

# Saving Darfur: Does Advocacy Help or Hinder Conflict Resolution?

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## Abstract

**T**his article looks at the factors that led to the formation of the American Darfur advocacy movement. It then considers the impact of this activism on both a domestic and international policy level. The author argues that although advocacy has been useful in raising the profile of the Darfur conflict, the oversimplification of the conflict, exaggeration of the atrocities, and misuse of the terms genocide has actually had a detrimental effect on the peace process.

## Introduction

The sky was bright blue and the sun was hot on that last day of April 2006 when my mother and I joined thousands of other concerned Americans on the National Mall in front of the U.S. Congress to rally to stop the genocide. The mood among the demonstrators was one of jubilation and defiance as we cheered on speaker after speaker. We heard from students, activists, religious leaders, politicians, and even celebrities. The crowd roared with approval as the year's "sexiest man alive,"<sup>1</sup> George Clooney took the stage to lend his voice to the campaign to stop the genocide in Darfur. Everyone agreed that the atrocities taking place in Darfur were a travesty that required immediate and decisive action. But as I think back to that day and the hours I spent cheering and chanting, I cannot remember exactly what that action was supposed to be. I remember slogans: "Never again," and "Not on our watch," but no solutions. Nevertheless, I returned home with my mother feeling very pleased with myself. After all, I had just rallied to stop the genocide in Darfur.

In an age when time is money and attention spans are increasingly getting shorter, the turnout of thousands of people at the "Rally to Stop the Genocide," which was organized by the Save Darfur Coalition, was no small feat. When one considers that the cause that motivated these people to come together was the plight of a people thousands of miles away on a continent most Americans have never set foot

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on, it becomes an even more impressive achievement. However, the questions of how and why these people came together remain. What is it about the conflict in Darfur that has captured our collective consciousness? And, perhaps most importantly,

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These questions have no clear-cut answers, yet they merit examination. This paper will examine the factors that have led to the groundswell of American activism around the Darfur issue. Next, it will consider the impact of this activism at the policy level—executive and legislative, domestic and international. Finally, this paper will consider some of the criticism that has been aimed at the campaign, particularly claims that oversimplification of the conflict, exaggeration of the atrocities, and misuse of the term genocide has actually had a detrimental effect on the peace process. It will conclude with a look at the way forward, particularly as it concerns possible negative consequences arising from the robust Darfur advocacy movement pertaining not only to the conflict in Darfur, but also the future of advocacy in the United States.

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## **The Emergence of the Darfur Advocacy Campaign**

### **Darfur and the Media**

The widespread mainstream media coverage Darfur receives today is relatively recent, compared to the attention it received less than four years ago. According to Deborah Murphy, who recently chronicled the evolution of the narration of the Darfur conflict by the U.S. press, it was not until 24 March 2004, when Nicolas Kristof began to write about the conflict in his New York Times column, that news of the “atrocities” being committed in Darfur began to seep into the mainstream media.<sup>2</sup> In his column, Kristof introduced the conflict in stark and dramatic terms:

The most vicious ethnic cleansing you’ve never heard of is...a campaign of murder, rape and pillage by Sudan’s Arab rulers that has forced 700,000 black African Sudanese to flee their villages...The culprit is the Sudanese government, one of the world’s nastiest. Its Arab leaders have been fighting a civil war for more than 20 years against its rebellious black African south. Lately, it has armed lighter-skinned Arab raiders, the Janjaweed, who are killing or driving out blacks in the Darfur region near Chad.<sup>3</sup>

Once Kristof broke the proverbial media ice, other editorials and op-eds condemning the conflict soon followed suit. Despite the difference in the journalists and newspapers in which these accounts were being published, Murphy points out that many of the articles during that pivotal period from March to September 2004 displayed “near unanimity in the descriptions of the conflict and the recommendation for outside intervention. While most of the articles acknowledged Darfur’s com-

plexity, there was little deviation from Kristof's first description...<sup>4</sup> The narratives commonly described the conflict as one between Arabs and Africans, usually labeled it as a genocide, and attributed culpability to the government for control over the violence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there was frequent allusion to previous genocides, specifically Rwanda, with many writers calling Darfur "the new Rwanda," or claiming that it was "the worst humanitarian crisis since Rwanda,"<sup>6</sup> particularly in light of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in April 2004. An editorial in the Washington Post, for example, posited, "It is as though, in the wake of the West's failure to prevent Rwanda's genocide, the gods of history are asking, okay, if we give you a second chance and months of warning, will you do better?"<sup>7</sup> It was not long before these analogies and later comparisons with the Holocaust triggered a response from a whole host of actors including human rights advocates, faith groups, and students all across the United States.

