



Genocide in Slow Motion: How Darfur's Refugees Are Dying a Protracted Death

Mia Farrow, Darfur Advocate and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador

Ruth Messinger, American Jewish World Service

Jill Savitt, Dream for Darfur

OBSERVATIONS FROM AFRICA

August 24, 2007

Background

A delegation of US advocates participated in a mission to eastern Chad to launch a global advocacy campaign to address the Darfur crisis, and to interview refugees from Sudan and internally displaced Chadians. The group also surveyed conditions in the camps – at the Oure Cassoni refugee camp in Bahai, the Djabal refugee camp in Goz Beida, and the Gouroukoum camp for internally displaced Chadians in Goz Beida. After Chad, the group traveled to Kigali to discuss the healing and reunification process with survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The group traveled in eastern Chad from August 7 to 11, 2007 and in Rwanda from August 12 to 15, 2007.

The delegation in Chad consisted of: Mia Farrow, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador; Ruth Messinger, President of American Jewish World Service; Ira Newble, an NBA player on the Cleveland Cavaliers; and Jill Savitt, Director of Dream for Darfur. In Rwanda, the delegation was joined by Omer Ismail, a Sudanese refugee, and Clare-Hope Ashitey, an actor who appeared in *Beyond the Gates*, a film about the Rwandan genocide, and the film *Children of Men*.

The advocacy campaign launched by the group is called Olympic Dream for Darfur. The campaign is designed to press the Chinese government for urgent action to end the Darfur crisis, using the 2008 Games as leverage. China is the 2008 Olympic host and has proven to be susceptible to pressure about Darfur because of this role. China is a focal point because Beijing has unrivaled influence with Khartoum – China is a close business partner and fierce diplomatic supporter of the Sudanese regime and as such is complicit in the Darfur genocide. The advocacy campaign involved the lighting of an Olympic-style torch at events in both Chad and Rwanda as a way to call on China to press President Bashir of Sudan to accept the implementation of an international peacekeeping force for Darfur and to engage in a good-faith peace process. The campaign is also building a global anti-genocide movement by uniting communities of genocide survivors from different countries. The campaign travels next to Armenia, Bosnia, Germany and Cambodia to involve the survivors of these genocides in calling for an end to the crisis in Darfur.

The following report outlines the delegation's observations from Chad and Rwanda.

Refugees Are Experiencing Slow-Motion Genocide

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide clearly states that in addition to mass killings and “deliberate bodily or mental harm with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic or racial or religious group,” the crime of genocide also includes “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” The case for genocide at the hands of the leaders in Khartoum and their *Janjaweed* militias is clear. The United States called the Darfur crisis a genocide three years ago. More than 200,000 Sudanese from Darfur have been killed – and the violence is ongoing.

In addition to the direct killings, the population of the Darfur region is now suffering genocide by attrition



Chadian children in Gouroukoum IDP camp, eastern Chad.

in refugee camps. By refusing to allow international peacekeepers into Darfur and by refusing to abide by its numerous ceasefire commitments, the regime in Sudan prevents refugees from returning to their homes or to where their villages stood. This keeps refugees in camps, where the conditions amount to a slow-motion genocide of the survivors who managed to flee deadly attacks.

The refugees with whom we spoke face sickness, disease and malnutrition, as well as unsanitary conditions, trauma, emotional instability and the inability to forge any semblance of a normal or productive life. They are prevented from earning a living, receiving an education, or living in a decent shelter. They are even at risk collecting firewood for daily cooking, with constant fear of attack.

In story after story, refugees spoke of the complete disruption of their lives – of the family and community bonds severed, of the farms lost, and of the lack of self-sufficiency that now defined their lives. The following are some examples of what we heard and saw:

- We spoke to a group of women who had survived capture by the *Janjaweed* militia. Even as the *Janjaweed* repeatedly raped the women, these survivors were held captive and forced to cook and clean for the men who brutalized their families and neighbors. Husbands have divorced or shunned many of these women, some of whom became pregnant with children of their enemy rapists. While many of the women have found solace in a group of other survivors of rape, their trauma and isolation is evident.
- Children – hundreds of them – showed the tell-tale signs of malnutrition. There were boys and girls with orange-tinged hair and children with a full set of adult teeth but who appeared to be no more than four or five years old.
- Refugees say they are in a permanent limbo, unable to lead normal lives and with no place to call home. Young adults feel this acutely. Young men and women have no access to education or training; they fear Sudan cannot rebuild if their generation is unable to ascend educationally and economically. A young man who had been taking university exams when the violence started, told us: “Because of war we have lost many things, but especially our future.”

