

Violence in Darfur, Sudan

Sudan is the largest country, by area, in Africa and the tenth largest country in the world. Sudan has been embroiled in internal conflicts since independence in 1956. Most recently, a violent conflict involving the central government, armed militias, and several opposition groups has devastated Darfur, the westernmost region of Sudan.

“For years, the people of Sudan have faced enormous and unacceptable hardship. The genocide in Darfur has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and left millions more displaced. Conflict in the region has wrought more suffering, posing dangers beyond Sudan’s borders and blocking the potential of this important part of Africa. Sudan is now poised to fall further into chaos if swift action is not taken.”

—President Barack Obama,
October 19, 2009

The conflict in Darfur is complex, involving many factions and spreading into neighboring countries. Some in the international community, including the United States, have called this conflict a genocide. Others have argued that the conflict, although exceedingly violent, cannot be called genocide.

Conflict in Sudan

The borders of Sudan encompass more territory than all of Western Europe. The country is made up of hundreds of different cultures with diverse ethnic, religious, and geographical backgrounds, and with many languages. Both Christianity and Islam have ancient roots in the area. There are two main ethnic groups



in Sudan: black Africans and Arabs. Indigenous Africans have lived in the region since the Stone Age. Arab peoples were prominent traders in Sudan as early as 800 CE and the area was heavily involved in the Arab-African slave trade.

Sudan is made up of two distinct geographic regions. To the north, the area is very dry and is home to part of the Sahara Desert. In the south, the climate is tropical, with lush rainforests and swamps. The majority of the population lives in urban areas in the north. The north is largely Muslim and Arab, and tends to have closer ties to Egypt. African farmers make up most of the population in the south, and the majority are Christian or practice traditional religions. African populations in the west, east, and south tend to have closer ethnic ties to populations in neighbor-

Note:

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ing East African states such as Chad, Uganda, and Kenya. Much of Sudan's population lives in poverty; the country ranked 150 out of 182 countries in the United Nation's Human Development Index (which measures things like life expectancy, literacy, and average income) released in 2009.

Sudan was a colony of Britain and Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Britain ruled Sudan as two distinct territories, with separate laws governing the north and south. Upon independence, northern Sudanese nationalists and the British planned to unify these two regions. Even before official independence in 1956, a civil war broke out between the north and south over control of the central government. This war lasted until 1972, and a second civil war, again between north and south, began in 1983. Millions of southern Sudanese were killed or displaced by violence in this second war.

What caused the second north-south conflict?

There were a number of issues at the root of the second civil war between north and south Sudan. Northern, Islamic Arabs have retained control over Sudan's central government since 1956. The 1972 peace agreement ending the first civil war granted southern Sudan a great deal of independence from the north. The second civil war began in 1983 when the north-controlled central government broke this treaty and tried to assert more power over the south. That year, the government implemented Islamic law across the entire country, angering many non-Muslims in the south.

Another source of tension between the two regions was oil, discovered in Sudan in the 1960s. Most of the oil reserves are located in the central and southern regions, yet

the north-controlled government took all of the oil revenues. The second civil war lasted for twenty-one years, ending with a peace agreement in early 2005. The peace agreement was negotiated with the help of the United States and the African Union and provided the people of the south with three basic things: the right to greater participation in government, the right to a portion of the oil revenues, and the right to hold a referendum in 2011 to decide whether to secede from Sudan and become an independent country.

What is the Islamist National Islamic Front?

The Islamist National Islamic Front (NIF) is a powerful political party that took over Sudan's government by coup in 1989. Led by Omar Hassan al-Bashir, the current president of Sudan, the NIF controls both the military and the oil reserves. After coming to power in 1989, President Bashir dissolved parliament and banned all political parties. Many within the international community believe that the Sudanese government pursues an aggressively Islamic agenda. In the 1990s, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia, which all border Sudan, formed an alliance backed by the United States to limit the influence of the NIF outside of Sudan. In 2010, Bashir won multiparty elections, Sudan's first in more than twenty years.