### **Darfur and the Call to Action**

The advocacy movement focused on Darfur certainly benefited from the work being done by Kristof and others in the media. However, as Rebecca Hamilton and Chad Hazlett point out in their recent article entitled, "'Not on our Watch': The Emergence of the American Movement for Darfur," the critical factor in Darfur's rapid rise to prominence in the United States was the groundwork laid by a coalition of groups, primarily Christian organizations that had advocated for Southern Sudan since the mid-1990s.<sup>8</sup> Many of these activists, such as the Sudan Coalition and Christian Solidarity International, took an early lead on the Darfur issue and formed the "Sudan Campaign," which demanded that the U.S. take the lead in pushing for international intervention, imposing targeted sanctions, and declaring the conflict in Darfur a genocide.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, these activists joined forces with other prominent actors such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Jewish World Service, along with well-known activist/academics such as John Prendergast from the International Crisis Group, to form the Save Darfur coalition in July 2004.<sup>10</sup> This coalition would go on to become the "central forum for spreading awareness, organizing major events, and occasionally gaining access to the highest levels of the Administration."<sup>11</sup> In their unity statement, the leaders of the coalition describe the conflict in Darfur using much the same rhetoric as the op-eds and editorials of the previous months:

The emergency in Sudan's western region of Darfur presents the starkest challenge to the world since the Rwanda genocide in 1994. A government-backed Arab militia known as *Janjaweed* has been engaging in campaigns to displace and wipe out communities of African tribal farmers... The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has issued its first ever genocide emergency... If aid is denied or unavailable, as many as a million people could perish... Lives are hanging in the balance on a massive scale...<sup>12</sup>

In September 2004, soon after the formation of Save Darfur, Secretary of State Colin Powell testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "genocide is being committed in Darfur...the government of Sudan and the [Janjaweed] bear responsibility."<sup>13</sup> This pronouncement proved to be a crucial turning point in the Darfur advocacy movement in that it "elevated Darfur above other atrocities with

high death tolls, seemingly highlighting it as a crisis most deserving of attention.”<sup>14</sup> Specifically, it stirred several groups of college students to launch their own campaigns. In fact, Students Take Action Now: Darfur (STAND) was started by a handful of Georgetown University students who viewed this as an extra-curricular activity for the fall semester.<sup>15</sup> In the subsequent months (and years), STAND has become one of the largest and loudest of the grassroots voices regarding Darfur, boasting 600 student chapters nationwide. Other student initiatives included the Genocide Intervention Fund, which was formed with the idea of convincing private citizens to donate to the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) as a means of shaming the U.S. government to raise its own contributions.

Release of the film *Hotel Rwanda* in September 2004, ten and a half years after that genocide, further exposed a mainstream audience to the brutality of that tragedy. Hamilton and Hazlett argue quite convincingly that the film and the use of the “G-word” had an enormous effect on the advocacy movement, particularly in the Jewish population.<sup>16</sup> Not long after, Darfur became the cause *de rigueur* of the MTV generation—the TV network even launched a campaign to promote activism for Darfur. This was followed by “Not on our Watch” Darfur wristbands and the “Million Voices for Darfur” postcard campaign to send one million postcards to President Bush asking for action in Darfur,<sup>17</sup> along with a continuous stream of campaigns, such as the recent “Dollars for Darfur” national school challenge, designed to keep Darfur in the forefront of the American psyche. Thus, on 30 April 2006, when George Clooney addressed the sea of people gathered on the National Mall in the largest rally (to date) focusing on the situation in Darfur, he was merely lending his voice to a louder campaign that had already successfully worked its way into the collective American consciousness.

