments to reach their intended destinations.

Conclusion

The humanitarian crisis in Darfur must be resolved peacefully, regardless of whether any particular government wishes to label the conflict genocide, ethnic cleansing, or a civil war. With at least 200,000 people already dead and several million more displaced from their homes, the loss of life and the destabilization of the region is clearly unacceptable. Add in the several hundred thousand refugees currently struggling

¹⁰ Ban Ki-moon, “Report of the Secretary-General on the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur” S/2008/98 February 14, 2008 p. 1.

¹¹ Ban Ki-moon, S/2008/98 February 14, 2008 p. 2.

to survive in Chad and the Central African Republic and it is easy to see how the conflict in Darfur could ignite a much wider war throughout much of North and Central Africa. The delegates to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) must focus their efforts on not only providing humanitarian aid but also on negotiating a peaceful solution to the immediate crisis as well as devising effective long-term solutions that will ensure greater sustainability in what is currently one of the world's most inhospitable regions.

Guiding Questions

How does your government view the situation in Darfur? Does your government feel that Sudan has done its part in attempting to resolve the situation peacefully? Have the rebel groups done their part in attempting to resolve the situation peacefully? How effectively have the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the United Nations sought to resolve this conflict peacefully?

Does your government support the mandate and projected mission size for the hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur? Is your government contributing to this hybrid peacekeeping mission?

How might the OIC work most effectively to end the conflict in Darfur quickly and peacefully? How will the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) be of the most assistance in rebuilding Darfur?

Has your government assisted Libya or any other countries that are hosting negotiations? How might your government provide greater assistance to the peace process than it has done to this point?