August 1998: The 2.5 million people displaced by the war in southern Sudan also faced famine. Here, these displaced people wait their turn for water.

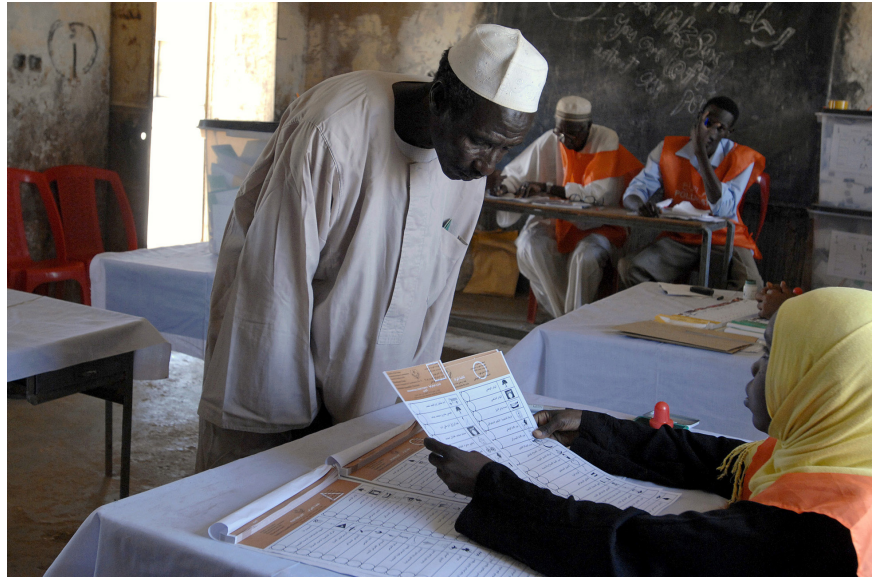
UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe.

Observers believe the elections were flawed by voter intimidation. Bashir is quite popular in the north where increased oil revenues have helped the region's economy.

Nevertheless, there is dissatisfaction in other regions of the country. Many Sudanese are frustrated with high levels of poverty and the lack of infrastructure such as paved roads, sanitation, and medical facilities outside Sudan's major towns.

Groups in some regions are upset over what they consider to be a lack of representation within the government, while others wish to have a larger degree of self-rule. The 2005 peace agreement set January 2011 as a date for a referendum in which people in southern Sudan will decide whether to secede from Sudan. With the vote approaching, tensions between north and south have increased. Many worry that if southern Sudan votes to become independent, civil war could erupt again. The north's access to oil resources in the south is one particularly thorny problem.

“[T]he situation North-South is a ticking time bomb of enormous consequence.... But the real problem is what happens when the inevitable happens and the referendum is passed and the South declares independence.... What happens to the oil revenues? And if you're in the North and all of a sudden, you think a line's going to be drawn and you're going to lose 80 percent of the oil revenues, you're not a very enthusiastic participant, what are the deals that can possibly be made that will limit the potential of violence?”



UN Photo/Tim McKulka.

April 14, 2010: Sudan's first multiparty elections in twenty-four years. Voters chose their national and regional presidents, governors and legislative representatives.

...And so we've got to figure out some ways to make it worth their while to peacefully accept an independent South and for the South to recognize that unless they want more years of warfare and no chance to build their own new state, they've got to make some accommodations with the North as well.

—U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,
September 8, 2010

What are the origins of the conflict in Darfur?

In early 2003, while peace negotiations to end the civil war between north and south Sudan were underway, opposition groups in Darfur (a region in western Sudan) rose up against the government led by President Bashir. The government and pro-government militias responded brutally to crush the new opposition. This began a new, even more violent conflict within Sudan.

The region of Darfur is roughly the size of France. The people of Darfur are predominantly Muslim, and there are large populations of both Arabs and Africans. Tensions over land and grazing rights between Arabs, most of whom are nomadic herders, and Africans, who

are mainly farmers, have existed for most of the region's history.