## **Policy Implications of the Darfur Advocacy Campaign**

### **National Response**

The response of world leaders to the extensive Darfur mobilization campaign has been mixed at best. Powell’s historic September 2004 pronouncement that genocide was being committed in Darfur was in response to some of the earliest advocacy efforts undertaken by the Sudan Campaign and was important,

“not least because it [broadened] the usage of the term ‘genocide’ to include ethnically targeted killings, rapes and displacement perpetuated in the course of counter-insurgency, a significant expansion on the customary usage of the term to refer to attempts to eliminate entire populations.”<sup>18</sup>

However, the official U.S. position was that this determination was to have no impact upon U.S. policy, arguing that “Washington was already pressuring Khartoum to stem abuse and was providing humanitarian relief.”<sup>19</sup> This was a far cry from the humanitarian intervention many activists had hoped would follow the first-ever public declaration by such a high-level U.S. official that an ongoing conflict constituted genocide.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of tangible actions against the regime in power in Sudan, the Bush administration renewed the targeted arms sanction imposed by the Clinton admin-

istration in 1997 and imposed new economic sanctions in May 2007 preventing 31 companies and 3 people from doing business in the United States or with U.S. companies. Yet, many question the political will necessary to bring effective influence to bear on the situation. Hamilton and Hazlett have characterized the administration's strategy as "managing" activists instead of finding a workable solution on Darfur.<sup>21</sup> In fact, when one considers the rhetoric of the administration, it does appear that there is an attempt to appeal to the activist constituency without actually engaging with Sudan's government in a way that could jeopardize Sudan's cooperation in the U.S.-led war on terror, or force the United States to expend any more of the political or military resources that have been so depleted by its engagement in Iraq. In 2007, President Bush described the situation in Darfur in much the same terms as activists and journalist have over the last three years, but he notably left out any definitive plan for action apart from a vague global responsibility to stop the genocide:

For too long the people of Darfur have suffered at the hands of a government that is complicit in the bombing, murder and rape of innocent civilians...My administration has called these actions by their rightful name, genocide. The world has a responsibility to help put an end to it.<sup>22</sup>

While action at the level of the nation's executive has been disappointing, activists have been more successful in affecting policy decisions at the legislative level. Even before Powell's declaration, in July 2004, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a unanimous resolution calling on the Bush administration to "seriously consider multilateral or even unilateral intervention to prevent genocide" if the United Nations (UN) Security Council failed to act.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, which had 162 co-sponsors, passed both the House and the Senate and was signed into law by President Bush on 13 October 2006. This law imposed sanctions against individuals responsible for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and was intended to support measures for the protection of civilians as well as humanitarian operations, and to support peace efforts in Darfur.<sup>24</sup>

The House of Representatives also demonstrated its commitment by providing \$55 million for the African Union (AU) peacekeeping operations in Darfur in

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House Resolution 1268. A few months later, in February 2006, the House unanimously passed Resolution 383, calling for significant NATO assistance to the AU and the transition to a UN force under a Chapter VII mandate.<sup>25</sup> However, despite this responsiveness to activist demands, Congressional representatives do not have the authority to enforce their resolutions. At best, they can make their opinions known and wait for the administration or other international players to take action.

### **International Response**

Prior to the U.S. declaration that genocide was taking place in Darfur, the international community had already engaged with key actors in the conflict on several occasions. In April 2004, the Ndjamena Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement was negotiated. This was the impetus for the deployment of AU peacekeepers. However, both compliance with and enforcement of this agreement proved to be ad hoc, inconsistent, and ultimately ineffective.<sup>26</sup> In July of the same year, the Security Council passed Resolution 1556, demanding the disarmament of the *Janjaweed* within 30 days without defining either *Janjaweed* or disarmament and with little regard for the historical and structural limitations within Sudan that made forcible disarmament essentially unfeasible.<sup>27</sup>

