Old Conflict, New Complex Emergency:
An Analysis of Darfur Crisis, Western Sudan

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ABSTRACT

For a number of years, Darfur region in western Sudan has been a scene of violent clashes between mainly sedentary farming communities of the three 'African' ethnic groups (Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa) and 'Arab' nomads. For all these years, successive Sudanese governments have repeatedly claimed that these clashes were caused by competition over resources. In the last couple of years, however, what used to be constructed as resource conflict dramatically turned into one of the worst humanitarian crisis and ethnic genocide, next to the Rwandan genocide, affecting over a million western Sudanese in Darfur region. The crisis erupted when in February 2003, two rebel movements–the Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)–emerged and demanded the development and equality for Darfur region vis-à-vis other parts Sudan. It eventually fermented into a sustained armed conflict between, on the one hand, the armed forces of Sudan and its allied proxy militia drawn from Arab ethnicity and, on the other, the two rebel groups comprising mainly of non-Arab African ethnic groups – the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa. The paper examines the genesis and manifestation of Darfur conflict in the wider context of political instability in Sudan. The paper argues that the conflict is not an isolated phenomena but one deeply rooted in the political economy of unequal regional development in Sudan. The paper also offers a modest solution to the crisis in Darfur with recommendations for domestic and international actors involved. To restore a lasting peace, the paper calls for a serious and planned global action involving, if necessary, the direct deployment of United Nations Peacekeeping force.

Keywords: Darfur, Ethnic conflict, History

1. INTRODUCTION

Because of the huge number of civilian population affected – over one million – the current crisis in Darfur is perhaps one of the most oft-repeated cases in the news. International media houses such as CNN, BBC World and Al-Jazeera regularly high-light the violent and unfortunate images of those affected by the crisis: helpless and worn out men and women riding on their beasts of burden heading to safety, often risking the dangers of further attacks on their ways; internally displaced people (IDPs) in concentrated refugee camps within Sudan and in neighbouring Republic of Chad; the young and elderly dying of disease and malnutrition and occasionally the pictures of soldiers, Janjaweed militia men and rebel operating in the battlefield. These images constantly remind people across the world that Sudan is in a complex state of emergency. It also

vindicates the general notion held about Africa as a home of violence, diseases and famine as recently echoed by a recent statement made by the British Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, describing the continent as a scar in the conscience of the world.

The crisis in Darfur is a challenge both to Africa and the rest of the world. But is this crisis a recent phenomenon? How can we configure the crisis in Darfur in a wider context of instability in the Sudan? How can the crisis be resolved and by whom? Darfur region in western Sudan has always grabbed the headlines, at least within Africa before now, as an ugly scene of violent clashes between mainly settled or 'sedentary' farming communities of 'African' ethnic descent (the dominant once being Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa) and 'Arab' nomads. Since 2003, however, the impending crisis took a dramatic turn from a resource-based conflict to one of the worst humanitarian crisis and ethnic genocide, perhaps similar to the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s, affecting over a million western Sudanese in Darfur region. In a BBC interview on March 19, 2004 the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan, Mukesh Kapila captured the enormity of the crisis. He decried the situation in Darfur as one of genocide, comparing it to the recent one committed in Rwanda in the 1990s. He described it as "the world's greatest humanitarian crisis… the only difference between Rwanda and Darfur now is the numbers [of casualties] involved".[1] The crisis erupted when in February 2003, two rebel movements–the Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)–emerged and spearheaded insurgency against the government of Sudan on grounds of institutionalised marginalisation and domination meted against Africans by an Arab-controlled government oligarchy in Khartoum.

The Western rebellion and the humanitarian crisis it generated in Darfur region is analytically important not least because it opens a new chapter in the history of insurgency in the Republic of Sudan, as well as a new dimension to the country's protracted political instability.[2] For the past four decades or so, the

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[1] If allowed to continue, the casualty could perhaps equal or even pass those of the Rwandan genocide. Quotation cited in Nat Hentoff "the Sudan Genocide: Arab Muslims are viciously killing and raping Black…" available:
http://www.fuckfrance.com/read.html?postid=665368&replies=0
p. 2; accessed on 10/06/2004.

[2] The rebellion is atypical of pattern of political dissent and struggles for autonomy in Sudan which normally comes from the south. Perhaps for the first time in Sudan's post-colonial history, a rebellion is emerging from the western region which has always been constructed as part of the dominant north and one that has perhaps remained loyal to its domination. With

country has been bedevilled by continuity of civil wars, and governmental instability. Civil wars and struggles for secession by southern rebel movements have threatened the corporate existence of Sudan as an indivisible entity since 1956. Also instability in the governance of the country as well as poor approaches to resolving the conflicts have further jeopardised the prospects of stability is war-torn Sudan, one of the few African countries considered as eye sores of the continent because of huge human and material cost inflicted by civil war.[3]

While in the past, the battlefields of Sudan's civil war have mainly been in the South, the recent rebellion in Western Sudan has shifted the scene of conflict into other parts of the country. One common cause of all armed rebellion in Sudan, irrespective of regions and time – Anya-Nya (1955 –72); SPLA/SPLM (1983 –date) and SLA/SLM/JEM (2003-date) – is that in terms of development, representation and justice, successive Arab-controlled governments have paid little or no attention to the wishes and aspirations of the majority of non-Arab citizens, especially those domiciled in the South and West. The crisis in Darfur that follows the western rebellion is an unfolding complex emergency with disastrous implications for Sudan's wider national crisis. When the crisis erupted, several actors with stake in the conflict – both within and outside Sudan – held different conflicting views, allowing the crisis to deteriorate. One factor that further exacerbated the crisis in Darfur was that the SLA/JEM rebellion, which ignited the crisis, occurred at the same time as the Naivasha Peace Accord[4], being brokered by the international community, had reached its climax. This single development contributed in no small measure in whittling down the urgency of the situation in Darfur, allowing the crisis to escalate.

