

U.S. Needs to Use Its Full Influence to Save Lives in Darfur

**By Jan Schakowsky**

**Op-Ed**

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I recently traveled with a bipartisan congressional delegation, led by Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, to Darfur, Sudan, where President Bush and the U.S. Congress have officially acknowledged "genocide" is taking place. Between 200,000 and 400,000 Sudanese now are dead, 2 million have been driven from their homes and the window to provide security and hope is narrowing. According to the Commander of the African Union forces who briefed us, "There is no sense of urgency outside."

The United States faces a fundamental choice in the coming months. We can maximize our influence to stop the genocide, or we can make empty statements.

The Darfur crisis is expanding. Two hundred thousand refugees have crossed the border into Chad, attracting the attention of the Janjaweed militia across the border. A domestic conflict is becoming international.

African Union leaders told our delegation that their 7,000 troops cannot provide security in a territory the size of France and they need double that number, though the Brookings Institution estimates that it will take at least 20,000 AU troops to secure the region. The budget for the African Union's Mission in Sudan will run out by the end of March.

The United States must urge the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution giving AU troops the backing of the United Nations. Additionally, the United States should encourage NATO to deploy a peacekeeping force to Darfur. The security of the civilian population depends on it.

Troops alone are not enough to stop the violence in Darfur. The United States must wield its diplomatic and economic power to stop the crisis. The peace talks in Abuja are now in their seventh round. Traditional power politics are dominating the talks -- the tribes that oppose Khartoum are asking for authority and wealth sharing and for more security for Darfur.

Sudan's Second Vice President Ali Osman Taha confessed to our delegation that the Khartoum government has assisted the Janjaweed militia, but he minimized the extent of the violence. "It is not ethnic cleansing or genocide," Taha said.

The United States must turn its sights to Khartoum. The president should immediately call on NATO to enforce a no-fly zone over Darfur, limiting Khartoum's supply lines. The United States should demand that Khartoum accept a U.N. peacekeeping force which could better monitor Khartoum's police force and soldiers.

Bush has joined members of Congress in calling for action, recommending a doubling of troops on the ground and NATO involvement. A bipartisan coalition in Congress wants to work with the president to realize our mutual goal.

The Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, sponsored by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), could be passed as soon as next week. This legislation lays out a path to peace by strengthening the African Union, pressuring Khartoum at the United Nations, and appointing a U.S. special envoy to Sudan. Congress must also fund the \$514 million requested by the administration to provide security and humanitarian assistance for the people of Sudan.

The Save Darfur Coalition, a broad group of student and faith-based organizations, has urged state-level divestment of pension funds from companies that do business in Sudan. Five states, including Illinois, have done so. The president should lead an international divestment effort that starts with all U.S. states and our national assets.

As time runs out in Darfur, now is the moment for the United States to lead the world in a diplomatic rush to secure a peace and save a people.

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