More recently, the African population has been frustrated by what it claims is the central government's lack of support during prolonged droughts and near-famine conditions. Many believe the government favors Darfur's Arab population. Opposition groups also say that the government has long marginalized the African populations of Darfur. They say that Darfur was left out of the peace negotiations with southern Sudan in which issues such as representation within the government were discussed. The Sudanese government, on the other hand, claims that the conflict in Darfur is rooted in competition for land among various ethnic groups in the region. With the 2011 referendum approaching, tensions in Darfur are high. President Bashir's government wants to discourage any possibility of Darfur trying to break away from Sudan.

Who is involved in this conflict?

Initially, there were two main African opposition groups in Darfur: the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM), also known as the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA), and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Both of these groups splintered into smaller factions over the course of the conflict. The UN estimates that there are now as many as thirty opposition groups in Darfur. Many of these factions are competing with each other for power and influence.

On the opposing side of the conflict are the central government and pro-government militias, such as the Arab Janjaweed. Most

parties in the conflict say that the Janjaweed, a group of armed horsemen, is responsible for the majority of violence. Opposition groups claim that the government supports the Janjaweed and the "Arabization" of Darfur because it wants to eliminate opposition from the black Africans in the region. The government denies any connection to the Janjaweed and asserts that it only supports government forces fight-



UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran.

January 25, 2010: The men pictured here are among three thousand Sudanese who have migrated to Dar al Salam in northern Darfur. They were forced out of their towns across Darfur by local warring factions. With few vital resources in Dar al Salam, such as water, food, and material for proper shelters, the migrants have needed help from UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

ing rebel groups in Darfur. But many within the international community believe that the Janjaweed does have ties to the government. Although the government has called the Janjaweed "thieves" and "gangsters" it has done little to limit the violence of this group.

What has been happening in this conflict?

Since the initial rebellion in 2003, violence between rebel forces and government militia and the Janjaweed has spread across the region. The government militia and the Janjaweed have targeted civilians and villages that they claim are harboring rebel forces. Aerial bombing has destroyed numerous villages.

Although the government denies its involvement in the bombings, it is the only force in Sudan that owns helicopters and planes. At the same time, the Janjaweed have looted and burned villages and crops, and poisoned water supplies. Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed by various groups in the conflict, and many more have been raped. Opposition groups have forced many young boys within refugee camps to join their forces. Fighting among rebel factions occurs both within the camps and outside of them. Other groups, capitalizing on the instability, rob supply convoys and international aid efforts.

UN officials currently estimate that about 300,000 people have been killed in the conflict through violence, starvation, and disease. Well over two million people have been displaced from their communities, and some have fled to refugee camps in neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). Refugees are dependent on foreign aid for survival. The majority of victims are farmers, mostly African civilians. But many Arab farming communities have also been displaced by violence from African opposition groups. Humanitarian groups have struggled to access the region because of the violence and lack of government cooperation. Rebel groups have targeted peacekeeping operations. As of July 2010, sixty-eight UN peacekeepers and personnel had been killed in Darfur.

There are fears that the violence in Darfur could spread to other parts of Sudan and beyond. In 2007, it spilled across the border into Chad and the CAR, and threatened to destabilize the region. Refugees, militia, rebels, and bandit raiders flow across Sudan's porous borders. Africans in bordering regions of Chad and the CAR have been attacked by armed Arab groups on horseback, similar to the pattern of violence in Darfur. At the same time, some observers believe that the Arab population in eastern Chad is facing persecution as well. By July 2007, more than thirty thousand Chadian Arabs had fled across the border into Sudan and claimed refugee status. The governments of Chad and the CAR accused Sudan of supporting rebel groups in

their countries, while Sudan accused Chad of supporting opposition groups aiming to destabilize its government. In February 2010, Chad and Sudan agreed to increase cooperation and security while reducing tensions between the two countries.

The Response of the International Community

There is disagreement in the international community over whether the conflict in Darfur is genocide. In July 2004, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution calling the conflict genocide. In September 2004, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell made a public statement declaring Darfur a site of genocide.