Initially, both the government of Sudan and the international community viewed the western rebellion as insignificant and diversionary in the context of

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the exception of race (Arab versus Africans), people in western Sudan have shared common religious and cultural identities with those in the north. In the past, rebellions were therefore constructed as coming from 'southerners' or 'disbelievers'.

[3] It is estimated that since 1983, over 1.5 million people have perished as a result of civil war between SPLA/SPLM and Sudanese government. Added to this are recent casualties arising from the current crisis in Darfur. It is also estimated that in material terms, civil strife costs the Republic of Sudan a staggering one Million dollars daily. For estimate in human cost in SPLA war see Kaya, Ali Abba "Sudan accused of Darfur truce breach as militia attacks Chad town" available:

http://www.splmtoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1331; for emerging data on civil casualties and material destructions in Darfur, see Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic Cleansing by Government and Militia forces in Western Sudan* Report of Human Rights Watch, May Volume 16 No 6 (A) 2004 especially Appendix 'D' pp. 67–5; Amnesty International I *Sudan* Annual Report Summary 2003 available:

http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/sdn-summary-eng and Amnesty International *Sudan* Annual Report Summary 2004 available:

http://web.amnesty.org/report2004/sdn-summary-eng .

[4] The Accord was aimed at ending twenty-one year war between the government of Sudan and SPLA/SPLM rebellion in the south.

the southern peace process being negotiated at the time. The rebel groups, on the other hand, viewed that an ever-defiant government in Khartoum cashing in on the southern peace process to continue its domination ignored their concerns. They eventually became more infuriated and with the initial help of SPLA intensified their attacks.[5] The attacks became serious as the rebel groups, though initially divided, became united and pounded heavily on important regional centres of power such as Al-Fasher and destroyed both military and civilian infrastructure. By the time attention of the international community had shifted to the Darfur towards the end of 2003 and early 2004, the crisis has plummeted deeply with breath-taking effects.[6]

This paper traces the root of the crisis in Darfur and relates it to the wider context of Sudan's instability. To capture the theme of this chapter in proper perspective, the second part of the paper examines Sudan's cultural diversity and its implications for political instability. Subsequent parts of the paper dwell on the origin of conflict in Darfur, the main theatre of the conflict under review as well as a road map for restoring peace in the region. The final part deals with conclusion

2. CULTURAL DIVERSITY: THE VORTEX OF SUDAN'S POLITICAL INSTABILITY

A former colony both of imperial Egypt and Britain, Sudan is undoubtedly the largest nation-state in Africa sharing borders with Chad, Egypt, Congo, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya and Uganda. It is also one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse countries with a population estimated at close to 28 million drawn from about 20 linguistic groups and over six hundred sub-dialects.[7] In addition Sudan's people 'practice a variety of religious

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[5] The SPLA/SPLM was known to have contributed to the early stages of rebellion in Western Sudan by offering training, arms and logistics support to the SLA, one of the warring factions. However it was reported to have eventually withdrawn such support following the successes made at the Naivasha Peace process. It seems that the SPLA/SPLM now relates the conflict western Sudan with the wider instability in Sudan for which it is a contending party. In an article posted at the official website of the group, it is stated that "the conflict in Darfur is running parallel to Sudan's wider war, in which southern rebels have been fighting Khartoum's forces for more than 20 years…" What cannot be ruled out, though, is the possibility that the SPLM may strategically bank in on crisis in any other part of Sudan with the aim negotiating better deal in case the peace accord reaches a deadlock or is breached in the future. For details see Kaya, Ali Abba "Sudan accussed…" p. 2.

[6] Thanks to early warning signals from major human right organisations like the Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Life and Peace Institute as well as constant media coverage by major international stations like Al-Jazeera, BBC World, CNN and CBS, the crisis in Darfur has now been brought to the knowledge of people all over the world.

[7] This statistic is quoted from van de Veen, Hans "Sudan: Who has the will for peace?" In: *Searching for Peace in Africa: an Overview of Conflict Prevention and Management Activities* edited by Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren and Hans van de Veen.

traditions with each of the three major groupings: Islam, indigenous African beliefs and Christianity in that quantitative order' (Bechtold, 1991: 1). Ethnically, the Arabs constitute 39 percent while Africans make up 61 percent. Religiously, Muslims make up 70 percent while the rest are Christians and traditional believers.[8] Sudan's diversity 'has resulted in one of the world's most heterogeneous societies that is almost microcosm of Africa' – a unique characteristics that poses an 'extraordinary challenge to any government' (Bechtold, ibid). Because of their sheer majority, Arab Muslims have been dominant in Sudan's central government since independence in 1956.

A strong culture of domination, the imposition of Islamic law as national legal instruments, especially after the abrogation of Addis Ababa Treaty in 1983, together with unequal regional development combined to provide the impetus for rebellion and secessionist struggles from marginalized southern Sudanese. Domestic conflict has therefore been one the key features of Sudan since independence.[9] With the probable exception of the period 1972–83, Sudan's history as a sovereign political system has been fraught with armed insurrection mainly from southern dissident groups – the Anya-Nya and later the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) – demanding greater autonomy to end what they perceive as inequality perpetrated by traditional northern Muslim dominated oligarchy.[10] Even then, the so-called decade of relative stability attained in the seventies have been refuted as an interval that "fanned the embers of one war to ignite another" (Daly, 1993: 1). Other manifestations of Sudan's instability include, among others, governmental crisis arising from incessant conflict among political actors – resulting on the one hand in constant collapse of shaky coalitions and on the other the oscillation of power

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Utrecht: European Centre for Conflict Prevention and Transformation (in association with the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Dispute) 1999 p. 168.