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Then, in September 2004, in response to the American declaration that genocide was taking place in Darfur, the Security Council mandated the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur. The commission found that the “Government of Sudan and the militias conducted indiscriminate attacks, including killing of civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, destruction of villages, rape and other forms of sexual violence, pillaging and forced displacement.”<sup>28</sup> Although the commission recognized that the Government and the *Janjaweed* were responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law amounting to crimes under international law, they found that “the crucial element of genocidal intent appeared to be missing.”<sup>29</sup> “Despite evidence of intent,” they argued in their final report that the crimes committed in Darfur are “no less serious and heinous than genocide.”<sup>30</sup> The commission furthermore recommended referral of the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The fact that the Security Council

complied with this recommendation was itself a significant victory for human rights activists, especially when one considers the United States’ and China’s compelling reasons to veto the referral—the U.S. owing to its contested relationship with the ICC and China as a result of its personal and economic stake in its relationship with Sudan.

In August 2006, the Security Council passed Resolution 1706, the impetus for which came largely as a result of insistence by the the U.S. that AMIS should be handed over to the UN, the so-called “blue-hatting” of the AU Mission. This resolution invited Sudan’s consent to a UN force, a clause that the Sudanese government subsequently used to block the deployment of UN peacekeepers.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in July 2007, the Security Council passed Resolution 1769 calling for a “hybrid AU-UN peacekeeping force” as a compromise to Khartoum’s rejection of 1706. This resolution went a step further than previous resolutions in that it was adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and as such did not require Khartoum’s consent.<sup>32</sup> Instrumental in the “upgrading” of Resolution 1769 as compared to 1706 was a change in the position of the Chinese government which moved from providing unconditional support to Khartoum to becoming moderately engaged in the search for a solution to the conflict in Darfur. It is clear that advocates’ targeting of China as part of the “genocide Olympics” campaigns has played an important role in this respect.

Many activists confused the non-consensual aspect of Resolution 1769—with the go-ahead for a military intervention and urged immediate deployment by the UN, irrespective of Khartoum’s consent. Their demands demonstrated a lack a familiarity with the conventions within UN peacekeeping operations whereby, while under a Chapter VII authorization the UN technically does not *require* consent to deploy its troops, it is unlikely that they will do so without it. For one thing, a peacekeeping mission (even a particularly robust one) literally has the role of *keeping* peace, not *stopping* war. “The simple reality is that UN troops can’t stop an ongoing war; and their record at protecting civilians is far from perfect.”<sup>33</sup>

Alex de Waal addresses this disconnect when he refers to the “wildly inflated” expectations of what UN troops could do, including forcibly disarming the *Janjaweed* and physically protecting both displaced people and those returning to their homes.<sup>34</sup> Also, in his article entitled “Reflections on the Difficulties of Defining Darfur’s Crisis as Genocide” in the spring of 2007, he considered the number of troops that had been allotted for the UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). At that time, the Security Council had called for around 20,000 troops to be deployed—a difference of approximately 6000 troops compared to the subsequent UN-AU force that was authorized in July 2007 and is slated to have a maximum of 26,000 military and police personnel. Nevertheless, as de Waal points out, this figure was derived directly from the implementation plan for the security arrangements section of the Darfur Peace Agreement signed on 5 May 2006, which was based on an estimate of the number of troops and civilian police that would be required to enforce the peace agreement. However, he posits that “policing Darfur and protecting its civilians without the cooperation of the government of Sudan would require a force of a greater magnitude and would not have a high probability of success.”<sup>35</sup> In short, Resolution 1769 is not, and more importantly should not be taken as, a proxy for a military humanitarian intervention in Darfur.

### **A Critique of the Darfur Advocacy Campaign**

There can be no doubt that the advocacy campaign regarding the conflict in Darfur has made an important contribution to raising public awareness and engaging ordinary Americans in the plight of a people half a world away. However, the movement

has not been without its critics, who point to the perverse effects that the advocacy campaign has had on the peace process. Many worry that the Darfur conflict has been sensationalized and overly simplified in order to appeal to the broadest possible segment of the population. It has been dictated in a narrative of good versus evil with little attention to its historical, regional, and political complexities.