While Khartoum is clearly to blame, political leaders the world over must be held accountable for the continuing crisis. Global leaders have not intervened during the four years of massacres, and they are now leaving UN agencies and aid groups – which are working at great personal sacrifice and risk -- with meager resources to address the ongoing problem.

For Khartoum, of course, this is ideal. From what our delegation witnessed, it was clear to us that the slow genocide Khartoum is waging in the camps is no less deliberate than its bombs and militias.



Sudanese girl at Djabal refugee camp in Goz Beida, eastern Chad.

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Refugees Want Security So They Can Return Home

In the scores of interviews our delegation conducted with refugees from Darfur, there was one unanimous refrain: We want to go home. A safe return home is the priority for refugees, all of whom want to restart their farms, rebuild their villages and community ties, and make sure their children are healthy and receive an education. They do not want to live in camps.

To return home, however, the refugee survivors of the Darfur crisis say they need robust protection from the international community.



Chadian men at Gouroukoum IDP camp in Goz Beida, eastern Chad.

The comments of one refugee were widely echoed by the refugees we interviewed: "If international troops would enter Darfur, they would create security. The AU [African Union] have only showed us that they cannot do this. But with peace and security, I would go back to Darfur today. I would not wait until tomorrow. I want this beautiful rain to fall on my fields so I can grow my own food from my own farm... But first, bring peace to my country."

In our interviews, the notion of a safe return home was inextricably linked with the need for international peacekeepers. Unprompted, refugees said it was essential that the peacekeepers come from Western as well as African countries. One refugee, speaking with our group, pointed to the members of our delegation, mostly Westerners, and said: "We need peacekeepers who look like you."

Currently, the only protection force in Darfur is made up entirely of African Union forces – 7,000 underfunded and ill-equipped troops guarding a region the size of Texas with a limited mandate. An AU-UN “hybrid” force of 26,000 troops and police has been approved but there is continued debate about the composition and command structure of the force. Despite the hopes raised by the authorization of the “hybrid” force, the regime in Khartoum continues to obstruct implementation.

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Refugees Feel Abandoned – Politically and Otherwise

Based on the conditions we witnessed, we expected to hear a litany of complaints about life in camps during our interviews. While such issues certainly surfaced, we met with a significant number of survivors whose list of concerns began with something quite different.

Refugees told us “we want a seat at the peace table,” “to realize our potential as human beings,” and “leaders who will watch out for us – not serve their own self interests.”

These statements were motivated, we were told, by the fact that refugees do not feel they are faithfully represented at peace talks or in the policy process, despite their enormous stake in the outcome. Many refugees say the rebel leaders have abandoned them. They feel isolated from events in the world. We were repeatedly asked for information and news, especially about the peace talks among rebel leaders that had taken place in Tanzania just days before our arrival in Chad.

The comments of one refugee, Izelden K., express it best (this report uses only first names to protect the refugees quoted.):

“We are Africans but we don't have friends to help us. We are Muslims but we are not Arab. So we must take care of ourselves. We don't belong to anyone. We don't belong to rebel groups. We don't belong to our own government. We completely disagree with our government. We



Sudanese women at Oure Cassoni refugee camp in Bahai, eastern Chad

refugees should be represented at the conferences. The rebels are using our name to obtain their positions. We used to believe in them but now we don't know."

Refugees asked our delegation when troops would arrive and when the international community would stop the violence. They asked us to carry their message to policy makers and the media.

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Refugees Camps Have Become Permanent – But Without Resources For Humane Conditions

The humanitarian and UN workers we met on our mission are nothing short of heroic. Aid groups and UN agencies are doing all they can to stem the suffering and advocate for the survivors in their charge. They undertake their work at great personal risk. It deserves mentioning that conditions for aid workers are also dismal at best and increasingly insecure. It is clear that the international community has not only abandoned the refugees, but the aid workers as well. A lack of funds and an oversupply of politics and bureaucracy severely hamper the effective delivery of aid.