[8] Cited in Human Rights Watch "Q & A: Crisis in Darfur" available:
http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/05/darfur8536.htm p. 1.

[9] A number of published academic materials have documented both the history and politics of Sudan's instability. For further details see for instance, Woodward, Peter *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations* London: I. B. Tauris & Company Ltd, 2003 (in particular Chapter 2: pp. 36–64 which deals with Sudan); Woodward, Peter *Sudan, 1898–1989: the Unstable State* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc 1990 especially Part 2: Chapters 4, 5, & 6; Daly, M. W. "Broken bridge and empty basket: the political and economic background of the Sudanese civil war" In *Civil War in Sudan* edited by M.W. Daly and Ahmad Alawad Sakainga London, New york: British Academic Press, 1993 pp 1–26 and Bechtold, Peter K "More turbulence in Sudan: a new politics this time?" In *Sudan: State and Society in Crisis* edited by John O. Voll Washington D.C.: Middle East Institute 1991 especially Chapter 1: pp. 1–23.

[10] For details of southern rebellion see Beshir, Mohamed Omer *The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict* London: C. Hurst and Co especially 1968 especially Chapters 8, 9, 10 & 11; Wakoson, Eliason Nyamlell "The politics of southern self government, 1972–83" In *Civil War in the Sudan* edited by M.W. Daly and Ahmad Alawad Sakainga London, New York: British Academic Press 1993 pp. 27–50. For account of a southern activist in the conflict see Albino, Oliver (1970) *The Sudan: a Southern Viewpoint* London: Institute of Race Relations/ Oxford University Press.

between those coalitions and repressive military regimes; the domination of national power by northern Arab dominated section of the country and their introduction of repressive and unacceptable laws on the southern, mostly marginalized, sections of the country. The resort to armed struggles by aggrieved southern Sudanese is essentially aimed at overcoming domination, underdevelopment and attaining some levels of autonomy, somewhat similar to one obtainable in a confederation, within a plural Sudan.

Over the past four decades, Sudan has featured prominently as a scene of protracted civil wars each related to the other by time and circumstances. In 1955, the first protracted rebellion was started by Anya-Nya Movement against successive governments in Khartoum. It ended in 1972 when the movement negotiated limited autonomy for Southern Sudan, albeit within a united state. The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 which ended the war was designed as a grand master plan for resolving related national problems – "political instability; lack of socio-economic development; and the disunity created by conflicting aspirations based on the political, cultural, racial, and most important, religious heterogeneity of Sudan" (Wakoson, 1993: 27).

The violation of the Addis Ababa Agreement by the former military ruler, General Numayri and his imposition of Islamic Law sparked a second rebellion in March 1983. Subsequently, Southern troops based in Bor, Janglei Province disobeyed orders to transfer to the north as part of unification. Attempt by the government to disarm them failed and they withdrew to bush and formed Southern Sudan Peoples Army (SPLA), which became armed unit of the Southern Sudan Revolutionary Movement led by John Garang le Maboir.[11]

In early 2003, while negotiations were underway for resolving the SPLM/SPLA rebellion, another wave of conflict erupted this time in Western region of Darfur, considered for decades as traditional northern 'sphere of influence'. Initially, the crisis in Darfur was played down both by Khartoum and the international community, lest it might jeopardise the Naivasha (Kenya) peace process being brokered by the United States and EU nations between SPLM/SPLA and the Government of Sudan. The crisis in Darfur exposes the multifaceted nature both of domination and anti-domination struggles in Sudan. In the past, the South has been depicted as centrepiece of struggles against northern domination. Since the eruption of crisis in Darfur, however, a new reality has emerged in the politics of unequal development and response to it in Sudan. Beyond what normally use to be the case, the unfolding crisis in western Sudan reveals further mysteries in the Pandora's box of civil war and domestic instability in the country: unlike the southern rebellion which was normally stereotypically constructed by the government as one coming from the 'disbelievers' or 'southerners', the western rebellion is coming from the mainly Muslim west. Perhaps for the first time, religion is loosing relevance as a

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[11] See Lual, Manock Achull (2001) "The Sudan: prospects for a peaceful settlement of the civil war" *Peace and Environment News* August; available: http://perc.ca/PEN/1992-03/achull.html; accessed on 10/06/2004 pp. 2–3.

divisive factor in this scenario of Sudan's civil war. Mysteriously enough, contending actors in the crisis – the government in Khartoum, rebellious movements as well as civil communities in western Sudan – are all mainly Muslims.

From the foregoing it seems obvious that Sudan is a terribly heterogeneous society dovetailing perhaps the most volatile of all socio-cultural diversities existing in Africa and Middle East. This heterogeneity is mainly responsible for conflict between people of different linguistic, religious, racial and cultural origins over resources and power. Decades of wars is therefore primarily a function of unresolved frictions arising from socio-economic and political divisions between Sudanese of different ethnic and racial groups, as well as marginalisation and unequal access to power and its gains.