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Analysts are also troubled by what they see as an exaggeration of what is undoubtedly a terrible tragedy that needs no embellishment. They argue that inflating mortality estimates “can cheapen the currency of suffering”<sup>36</sup> and raise the threshold for advocacy campaigns for future conflicts. There has also been significant discussion regarding the policy prescriptions that have come out of the advocacy movement, particularly calls for “humanitarian” intervention, no-fly zones, and immediate deployment of the AU-UN peacekeeping force. Many of these prescriptions

demonstrate ignorance not only of the conflict itself, but also of the norms, laws, and practices that govern international politics. There is concern that these policies have the potential to do more harm than good and can actually extend or exacerbate the conflict in Darfur. Finally, much debate centers on the ongoing use of the term “genocide” to describe the conflict. Several analysts argue that the conflict in Darfur no longer qualifies as such and that continuing to use the term to describe Darfur dilutes its efficacy and impact in the future.

### **Good versus Evil in Darfur**

The narrative commonly used by journalists and activists alike describes the conflict in Darfur in terms of the simplified polarity of good versus evil. This moralization of the conflict is problematic for several reasons. First, thinking about the conflict in terms of good versus evil loses sight of its political dimensions and makes it difficult to discuss the country’s political choices in a sensible manner.<sup>37</sup> So long as Khartoum is portrayed as the Darth Vader of international politics, any form of negotiation or compromise becomes a form of moral equivocation.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, this discourse has the added danger of alienating Khartoum and emboldening the rebels. De Waal has pointed out that many of those involved in the conflict perceive undertones to the debates taking place in Washington and the UN reminiscent to the period leading to the intervention of Kosovo—which encourages Khartoum to take a hard line and further entrench the conflict in order to retain its power and sovereignty. The rebels, on the other hand, may see the prospect of autonomy on the horizon, which will likely lessen their willingness to settle for anything less.<sup>39</sup> Nigerian columnist Tajudeen Abdul Raheem of Justice Africa alluded to this dilemma when he wrote: “Unlike many liberation movements in Africa, which had to depend on the people to build and plan with them, these rebels have too many willing regional and international actors indulging their delusions of grandeur.”<sup>40</sup> The key question, therefore, is if the very element that has served to unite otherwise disparate groups such as the



Christian right and the liberal left has also created a situation that is antithetical to a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

### **The Currency of Suffering**

In August of this year, the British Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) made a significant decision with regard to the mortality estimates that Save Darfur was using in their media campaign, particularly their claim that, “After three years, 400,000 innocent men, women, and children have been killed.”<sup>41</sup> In making its decision, ASA referred to a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) panel that had been convened the year before in order to assess the credibility of six prominent mortality estimates for Darfur. The GAO committee overwhelmingly found that the estimate given by Northwestern sociologist John Hagan, which was the basis of the Save Darfur statistic, was flawed, and most panel members expressed a low or very low level of confidence in the reliability of his study. As a result, ASA asked that Save Darfur present the 400,000 figure as opinion and not fact in future British ad campaigns.<sup>42</sup> However, Save Darfur continues to use the 400,000 mortality estimate on its website as well as its American media campaigns with little regard to the GAO committee’s findings or the ASA August decision.

Given that the situation in Darfur remains unstable, with massive amounts of displacement, accurate statistics are difficult to come by. However, recent mortality estimates are approximately 200,000, roughly a quarter of which resulted from direct military attacks.<sup>43</sup> Many more deaths resulted not from slaughter but rather from hunger and disease, which are undoubtedly rooted in the war, but yet bear differentiation from violent killing. At a minimum, accurate information is needed to make sound policy recommendations. For example, the above-mentioned statistics suggest that policy makers should concentrate particularly on ways to bolster and protect aid agencies providing relief in order to address the 75% of Darfur’s deaths that result from disease and malnutrition.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, critics of the inflated figures distributed by Save Darfur and others such as Nicolas Kristof worry that this “mortality one-upmanship threatens to inure the public to both current and future catastrophes by making 400,000 the de facto benchmark for action.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Military Intervention**

