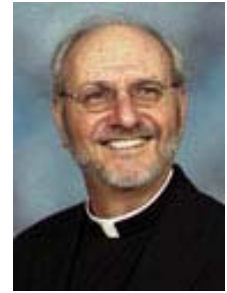


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Darfur: Don't Look Away

Falling refrigerators dropped from planes plus old car chassis and kegs of nails raining down on innocent civilians during aerial bombardments are cited as some of the Sudanese government's weird war tactics in the "Unity Statement" of Save Darfur, a coalition of over one hundred groups including the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops. The bizarre bombings coupled with the more horrifying strategems of razing villages, raping women, murdering boys and attacking food and water supplies describe the atrocities perpetrated on villagers by government troops and their shadow military partners known as the Janjaweed. Yet again, the world watches in horror. This time Darfur approaches a tragic genocide similar to Rwanda's a decade earlier.

The quick facts: over 400,000 Darfuran civilians have died—an estimated 150,000 from violent attacks and 250,000 from disease and starvation. About 2.8 million have been displaced within Sudan and another 250,000 have fled abroad, mainly to Chad where they face further violence. Ninety percent of the villages of Darfur's targeted ethnic groups have been destroyed. Approximately 3.6 million people are dependent on international humanitarian assistance, but a third of those in need are beyond the reach of humanitarians workers.

The bloodletting began in 2003 when rebels from Darfur challenged the government for genuine political representation, investment in their impoverished region and a share of potential oil revenues. Sudan's government, widely considered one of the most repressive regimes in the world, responded by arming and supporting a militia, the Janjaweed, to fight on its side against the rebel insurgents. The Janjaweed, a colloquialism translated as "horsemen with guns," or "evil horsemen," represents a mob of armed thugs more than a militia that has rampaged through villages and towns killing and raping. Drawn mainly from pastoral peoples of different tribes, the Janjaweed are attacking the farmers in the Darfur region to gain access to land and water for their

herds. The government for its part promotes regional instability to maintain its grip on power and its eye on oil reserves.

The international community raises largely ceremonial protests, while jealously guarding its individual self-interests. The world community has indeed supplied humanitarian aid, but has stopped short of exerting substantive political clout. Critics charge that although the U.S. has labeled the situation "genocide," behind the scenes it avoids spoiling relationships with Khartoum because it wants useful information about terrorists in the region.

China, on the other hand, derives fully ten percent of its oil from Sudan. In terms of trade, Sudan represents China's third largest trading partner in Africa, and since the 1990s China has sold arms and weapons to Sudan. Human rights organizations have reported sighting Chinese-made small arms weapons and military trucks used by government and Janjaweed forces in Darfur.

The enormity of the suffering in Darfur staggers the mind, but Martin Luther King, Jr. warns us against "the paralysis of analysis." Save Darfur suggests a few doable steps: 1) send money to appropriate humanitarian relief organizations; 2) divest in companies investing in Sudan; and 3) petition Congress to call on China to pressure the Khartoum government to end the violence.

For people of faith, charity demands we help the victims of Darfur immediately, yet justice beckons us to step back and develop greater foresight to prevent future Darfurs. What are the humanitarian principles that should trigger economic and political responses before a crisis develops, even at the expense of our own self-interest? How can we utilize the International Criminal Court to deter genocide and war crimes? How can we stop looking away when the crisis is not in our own backyard?

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.