3. OLD CONFLICT, NEW COMPLEX EMERGENCY: THE EVOLUTION OF CONFLICT IN DARFUR[12]

Greater Darfur, a territory roughly the size of France or Texas[13] and with an estimated population of about four to five million people, is Sudan's largest region in terms of landmass and population. Yet it is one of the least developed regions in the country with a long history of ethnic and racial strife. Located in the north-western region of the country, the region shares Sudan's international borders with the Republic of Chad to the west, Libya to the northwest and Central Africa Republic to the southwest.[14] In the context of the on-going insurgency and its drastic aftermaths, however, the border region between Chad

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[12] The term Darfur is derived from two words: *Dar* means 'home' while *Fur* stands for the Fur 'tribe'. Literally it means the homeland, settlement or territory of the Fur people. Similar categories include *Darmasalit,* that is Masalit territory and so on.

[13] This geopolitical comparison is highly symbolic not least because it seems to underpin the crisis bedevilling a massive territory with huge population (4–5 million). If Darfur were a France or Alaska, the international uproar that would have been created and solidarity assistance rushed would have been more than what the international community is currently doing in the region. See Amnesty International *Sudan Crisis: In our Silence we are complicit* available http://web.amnesty.org/pages/sdn-index-eng p. 1 (accessed 18/06/2004); and Human Rights Watch *Darfur Destroyed...* p. 6 fn 1.

[14] Most of these borders are porous and permeable. The one between Chad and Sudan, 1,000 Kilometres as claimed by the Human Rights Watch (2004a) or 8,00 Kilometres as contained in a Report of the UNCHR (2004), demonstrates literally that there is no physical divide between the two countries. Many of the demographic characteristic of the people living across those international boundaries, such as economic activities, racial, ethnic and religious division and so on are similar. Pattern of conflict over resources, especially clashes over grazing areas/farmland, as well as the mediation and resolution of conflict often cut across those international boundaries. In addition, communities across borders often engage in trade (both legal and illegal) intermarriages and religious congregations making it very difficult to distinguish citizenship and other identities in the borderlands.

and Sudan provides flashpoint of the crisis.[15] There is a long history of migration and commerce across the border and today people traverse both sides of the political divide for economic activities. Indeed, during the colonial era, Darfur served as one of the two main axis of Sudan's international trade (Woodward, 1990: 23).

The ecology of the area ranging from desert in the north, fertile belt in the Jabel Marra region to mixed vegetation of the southern zone provide a massive resource base for agriculture resulting in conflict between sedentary farmers and itinerary nomads.[16] In the past, such clashes have occurred between mainly Fur, Masalit and other 'African' farming communities pastoralist 'Arab' tribes, particularly those from Beni Hussein from Kabkabiya region (North Darfur) and Beni Halba (South Darfur).[17] Following administrative divisions in 1994, Darfur has been divided into three provinces: North, South and West. West Darfur comprises mainly of the Fur and Masalit, albeit with a panoramic mixture of other ethnic groups.[18] The pattern of farmers-pastoralists clashes cut across the three administrative divisions of Darfur but intensifies as a result of annual migration by pastoralists seeking greener pasture for their livestock.

In the past, clashes between cattle and camel rearing Arab tribes and sedentary African farming communities were often resolved through age-hallowed means of conflict resolution reinforced by Anglo-Egyptian legal

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[15] It is estimated that more than 110, 000 people mainly Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa, have fled across the border to Chad to find refuge there; while at least 750, 000 remained displaced in Sudan at the mercy of militia attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2004a: 1)

[16] Sedentary agricultural communities in Darfur consists mainly of non-Arab or 'African' blacks (called Zurga) and include such ethnic groups as Bergit, Bertit, Fur, Masalit, Tama and Tunjur living and farming in central zone. On the other hand, nomadic communities consist mainly of Arab shepherds of the northern belt who rear camels. They include Rizeigat, Mahariya, Irayqat and Bani Hussain as well as 'African' Zaghawa. Furthermore, there are cattle rearing Arab communities such as Rizeigat, Habbaniya and Bani Halba living and herding in the southern and eastern zones. Conflict often occurs when herding communities trample their animals into lands of settled farming communities.

[17] The use of 'African' and 'Arab' are being re-invented as new forms of racial identity construction in the context of current crisis in Western Sudan. In the past people of African origin identify themselves as 'Darfurians' or 'Zurga'. However, following the eruption of the conflict and systematic attacks on them by government supported Janjaweed militia, they now identify themselves as 'Africans' or 'blacks' as an identity referent that contrasts with the 'Arabs'. Furthermore, in the context of conflict over resources, it is worthy of note that though conflicts are often constructed racially as one between Arabs and Africans, it also occasionally occurs within a single racial category: an insignificant percent of the clash often occur between African farmers and rearers themselves (such as between Fur or Masalit farmers and Zaghawa cattle rearers or Masalit farmers and rearers).

[18] West Darfur's 1.7 Million people contains a huge plethora of ethnic groups. The Masalit comprise 60 percent of the population in Geneina and Habila provinces followed by Arabs, Zaghawa, Erenga, Gimr, Dajo, Borgo and Fur. The Fur constitute the majority in Zalingei, Jebel Marra and Wadi Salih Provinces while Kulbus province comprise 50 percent Gimr, 30 percent Eranga, 15 percent Zaghawa and 5 percent Arab (Human Rights Watch, 2004b: 5).

heritages.[19] Acting as third party mediators, community leaders and tribal chiefs – Sheikh Kabilah – often serve as veritable tools for conflict management. These traditional mediation mechanism often prove fruitful resulting in compensations for lost crops, establishing the time and pattern of seasonal migration, as well as setting buffer zones for grazing. Nevertheless, they also fail to resolve the conflict or even degenerate into further strife. For instance in January 1999, Arab and Masalit tribal heads gathered to restore normalcy following a standoff between farmers and pastoralists over the latter's grazing on former's cultivated farmland. The arbitration collapsed when angry Masalit farmers shot at the tribal heads killing an Arab chief. Political interference, undue influence and biased top-level conspiracies did nothing more than to further add insult to the injury:

> The Sudanese government claimed that the Masalit were fifth column of the Sudan's People Libration Army… and sealed off Dar Masalit. Reportedly the Arab militias then killed more than 1,000 Masalit. The government set up special courts to try leaders of the clashes, sentencing fourteen people to death, and sponsored a tribal reconciliation conference [which] concluded that 292 Masalit and seven Arabs were dead; 2,673 houses burned down; and large numbers of livestock looted, with Masalit suffering most. The Arabs refused pay compensation. About 29,500 fearful Masalit refugees remained in Chad, where the Arab militia reportedly came to kill eighty Masalit refugees in mid-1999 Human Right Watch, 2004b: p. 9, fn 7)

From the foregoing statement, an indicator of the partisan role of the state is its indictment of the Masalit, thus giving tacit approval for Arab militia to vent their anger, before setting up judicial process to try offenders perhaps in terms convenient to the government. Thus, though the conflict over resources in Darfur is age-long, over the past two decades or so, it has been intensified by several political, security and socio-economic factors:

> … a combination of extended periods of drought; competition for dwindling resources; lack of good governance and democracy; and easy availability of guns have made local clashes increasingly bloody and politicised (Human Rights Watch, 2004b: 7).

Among the factors mentioned above, two of them – one natural, the other man-made – devastatingly changed the course of the conflict in the late 1980s. The first was the draught and famine that struck Darfur in 1984–1985 and left many Arab pastoralists with heavy lost of their livestock. As a result, they resorted to raiding the stock of others who were less hit by the catastrophe. Victims who

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[19] For details of Anglo-Egyptian legal and political legacies over Sudan see Woodward's Peter (1990) *Sudan 1898–1989: the Unstable State.* Part one of the book traces the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium (chapter one); the crisis that it faced (chapter two) and its formal end following the granting of independence to Sudan (chapter three). For an analysis of the interface between imperialism and nationalism in Sudan see also Woodwards P. (1979) *Condominium and Sudanese Nationalism* London: Rex Collings.

resist or track back the footprint of raiders had to face battle with the raiding gangs leading to loss of human lives and wealth. In addition to raiding, the draught also led pastoralists who were left with few malnourished herds to find solace by grazing on farmlands and barns of settled African farmers provoking their anger in the process. The farmers' retaliation to such acts often resulted in violent clashes between farmers and frustrated pastoralists. The second factor which emerged almost at the same period as the draught of the late 1980s, was the introduction of small arms into farming and pastoralists communities. While in the distant past, the kinds of arms available to farmers and pastoralist were traditional dane guns, swords, machetes, bows and arrows, the introduction of small arms tragically transformed the violent means of fighting available to rival communities and tribes. By January 1988 it was reported that "there were at least 50, 000 automatic weapons in Darfur – one for every sixteen adult men."[20] The proliferation of small arms became worse after the government of Sadiq Al-Mahdi (1986–89) introduced a policy of arming Muraheleen militia in Darfur and Kordofan regions. The proliferation of automatic weapons, fuelled by governmental influence in such an 'unstable state' as Sudan (Woodward, 1990), fits into what Stohl and Smith (1999) term 'a deadly combination' by which they mean the lethal configuration of state instability and unfettered proliferation of small arms coupled up with all their associated security risks. Successive regimes in Sudan have continued to abuse the volatile situation by allowing 'loyal' and favoured groups to possess arms as a means of 'defending themselves'.

Allegation of biased and counter-productive interference by successive Sudanese governments not only fermented the conflict in Darfur, but also further politicised ethnic and racial tension among Darfurians of African and Arab identities, especially on such tangential but sensitive macro-political issues as representation and local governance. For a long time, Arabs have shown resentment over their insufficient representation in local governments which, they complain, were dominated mainly by Fur and Masalit. They agitated for a fairer representation by forging pan-Arabic political platforms and interest groups. In 1986, they formed the Arab Alliance, a movement aimed at regaining control of Darfur and stamping Arab influence in the region. This development culminated in allegations by African Darfurians on government's favouring of Arabs on policy making and executions, even if such policies are detrimental to fragile peace and security of the region.[21] Instances of policy biases include

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[20] As at now, the quantum of arms used in Darfur is incalculable The figure cited was originally reported by the Sudanese *Al-Ayyam* newspaper and was re-echoed in a reported by the Human Rights Watch. See Human Rights Watch *The Forgotten War in Darfur Flares Again* A Human Rights Watch Report Volume 2 No 11 (A) April 1990 p. 3

[21] These complains seem to carry heavy political weight because it is constructed, in ethnic and racial terms, as a response by an Arab controlled central government in Sudan to cries of marginalisation coming from its Arab kith and kin in a region (west) where 'Arabs' perceive themselves as a minority. Since the country gained independence in 1956, the Arab political class mainly from the northern Nile Valley region has dominated political power in Sudan.

appointment of 'Arabs' into sensitive and high-powered posts; the arming of Muraheleen militia, giving them legal protection to commit violence as well as favouritism of Arabs in the dispensation of justice especially over land matters and communal crises. This resulted in breeding feelings of domination and distrust from Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa political leaders, fears that were later proved in 1994 following the President Omar El-Bashir's administrative reforms in Darfur which gave Arab leaders new positions of power. This policy shift was seen as a deliberate and systematic strategy aimed at reversing power imbalances in favour of Arabs and simultaneously undermining the power of 'Africans'.