From the beginning, Darfur activists have advocated for military intervention in Darfur. In fact, a large part of the excitement surrounding the American pronouncement that genocide was occurring was the expectation that this declaration would trigger “the responsibility to protect” and would usher forth an armed intervention. There is, however, no guarantee that a forcible intervention in Darfur would indeed have stopped the violence and succeeded in avoiding aggravating the situation. In fact, it is likely that:

“international armed intervention without the consent of the government and either led or instigated by the U.S. would have the further complication of being seen in Africa and the Middle East as an arbitrary projection of American power into a Muslim and Arab country.”<sup>46</sup>

As previously discussed, interventionist rhetoric has the potential to impede the peace process by “giving oxygen to regime hard-liners.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, the more threat-

ened Khartoum feels, the less inclined it will be to consent to having international military personnel within its borders or complying with the negotiated peace agreement. No regime is willing to compromise when it feels that its very existence is being threatened.

Aside from the political implications, there are concerns regarding the likely detrimental effect of an intervention on humanitarian assistance. Although the humanitarian crisis at the apex of the conflict was immense, the situation has improved markedly thanks in large part to the diligence and commitment of humanitarian organizations. In fact, "mortality levels among Darfurians reached by relief are marginally better than they were before the war and lower than in the capital Khartoum."<sup>48</sup> Although most of these humanitarian organizations privately condemn the conflict and the actions of the militants on all sides, many disagree with the advocacy groups that have encouraged coercive measures such as a no-fly zone. These measures, "however well-intentioned, would put the on-the-ground aid effort at risk because the relief organizations themselves fly constantly over Darfur in aircraft virtually indistinguishable from those fielded by the government of Sudan."<sup>49</sup> In short, far from resolving the conflict, a military intervention would "have disastrous consequences that risk triggering a further escalation of violence while jeopardizing the provisions of vital humanitarian assistance to millions of people."<sup>50</sup>

### **"G-Word"**

As described in earlier sections, labeling the conflict in Darfur as genocide served as a lightning rod for action and netted the Darfur movement a great deal of momentum and mass support. However, three years after its initial pronouncement, activists continue the refrain of stopping genocide despite significant changes on the ground. The use of the "G-word" with regard to Darfur bears consideration on several levels, not least of which are the criteria for establishing the existence of genocide in terms of international law, including, a genocidal intent. That point aside, there is still a question of whether or not genocide is actually continuing to take place in Darfur. Not surprisingly, activists answer with a resounding "Yes!" Many analysts, however, take a different view. In an August 2007 *Washington Post* op-ed, noted Darfur experts Alex de Waal and Julie Flint argue that the current situation in Darfur resembles anarchy far more than it does genocide. They cite the recurrent pattern in Sudan's long history of conflict whereby episodes of intense brutality and mass displacement are followed by longer periods of anarchic internecine fighting. They also point to the fact that militias are increasingly following their own agendas with little input or control from Khartoum. Furthermore, rebel leaders are pursuing opportunistic alliances based not on ethnicity, but rather on the currency of power politics.<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere, de Waal has been quoted as rejecting the hard and fast racial dimensions that the activist narrative has ascribed to the conflict, arguing that "a lot of the 'African' groups have defected to join the government and a lot of the 'Arab' groups have defected to join the rebels."<sup>52</sup> Flint has also posited that in many areas controlled by rebels who rejected the peace pact, life is returning to normal as much as is possible after so much death and destruction.<sup>53</sup> Her point is that Darfurians are trying their best to continue with their lives and that by reading from an "outdated script," activists are stuck in a refrain that may not be reflective of the reality on the

ground. The emphasis is that fighting is not limited to a government-controlled proxy militia trying to quash an insurgency. Rather, it is between Arab militias on the ground fighting one another over land as well as by and between rebel factions now aligned with the government. To be sure, the numbers of civilian casualties and displacement continue to rise, but the violence does not seem to reflect an “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,”<sup>54</sup> and as such should not continue to be referred to as genocide.