“We concluded—I concluded—that genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the government of Sudan and the Janjaweed bear responsibility—and genocide may still be occurring.”

—Colin Powell, U.S. secretary of state,
September 2004

In early 2005, the UN released a report saying that although there was massive violence in the region, it could not be called genocide because there was no evidence of intent to kill an entire racial, ethnic, or religious group.

“The Commission established that the Government of Sudan and the Janjaweed are responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law amounting to crimes under international law.... However, the crucial element of genocidal intent appears to be missing, at least as far as the central Government authorities are concerned. Generally speaking, the policy of attacking, killing and forcibly displacing members of some tribes does not evince a specific intent to annihilate, in whole or in part, a

group distinguished on racial, ethnic, national, or religious grounds.

—UN report, January 2005

In March 2009, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Sudan's president for his role in the violence accusing him of crimes against humanity and war crimes. In July 2010, the court added three counts of genocide to the charges.

Although the Sudanese government claims that the ICC has no jurisdiction in Sudan, the court has charged others involved in the conflict. In early 2007, the ICC issued arrest warrants for a government minister and a Janjaweed leader, both of whom the Sudanese government refused to turn over to the court.

How has the UN responded to the conflict?

Until recently, international troop presence in Darfur was minimal. In late 2004, a regional organization called the African Union (AU) sent troops to serve as a small observer mission. The AU force was funded largely by the United States, European Union, and Canada. But with only six thousand troops, the force was too small and ill-equipped to quell violence over such a large area. Additionally, AU soldiers were targeted in shootings and kidnappings.

Starting in March 2006, many in the international community began to call for a UN peacekeeping force to be sent to Darfur. Initially, Sudan's government was hostile to this suggestion, claiming that the presence of international troops would be tantamount to occupation. After months of negotiations with UN officials, the Sudanese government relented. In July 2007, the UN Security Council



August 4, 2010: Sudanese women from Kassab Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp in Kutum, Darfur, venture out to collect firewood. Female IDPs often fear being raped by rebel fighters or criminals when they leave their homes. These women were escorted by UNAMID peacekeepers.

UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran.

unanimously approved a resolution to create a combined AU-UN force of up to 26,000 troops and police in Darfur. The Council approved the use of force for self-defense as well as for the protection of civilians by these troops. The UN, along with the European Union, also pledged to send troops to help stabilize Chad's eastern border with Sudan.

The African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) has been in charge of all peacekeeping operations in Darfur since December 31, 2007. As of July 2010, only 21,000 troops had been deployed and many critical supplies were still missing. Some point out that even 26,000 troops is too few to cover the large area of Darfur. Others argue that peacekeepers can do little until there is a peace agreement to enforce.

What are the prospects for peace in Darfur?

Thus far, peace negotiations have achieved little. Only the government and one rebel faction signed a peace treaty mediated by the AU in 2006. Further negotiations led by the AU and UN in Libya in 2007 also were unsuccessful. In 2010, AU and UN officials held a new round of talks in Qatar, but have struggled to

keep representatives from all of Sudan's many rebel factions at the negotiating table.

The arrest warrant for President Bashir has also complicated the peace process. Many in the international community opposed this measure, fearful that it will further inflame tensions in the region. Some within the UN Security Council have supported a proposal to suspend the case against Bashir in return for his full cooperation in negotiating a peace agreement. Others have argued that suspending Bashir's case would undermine the international criminal justice system.

The international community has stepped up efforts to mediate the many disputes in Sudan to prevent the referendum from creating instability, violence, and even civil war. In 2010, violence and killing has escalated in the Darfur region. International observers worry that the intense focus on the referendum will distract the international community from making a comprehensive effort to improving the situation in Darfur. 2011 is certain to be an important year for the peoples of Sudan.

“What happens in Sudan in the days ahead may decide whether a people who have endured too much war move forward towards peace or slip backwards into bloodshed.”

—President Barack Obama,
September 24, 2010