It was against the backdrop of the foregoing factors and incidences that by 1998/99, the pattern of clashes in Darfur took a tangible shape, in a manner that was not necessarily so in the past: protracted clash between 'African' Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa on the one hand and 'Arabs' on the other.[22] The deliberate but hidden 'strategic' and 'ethnic' agenda of the government of Sudan have also come to play increasing role in fuelling the conflict. Rather than taking concrete step to ease ethnic tension and or resolving the resource conflict, the government of President El-Bashir, as did its predecessors, is largely seen to have been taking enraging steps by arming Arabs and their militia (Janjaweed) at the detriment of defenceless farming communities. Certainly, the key antidote to the conflict in Darfur region lies in structural reform of the state's centre of power in its dealings with the peripheries: provision of social justice and security, equal development, non-partisan policy formulation and implementation as well as the use of dialogue, rather than state violence, in resolving dissent and rebellion.

4. THE WESTERN REBELLION AND ITS AFTERMATHS

The current crisis in Darfur, which began following the SLA/JEM rebellion against the government in early 2003, can neither be configured as a phenomenon that is isolated from the past conflicts described above nor one that it is exclusively caused by the western rebellion. To effectively comprehend it, reference has to be made to the previous conflicts, but there are pressing urgencies that make the current conflict both unique and fatal. In its recent report on the crisis in Darfur, the Human Rights Watch offers a more equated view of the urgency of current crisis in Darfur and its correlation with recent western rebellion and previous conflicts in the region:

> The current conflict in Darfur has deep roots. It is but the latest culmination of a protracted problem, yet there are key differences

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This political class is commonly described in the streets of marginalized regions, as an ethnic and racial oligarchy whose power has to be stripped of them if at all Sudan is to remain a egalitarian society. This is one of the remote causes of southern rebellion as well as the one going on in the west.

[22] See the last lines of endnote No 27, especially the information provided in parenthesis.

between the 2003–2004 conflict and prior bouts of fighting. The current conflict has developed serious racial and ethnic overtones and clearly risks shattering historic if fragile pattern of co-existence. A number of ethnic groups previously neutral are now positioning themselves along the Arab/African divide, aligning and co-operating with either the rebel movements or the government and its allied militia. Remaining neutral and outside the conflict is becoming impossible, though some groups have tried to do so (Human Rights Watch, 2004a: 8).

The causal epicentre of the current crisis in Darfur is, of course, the eruption of the western rebellion. In February 2003, the Darfur Liberation Front (DLF) emerged and captured the town of Gulu and, thereafter, transformed itself to the Sudan Libration Army/Movement (SLA/M). The key political motivations behind the rebellion were "that Khartoum authorities address the marginalisation and underdevelopment to which the region was reportedly subjected" (UNCHR, 2004: 3); and bring "an end to tribal militias, and [adopt] a power share [of the peripheral west] with the central government" (Human Rights Watch, 2004a: 9). Initially, the Sudanese government refused to heed to the demands of SLA/M neither did it seek to negotiate with the group. The seriousness of the rebellion became clear when the rebels attacked El-Fashir, the capital of North Darfur in April 2003 in which they destroyed a number of Sudanese military Aircrafts and helicopters, looted fuel and munitions facilities and captured a Sudanese Air force officer who was forced to give interview to the 'Arab' international Television Channel, Al-Jazeera. They subsequently attacked other important garrison towns in north Darfur, looted food and arms depots. The situation worsened following the emergence of a similar, albeit initially factional, rebel group known as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The JEM eventually merged, even if temporarily, with the SLA/M in carrying out intensive, more disastrous attacks on key military and civil targets. In May 2003, the Sudanese authorities responded by making key political and appointive changes and establishing heavy military presence in the Darfur region.

Several factors escalated the rebellion. The first was the refusal of Sudanese government either to recognise the rebel groups or honour their demands. Well known to the government, the rebellion, as recently reported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, was "rooted in the structural imbalance in the Sudan in terms of governance and economic development between the centre and the rest of the country" (UNCHR, 2004: 21, Para 85). The most effective solution to this structural imbalance ought to have been taking concrete short and long term measures to address the 'imbalances'. In the short term, the rebellion could have been reigned on or at least tamed had the current government invited the rebel groups to the negotiation table and agreed on what to be done. In the long run, the path for lasting peace could have been built through concrete policy measures aimed at reversing the resource and power disequilibria which have been in favour of the Arabs since independence; these

measures have to be followed by genuine political will in formulating and implementing egalitarian regional development programmes.

The second factor that compounded the western rebellion is the prospects for complacency offered by progress made in the southern peace process since 2002. In late 2002, a ceasefire was signed between the government and the southern rebel group – the SPLA/M. Further progress have been made in 2003 and 2004 following the Naivasha Peace Accord brokered by the US and some members of the European Union. Instead of utilising these international goodwill and cutting-edge initiatives by brewing more peace, its seems to have conversely made the Sudanese government complacent, ready and willing to deploy its military might to nascent scenes of rebellion such as Darfur, seemingly constructed as 'insignificant' compared to the southern rebellion. The third factor, which exacerbated the western rebellion, is the macro-economic impacts of the discovery of petroleum in commercial quantity in Sudan. Since the commencement of production and exportation of petroleum in 1999, the Sudanese government have experienced fundamental improvement in its real term fortunes. Ironically, instead of using the benefits accruing from petroleum to funding development projects that could improve the lives of Sudanese and reverse 'ages' of unequal internal development, the Sudanese government, it seemed, accorded greater priority to reinforcing its military capability – an institution fatigued by a long haul civil war in its combat with the Anya-Nya and SPLA/M rebellion in the past forty years.