This intractability is also worrisome as it relates to activism around future examples of mass violence. For example, must we now define a potentially devastating conflict as genocide before the world will be outraged enough to demand its cessation? What of the conflict currently underway in parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the total numbers killed are estimated in the millions<sup>55</sup>—are those lives less valuable because they are being lost in violence not attributable to a campaign of ethnic cleansing? And what about structural violence—what of the instances of famine, disease, and poverty that claim many thousands more victims on a daily basis? What of the term genocide itself? After the protracted and controversial debate over genocide in Darfur, has it lost some of its political capital, its gravitas? What precedent has been set by the United States’ reluctance to engage militarily despite making the determination that the government of Sudan was guilty of genocide? Would the outcome have been different had the international community (i.e., the UN) concurred with that assessment?

#### **Conclusion: “Do No Harm”**

In his book, *The Dark Sides of Virtue*, David Kennedy cautions those involved in humanitarian projects aimed at making a difference for the weak and the poor: “At worst, we can find our own work contributing to the very problems we hoped to solve. Humanitarianism tempts us to hubris, to an idolatry about our intentions and routines, to the conviction that we know more than we do about what justice can be.”<sup>56</sup> Increasing awareness about perverse effects of their work has led humanitarian and development workers to endorse the concept of “Do No Harm”—a framework oriented to assess the potential of aid, development or humanitarian response projects to exacerbate social tensions and feed conflicts, and to seek to mitigate these impacts. The case of the

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movement for Darfur demonstrates that human rights activists could benefit from a similar sensitization regarding that which they advocate for and the implications of their actions, in order to ensure that the movement does not deviate from its larger purpose.

In the case of the Darfur advocacy movement, the larger purpose should be to bring peace to Darfur even if that means updating familiar narratives and revising well-known tactics. Although the Save Darfur campaign has done an admirable job of raising awareness, they are presently stuck in a quicksand of their own making. No one denies that horrible atrocities have taken place in Darfur. Countless people have lost their lives and had their homes, livelihoods, and families disrupted and often destroyed beyond recognition. And the interminable continuation of the conflict is only going to lead to more suffering and more displacement. The activists have succeeded in gaining the world's attention and it is time for them to "complicate Darfur"<sup>57</sup> if they truly hope to affect positive change in the region. They need to acknowledge the historical, regional, and structural complexities of the conflict and advocate for a political solution instead of continuing to shout for international intervention. Instead of insisting that there is a genocide from which Darfur needs to be saved, activists should recognize that as Julie Flint and others have pointed out, many in Darfur are trying to move forward with their lives, and much more than moral indignation, they need medicine, books, infrastructure, and resources with which to rebuild their communities. The next time there is a rally in Washington D.C., let us move beyond slogans and start thinking about realistic long-term solutions. Though it is tempting to be carried away by our unfettered activism fueled more by passion than an objective assessment of international law (i.e. definitions of genocide) and practice (i.e. with humanitarian interventions), this mind-set can end up causing—however unintentionally—more harm than good to the very cause or more precisely, the very people we have committed ourselves to "saving."

## Endnotes

- 1 George Clooney has been named as the "Sexiest Man Alive" by People Magazine twice: once in 1997 and again in 2006.
- 2 Deborah Murphy, "Narrating Darfur: Darfur in the U.S. Press, March-September 2004," *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace*, Alex de Waal, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Global Initiative, 2007), 314-336, at 314-315.
- 3 Nicolas Kristof, "Ethnic Cleansing, Again," *The New York Times*, March 24, 2004.
- 4 Murphy, 315.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid, 317.
- 7 "The Stakes in Darfur," *The Washington Post*, July 22, 2004, A20.
- 8 Rebecca Hamilton and Chad Hazlett, "Not on our Watch": The Emergence of the American Movement for Darfur," *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace*, Alex de Waal, ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Global Initiative, 2007), 337-366, at 341.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid, 343-344.
- 11 Ibid, 344.
- 12 Save Darfur website <[http://www.savedarfur.org/pages/unity\\_statement](http://www.savedarfur.org/pages/unity_statement)> (accessed December 3, 2007).
- 13 Glenn Kessler and Colum Lynch, "U.S. Calls Killings in Sudan Genocide," *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2004, A01.

- 14 Hamilton and Hazlett, 343.
- 15 Ibid, 345.
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