

## Extra Feature Story

### 2008 Olympic Games in China Draw Criticism over Darfur

February 27, 2008

**Celebrities and advocates are using the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing as an opportunity to force the Chinese government to confront its allies in the African nation of Sudan about the violence in war-torn Darfur.**

In 2001, China was awarded the chance to host the 2008 summer games, and Beijing has looked forward to showing the world an economic powerhouse and modern world leader.

"This has a huge meaning for us," Zhang Mingeng, a real estate developer in Beijing, told the Associated Press at the time of the announcement.

"It constitutes a recognition of China by the international community. The world is saying here are the rules, play by them and you can become a member of the international community. China has arrived!"

#### **Scrutiny of human rights and foreign policy**

But by opening itself to the rest of the world, China has also opened itself to more vocal criticism of the communist government, its policies and human rights record.

Ai Weiwei, the Chinese architect who designed the \$440 million Olympic stadium, will not attend the opening ceremony in protest of the lack of democracy in China.

"There isn't anything to celebrate. The political system is incapable of handling economic and social change," Ai Weiwei told Spiegel Magazine. "The games are a propaganda show, a giant masked ball."

Other international figures are protesting China's policy in Tibet. Britain's Prince Charles said he would not attend in protest over the exile of Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

#### **Movie maker Stephen Spielberg takes a stand**

From the United States, movie director Steven Spielberg delivered a blow to the Chinese government two days before Valentine's Day by withdrawing from his role as the Olympics artistic adviser.

In an open letter, Spielberg admonished China's lack of intervention in the Darfur genocide. China, as Sudan's largest oil investor and weapons supplier, has a considerable amount of influence with the Sudanese government, he said.

Spielberg had already sent two letters to Chinese President Hu Jintao, and although China appointed a special envoy to Sudan, Spielberg, who created the Shoah Foundation dedicated to remembering the Holocaust, said it was not enough. "Conscience will not allow me to continue with business as usual."

A Chinese spokesman called Spielberg's decision "regrettable" and argued that "the Darfur issue is neither an internal issue of China nor is it caused by China, it is completely unreasonable, irresponsible and unfair to link the two as one."

#### **China and the conflict in Sudan**

As the consumer of two-thirds of Sudan's oil and Sudan's main weapons supplier, China is an indirect major player in a military conflict largely centered on oil and resources.

In 2003, two groups of ethnic Africans from the oil-rich Darfur region rebelled against the Arab-led central Sudanese government, demanding inclusion in new power-sharing arrangements and some of the money made by the sale of oil.

To suppress the rebellion, the Sudanese government trained and armed militias of Arab nomads, called the Janjaweed, according to human rights groups. The Sudanese government denies it has trained, armed or helped these militia members.

The Janjaweed went on killing, raping and pillaging rampages against particular ethnic groups, attacking civilians who were not directly involved in the fighting. The United States officially called their actions genocide in 2004.

More than 200,000 Sudanese have died and around 2.5 million forced from their homes since the start of the conflict five years ago. Fighting continues in the region, often preventing the delivery of much needed humanitarian aid for civilians.

The Chinese government has used its position as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council to veto measures calling for intervention in Sudan or for imposing economic sanctions on Sudan's oil exports. China agreed to the deployment of U.N. peacekeeping troops after the other countries agreed that all forces would have to abide by conditions set by the Sudanese government.

### **The Olympics as a sporting event**

The majority of international officials and leaders seem to agree with China's argument that the Olympics are about rising above politics through the celebration of sports.

When asked about Spielberg's announcement, President Bush said that although he was concerned about the slow pace of international action in Sudan's Darfur, it wouldn't stop him from attending the Olympics.

"I'm going to the Olympics. I view the Olympics as a sporting event," Mr. Bush said in an interview with the BBC.

"On the other hand, I have a little different platform than Steven Spielberg, so I get to talk to President Hu Jintao," he added. "I do remind him that he can do more to relieve the suffering in Darfur."

**-- Compiled by Jean Shin for NewsHour Extra**

© 2008 MacNeil/Lehrer Productions