The fourth factor is the massive geopolitical terrain conducive for rebellion provided by Darfur region, especially the boundary between Chad and Sudan. For a long time, the region has been a lunching pad of coups and rebellion in the neighbouring Republic of Chad. In addition the two rebel groups draw part of their fighting forces from the republic of Chad, especially from the politically ambitious Zaghawa ethnic groups, as result of the porous nature of the border region. The final and perhaps most important factor is the Sudanese government's decision to employ the Janjaweed militia composed of 'Arabs' as part of its counter-insurgency forces in a highly balkanised region ridden with ethnic, racial and resources conflicts. The importance of this factor as well as the risks it generated have been underscored the Acting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bertrand Ramcharan, in a Report submitted to the Sixty-first session of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights and follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights:

> It is the manner of the response to this rebellion by the Government of the Sudan which has led to the current crisis in Darfur. Following SLA victories in the first months of 2003, the Government of the Sudan appears to have sponsored a militia composed of a loose collection of fighters, apparently of Arab background, mainly from Darfur, known as the 'janjaweed'. In other words, and worryingly, what appears to have been an ethnically based rebellion has been met with an ethnically based response, building in large part on long-standing, but hitherto contained tribal rivalries (UNCHR, Report No E/CN.4/2005/3, 7th May 2004: 6)

The most volatile consequence of the western rebellion, therefore, is the creation and intensification one big ethnic cum racial divide among a plethora of conflicting Arab and African communities in Darfur. While mutual ethnic suspicion and racial hate have been obvious in past resource conflicts, they were essentially blurred and cross-cutting: much as they were Arab/African clashes, there were few incidences of clashes between farmers and rearers of the same ethnic group. After the rebellion however, the hitherto blurred boundaries of identity and resource conflict gradually collapsed; in its place emerged a definite dualised, but explosive, divide. While the Arabs pitched tents with the government, other ethnic/racial groups joined forces with the two rebel movements namely the Sudan liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

At the early phase of the rebellion, especially during the first year of the insurgency, the two rebel groups were mainly composed of the three 'African' ethnic groups: Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa.[23] Eventually however, other 'minority' African ethinc groups such as Dorok and Jebel who were previously not assuming themselves as party to the conflict were left with no alternative than to identify with their 'kinds' in the rebel groups, a choice impelled by the calculated nature of attacks by an alliance of government forces and Janjaweed militia on their communities.

Perhaps a more serious effect of the western rebellion is complex emergency it created in Darfur region. Perhaps, one of the most perilous strategic blunders committed by the government of Sudan, in its handling of the rebellion, is its refusal to come to terms with the rebel group; and a far greater one is its decision to arm the Janjaweed militia. While the government seemingly involved the Janjaweed militia to serve as counter-insurgents, they eventually went out of control as they began to unleash their own ethnic hate in the targeting rival ethnic communities. This reality vindicates a common Muslim believe, one held among parties to the conflict, most if not all of who are Muslims that: "Crisis is a sleeping monster, do not wake or provoke it. Doing so risks disastrous consequence that can be hard to rein on".[24] The provoked

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[23] There were division and tension among and within these ethnic groups on preference and loyalty to one of the two rebel groups. For instance, among the three sub-ethnic groups of the Zaghawa, the Bideyat and Kobe are commonly found in the JEM, while the Wagi constitute majority of SLA/M rebels. Before they became united, at least partially for a shortwhile, the two rebel groups were not in good terms with each, their bone of contention being the ideology and strategies of the rebellion.

[24] As a politically motivated conflict, the crisis in Darfur, for all intent and purposes, cannot be seen as one between actors of different religious faiths whose leaders mobilise such difference to justify violence as was the case in the context of the southern rebellion. It seems that key parties to the conflict in Darfur who are mainly Muslims – the authorities in Khartoum, rebel groups, Janjaweed militia etc – are not motivated by religious cause as was divisively the case when the Muslim controlled state was fighting mainly Christian rebellion in the name of Jihad in the 1980s and 90s.

"sleeping monster" here is "ethnic tension and racial hate" while its "provocation" can be seen as the Sudanese government's exploitation of ethnic/racial tension and hate by creating and supporting militia force comprising of only one side of a long-standing tribal, resource etc conflict in a drive to contain another conflict (insurgency, rebellion). Even though the insurgency is related in a way to the long-standing resource conflict, the two are not significantly tangential. But this, I mean had the government not resorted to mobilising ethnic/racial divisions by recruiting the Janjaweed militia, the conflict could have stood exclusively as one between a marginalized regions struggling to regain some form of equal treatment and a marginalizing regime.

In the context of the current crisis in Darfur, the "sleeping monster" has no doubt been provoked, with unforeseen consequences that could perhaps take years to overcome. The humanitarian situation in Darfur is not easy to describe in few lines, neither can it be 'underestimated' (UNCHR, 2004: 7). More worrisome is the fact that the crisis is deteriorating by the day with huge spill-over effects on neighbouring Republic of Chad. The UNCHR estimates that as at May 2004, there are over one million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) inside Darfur as compared to 250,000 in September 2003. Over half of the IDPs (570,000) are located in Western Darfur while the rest are spread across North and South Darfur (290,000 and 140,000 respectively). The rising spate of humanitarian disaster in Darfur is caused primarily by targeted attack on civil population by government forces and Janjaweed militia.

