

Written Testimony by Mia Farrow, Chair, Dream for Darfur
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Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law
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Senator Durbin, Ranking Member Coburn and other distinguished Members of this Subcommittee: Thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to participate.

I have recently returned from my ninth trip since 2004 into a triangle of human suffering: Darfur, eastern Chad and Central African Republic (CAR).

Darfur

Incomprehensibly, more than five years have passed since the government of Sudan and its proxy killers, Arab militia known as Janjaweed, launched their campaign of destruction upon the civilian population of Darfur. Only the perpetrators dispute that hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children have died.

Earlier this month the ICC issued a report listing multiple crimes against humanity and a widespread cover-up, concluding there is “evidence of a criminal plan based on the mobilization of the whole state apparatus, including the armed forces, the intelligence services, the diplomatic and public information bureaucracies, and the justice system.”

The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant against Minister Ahmed Harun, charging him with crimes against humanity in Darfur in 2003-2004. Instead of arresting him, the Sudanese regime made Harun their liaison to oversee the deployment of the UN protection force in Darfur (UNAMID).

My time on the ground and in on-going research leads me to ask one question; how long will the UN, the United States and the international community allow themselves to be manipulated by the government of Sudan?

The United States government must finally and fully support the ICC. Perpetrators of crimes against humanity must be brought to justice, or a destructive climate of impunity will continue to prevail in Darfur.

Unrelenting insecurity in Darfur has led to an additional 150,000 civilians being driven from their homes in the first four months of 2008. Today more than 2.7 million people are displaced in Darfur.

Attacks on the UN World Food Programme convoys distributing food aid to Darfur have forced a cut in the food ration of more than 40 percent since the start of May. At least 2.7 million people are affected by this reduction.

In order to reverse this progression toward starvation, the Government of Sudan must

implement its stated commitment to ensuring that escorted food convoys are able to proceed every 48 hours into and throughout Darfur.

The latest reports released last September showed that in many camps 40% of the people are suffering acute malnutrition. More recent reports have not been cleared for release by Khartoum. This is simply unacceptable. The agreement made by the Government of Sudan to release the results of humanitarian nutrition surveys must be urgently implemented.

Thus far in 2008, there have been 120 hijackings of humanitarian vehicles and 51 attacks on humanitarian facilities and compounds. Eight humanitarian workers have been killed this year.

According to relief workers I have spoken with, almost 100 percent of women living in aid camps have been raped. Aid organizations working in the region are powerless to stop the attacks and will not speak out for fear of government reprisals. Scores of infants born of rape are abandoned in every camp.

Never has the need for a protection force been greater or more urgent. But nearly a year after the UN/African Union protection force of 26,000 (UNAMID) was authorized by the Security Council, only a fraction of the mission is deployed, and it is badly underequipped.

The Khartoum regime continues to place every conceivable obstacle in the path of a full and effective deployment of this force (UNAMID). Khartoum has been able to thumb its nose at the UN, the United States and the international community because it can be confident in the unwavering support of China. Beijing has commercial and military ties with Sudan and has protected the regime and its genocidal policies with the veto power it enjoys in the Security Council.

Time and again, the United States has pushed for economic sanctions against Sudan, but failed due to fierce opposition on the Security Council from both China and Russia.

Nothing has changed. The UN head of peacekeeping operations expressed the fear that – quote- the “force will not have the capability to defend itself, and that carries the risk of humiliation for the Security Council and the United Nations, and tragic failure for the people of Darfur.”

The wording of the UN resolution states that the force should be “predominantly African in character.” But Khartoum has twisted the intention of the resolution and ‘predominantly’ has become exclusively.” This is just one example of the on-going efforts by the government of Sudan to obstruct the full deployment of a capable protection force. If the failure of the mission is to be averted, the United States should take the lead in encouraging an array of militarily capable nations to partner with those African battalions in need of training and logistical support. In addition to the United States and the few European countries already committed, a group of volunteer nations might include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, and Portugal.

Chad

If we hear of Eastern Chad at all, it is as a spillover of the slaughter and misery in Darfur. But this swath of land along Darfur's border has become a full-scale catastrophe in its own right, and it is without the immense humanitarian infrastructure in Darfur.

