



## SUDAN GENOCIDE DECLARATION STIRS WORLD

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*One of the two rebel groups in Sudan's Darfur region broke off peace negotiations Wednesday, as the United Nations' World Health Organization issued new figures saying 6,000 to 10,000 people are dying per month there in one of Africa's worst humanitarian crises.*

The report comes a week after U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that the killings, rapes and other atrocities committed in Darfur amount to "genocide." Powell used the word in remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and based his finding on a U.S. State Department survey of 1,136 refugees living in neighboring Chad. He determined that "the government of Sudan and the *Janjaweed* bear responsibility, and genocide may still be occurring."

In response, the Sudanese government claimed that Powell's statement was "flawed, regrettable and dismaying." The government claimed the report was "based on partial observations by an American team that had never set foot in Darfur and interviewed politicized refugees in Eastern Chad."

### **What is Genocide and why is it significant?**

The word genocide came out of the violence of World War II and recalls the Nazi attempt to systematically eliminate the Jewish people in the Holocaust. The official definition is the intentional destruction of a national, ethnical, religious, or racial group. In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly gave genocide a legal definition in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Historically, many heads of state have been hesitant to use the label genocide, as doing so would make them legally obliged to act to "prevent and punish" the perpetrators.

Ten years ago, the Clinton administration resisted applying the term genocide to ethnically motivated massacres in Rwanda until 800,000 people had been killed. The former president later apologized for not having acted more quickly.

However, Powell was careful to emphasize that "no new action is dictated by the determination" that genocide is occurring, a statement that has left some activist groups frustrated. "You don't declare genocide and then fail to act," Salih Booker, executive director of Africa Action told the Inter Press Service News Agency.

John Prendergast, a Sudan specialist at the International Crisis Group warned that Powell's "finding ... will only be meaningful if it's backed up by more assertive action at the U.N. Security Council."

### **The conflict in Darfur**

Tension in Darfur between black Africans and Arabs dates back decades. The two groups have long competed over scarce land, water and other natural resources.

However, the situation came to a head in early 2003, when two groups of black Africans from the region openly rebelled against the Sudanese government, demanding inclusion in new power-sharing arrangements.

To suppress the rebellion, the Sudanese government trained and armed Arab militias, according to human rights groups.

"The *Janjaweed*, armed militias supported by the Sudanese armed forces, are committing massive human rights violations in the Darfur region in the west of Sudan. They are systematically pillaging and destroying the towns and villages of Darfur, forcing the people to flee for their lives," Amnesty International reported.

To date, the violence has claimed some 50,000 lives and has forced 1.4 million people from their homes. About 1.2 million of them live in camps within Darfur, while 200,000 have fled over the border into Chad.

The Sudanese government denies supporting the *Janjaweed*.

### **What can the Security Council do?**

On July 30, the United Nations' most powerful body, the Security Council passed a resolution demanding that the Sudanese government disarm the *Janjaweed* and stop the violence within 30 days. If the authorities failed to do so, the Security Council threatened to take action against the government. When the Secretary General's Special representative to Sudan went to investigate the situation at the end of August, he found that the government had not made satisfactory progress. The Security Council is currently discussing how best to respond to this report.

All members agree that more peacekeepers are needed on the ground. The African Union has already sent monitors and troops to support them, and the United Nations advocates expanding that force.

How to punish the Sudanese government is a more complicated issue. The United States and the European Union have threatened sanctions in which they would refuse to buy oil from Sudan, thus starving the government of profits from the industry. However, China, which buys a lot of oil from Sudan, has threatened to veto any Security Council resolution that includes sanctions.

--Compiled for *NewsHour Extra* by Alexis Ortiz

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