Tent at Oure Cassoni refugee camp in Bahai, eastern Chad

For the first four years of the crisis, refugees were discouraged from creating any kind of permanent housing or shelter in the camps; they were told that they would return home soon, so the survivors from Darfur used sticks and plastic sheeting to create huts. The sheeting – made of thin plastic – is now in tatters, shredded by time, sand, wind and torrential rains. These “temporary” shelters, now in place for four years, serve as permanent housing.

When the sheeting failed to provide shelter in Oure Cassoni camp, refugees used mud and water to build huts. But since water is in short supply in the camp, humanitarian and UN workers have discouraged mud structures; water needs to be saved for drinking and cooking. Now, in year five of the crisis, refugees are urged to build permanent homes. Materials to build, however, are nowhere to be found – areas surrounding the camp have been denuded in the search for firewood.

From our experience, conditions in camps for internally displaced people are as bad, and often worse, than conditions in refugee camps. Crossing an international border confers refugee status upon an individual – and therefore the right to international legal protection. In the Chad/Sudan context, internally displaced people (IDPs) are Chadians displaced by violence within their own country and Darfuris still inside Sudan but not able to live in their own villages. IDPs do not receive the full mantle of legal protection and aid provided to refugees under international law and IDP camps reflect this. These camps have less permanence, fewer services and less coordination than refugee camps.

The culprits responsible for these conditions: President Omar al-Bashir and his regime. The UN, national governments and particularly the government of China also bear a great deal of responsibility for their lack of will to intervene to end the violence, their inability to protect aid workers, and their refusal to provide adequate resources to survivors.

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Genocide Is A Lifelong and Debilitating Condition For Any Society That Experiences It

Visiting Rwanda immediately after our mission to refugee camps in Chad provided a great deal of perspective about the devastating impact of genocide on a society. In Rwanda, we were able to witness the legacy of genocide 13 years later.

Our interviews in Rwanda underscored the fact that genocide is a lifelong and debilitating condition for any society – it affects every aspect of life for generations. This has been proven historically: Armenians are still advocating for recognition of their suffering almost 100 years after the slaughter. Jews around the world are still haunted by the Holocaust. Survivors in Bosnia, where prosecutions of perpetrators are ongoing, are now experiencing the painful process of seeking justice, as part of a national rebuilding process.



Rwandan genocide survivors participate in a ceremony to call for an end to violence in Darfur.

From our interviews with Rwandan survivors, we learned that Rwandan society has made a concerted commitment to rebuilding and reunification. And yet, it was clear that the people there – Tutsi, Hutu and Twa – are still traumatized.

The wife of an imprisoned Hutu perpetrator lives next door to the widow of a Tutsi. Thousands of children lost one parent – and many lost both. Reminders of the violence abound. “What makes anybody think that I could possibly ever forgive the people who killed my family?” one survivor asked us.

The trip to Rwanda put in stark relief the fact that the Sudanese people are only at the very beginning of their horrific journey. Physical genocide is a brutal and bloody tragedy, but only the first phase of a societal catastrophe that, as one Rwandan survivor told us, “will last forever.”

Recommendations

During the Holocaust world leaders did not believe what was going on in the concentration camps until prisoners escaped and related the stories. Even then it took time for people to believe.

The international community cannot claim that it does not know about the genocide in Darfur. The atrocities are well documented and the survivalist regime in Khartoum has shown over the past four years that it will do whatever it takes to complete its genocidal counter-insurgency.

The following recommendations outline the steps the international community must take to end the genocide in Darfur.

The UN and its member states must:

- Deploy, immediately, the UN-AU “hybrid” force with a Chapter VII mandate as outlined in UN Resolution 1769 (passed July 31, 2007).
- Announce, immediately, significant troop contributions from Western nations to the UN–AU “hybrid” force.
- Press China, as the 2008 Olympic host and supporter of the regime in Khartoum, to use its unique leverage to persuade Khartoum to accept the implementation of an international peacekeeping force and to engage in a good-faith peace process.
- Press Khartoum to keep its multiple commitments to disarm the *Janjaweed* militias that are responsible for so much civilian destruction.
- Press Khartoum to adhere to previous ceasefire commitments.
- Demand a cessation of aerial bombardment of civilian targets, and the indiscriminate use of aerial military assets.
- Demand immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to all regions of Darfur.
- Provide substantial funding to UN refugee agencies and humanitarian organizations working in refugee and IDP camps.