Eastern Chad has been plunged into chaos and lawlessness. In border towns, pick-up trucks outfitted with machine guns and loaded with armed, uniformed men careen through the dusty streets. No one knows who they are: the army, Chadian rebels, bandits? It makes little difference to the victims of the escalating violence. More than 100 humanitarian vehicles have been hijacked in the last year; aid workers have been robbed, beaten, abducted and killed. The recent murder of the director of Save the Children in Chad is just one illustration of the existing climate for aid organizations working in the region.

In 2006, 40,000 Chadians had been displaced by Janjaweed attacks. Today the number is 200,000 and rising. "Mortality rates of children under five are double what is accepted as the threshold for an emergency," a Doctors Without Borders program director told me. "The situation here is massively deteriorating. The needs are huge. Assistance has been too little, and it comes too late."

On June 14 Chadian rebels backed by Khartoum seized the border town of Goz Beida, exchanging fire with EUFOR, the UN-authorized European Union force. Another coup attempt on Chadian president Deby is widely expected.

EUFOR a force of 3700 (just 2600 have deployed) is tasked by the UN with protecting civilians in danger, particularly refugees and displaced persons, and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of humanitarian personnel by helping to improve security in the area of operations.

EUFOR is committed for a single year, from this past March. The need for an extension of their deployment is obvious. The United States Government should be thinking ahead—fully engaged and supportive of European efforts to bring security to this inflamed borderland.

Central African Republic

CAR is essentially a collapsed state. The government has control of the capital and a few strategic towns, but the rest of the country is being torn apart by cross currents of violent armed groups which include the government forces, the Chadian military, various rebel factions, poachers and bandits from Sudan, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, and most recently the brutal Lords Resistance Army from Northern Uganda. A peace agreement between the government and two of the rebel factions was reached on June 23, 2008. But as things stand, remaining rebel groups, bandits and militia will continue to plunder and terrorize with complete impunity.

The victims, as always, are the civilian population. Countless villages have been attacked,

looted and burned. Women and children are raped, children are abducted and held for ransom, possessions and cattle are stolen. 300,000 civilians are displaced. Many have fled deep into the bush where they are eating leaves and drinking swamp water. They are completely traumatized and in constant flight mode. They are without medical care, shelter or clothing. Their children are sick.

“Outside of a famine situation I have never seen people in such terrible shape,” said the top official for the World Food Program for the Central African Republic. “In terms of weight, in terms of height, in terms of health, the population is really in rough condition.”

Eufor is deployed in CAR but it lacks logistical support and sufficient numbers- Just 2600 troops patrol an immense, inhospitable region. No forces are on the CAR border with Chad where most of the incursions are now taking place.

When I first visited CAR in February 2007, there were just two aid organizations in the entire vast northern regions. Now there are 23 NGOs, but they have limited personnel and resources and are based in several clusters with very limited access to the people

Meanwhile the plundering of CAR continues: as the people starve, private planes fly in and out carrying away the wealth of the nation. I witnessed an illicit diamond exchange in remote Sam Ouandjo near the border with Sudan.

In 2005 the ICC issued arrest warrants for Kony and his top commanders for war crimes massive and crimes against humanity, citing the “brutalization of civilians by acts including murder, abduction, sexual enslavement, mutilation, as well as mass burnings of houses and looting of camp settlements-.”

In April 2008, Joseph Kony and the LRA moved into CAR where they kidnapped 300 children (from Obo). Kony is believed to be receiving support from the government of Sudan and from Ugandan extremists. For the sake of defenseless civilians and in the name of justice, international efforts must be made to apprehend Joseph Kony and end one of Africa’s longest and bloodiest rampages.

As long as we are more concerned about protecting the interests of governments and businesses than protecting people from needless suffering and death, these tragedies will continue. Are we really serious about protecting the most vulnerable human beings and those courageous individuals who are struggling to sustain them? Do we really believe we have a responsibility to protect defenseless populations from slaughter? Do we believe that perpetrators should be apprehended and brought to justice before they cause more suffering, create more victims? If so, then our response as human beings and as a nation must be more vigorous, more courageous, and more effective. History will long remember our failure to protect the world’s most forsaken populations, and we will be judged accordingly.

This is a defining moment for the United States of America, and for each of us.