Several reports, media documentaries, researches and fact-finding mission have revealed an ugly picture of calculated attacks on civilian communities in Darfur committed by Janjaweed militia force in liaison with the Sudan Armed forces (Darfur Monitoring Group 2004; UN High Mission to Darfur, 2004: Para 4–8; AI, 2004a, 2004b, Human Rights Watch, 2004a, 2004b). A representative sample of the orgy revelations emerging from these exercises could be discerned from a paragraph of a recent report of the Human Rights Watch:

> The government and its Janjaweed allies have killed thousands of Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa – often in cold blood, raped women, and destroyed villages, food stocks and other supplies essential to the civilian population. They have driven more than one million civilians, mostly farmers, into camps and settlements in Darfur where they live on the very edge of survival, hostage to Janjaweed abuses. More than 110,000 others have fled to neighbouring Chad but the vast majority of war victims remain trapped in Darfur (Human Rights Watch, 2004b: 1).

Given the ugly situation that is currently prevailing in Darfur, what solution could one offer with a view of restoring peace in the region?

5. TOWARDS A ROAD MAP FOR PEACE IN DARFUR REGION AND THE SUDAN

Restoring peace in crisis-ridden Darfur is a huge challenge facing all concerned in the current crisis in Darfur. Given the despondency that faces the victims of the crisis who are currently wallowing in refugee camps both within Sudan and outside, there is an urgent need for a return to normalcy so that these victims could return back to their homes. Meeting these challenges require creative, honest and genuine commitment on the part all the parties that have taken arms against each other – the Sudanese army, Janjaweed militia and the rebel forces (SLA/M and JEM) as well as a more serious and resilient efforts from the international community. The following solution is in the context of two pairs of factors: domestic and international initiatives, on the one hand, and short and long term imperatives for peace on the other.

Domestic solutions rest squarely with the government, rebel forces and Sudan's political society. However, the bulk of the challenge rest with the Sudanese government, ideally being the absolute provider of peace, security and welfare to all its citizens. Being a sovereign state, the government is better poised than any other domestic actor either in making or marring the situation in Darfur. However that does not mean that other domestic actors are not relevant. So far, the Sudanese government has remained adamant in its approach to resolving the crisis. While the impact of violence committed by both the army and Janjaweed militia are worsening by the day, the government of Sudan continues to distance itself from the militia or its activities. Worse still attacks are deliberately targeted on helpless civil populations. In the short terms and as a minimum step, the Sudanese government has to re-design its counter-insurgency strategies so that military operations they do not target civil population. In addition, the government must unconditionally disarm the Janjaweed militia as a minimum condition for return to negotiations. The government also has to negotiate with the rebel groups in a more serious and determined way. It has to be concerned with their feelings, demands and grievances and show genuine commitments to satisfying them. The government has to reverse its current pasture of ignoring these demands or meeting force with force. In the long term, the government has to balance unequal development in different parts of the country. Because of the huge premium placed on resource distribution, as a result of the on-going and past civil wars, there is the need for the Sudanese government to initiate a national conference that could find an equitable formula for sharing the wealth of the nation and sanctioning the parameters of power relations. Such a conference has a potential for resolving several other problems especially ethnic, religious and racial tensions

On their part, and in the immediate short term, the two rebel groups have to stop stationing themselves near civilian settlements, mingling into helpless civil populations or using them as human shields. There are obvious indications that the rebel groups have used the civilian both as a source of recruiting rebel

fighters and as a sanctuary of retreat. The rebel forces should also identify with and follow all negotiated attempts that are aimed at disarming them. There are indications, also, they often prove stubborn in several conflict tables. For instance, the JEM refused either to attend or ratify the April 2003 peace deal brokered by President Idris Derby of Chad. Much as the government is duty bound to adopt means of stopping the use of arms and disarming the Janjaweed militia, the two rebel forces are also duty bound to immediately disarm as a starting gesture for further negotiations or observance of agreements reached in past negotiations. In the long run, the rebel forces should resort to non-violent means of achieving political goals. Instead of using the population of Darfur as human shield or source of rebel recruitment, the rebel forces should start thinking of utilising the huge plethora of human agency that exist in Darfur's population which is sufficient enough to be politically mobilised for non-violent action such as peaceful demonstration, protest voting or pressure grouping. On their part, civil population both within Darfur and other parts of Sudan should begin to think about their relevance in restoring and sustaining peace in their country. Its is a fact, perhaps well known to Sudan political society, that their country's elites often mobilise the ethnic, racial and religious difference that exist between them in maintaining themselves in power. They can easily overcome this by overcoming such difference and mobilising themselves into tools of peace and democratic governance. In the short term, the different sections Sudan's political society should overcome their difference and call on all rival parties in the current civil war to go to the negotiating table and resolve the conflict in more serious and genuine terms. If possible representatives of Sudan's civil society (at least for now, the most active section of the political society) should seek to participate in all future peace deals. In the long run, Sudan's political and civil society should begin to think of themselves as invaluable social and political capital, one capable of initiating and sustaining peace

Within Africa, the African union should be involved as a continental peace making machine. So far the organisation is known for supporting the government and, therefore, has played insignificant role in restoring peace in Darfur. The AU's observer and facilitator status in future peace deals should be strengthened. The existing precedence in which the organisation acts like a toothless bulldog that only barks and not bite should be reversed for a more engaging and autonomous initiative on the part of OAU. It is grossly wanting on the part of the AU that its actions so far is less assertive than those of other international actors such as EU and USA. The AU mechanisms for mediation as well third party intervention should be reactivated and strengthened. Within Africa, majority of countries have so far remained more of supportive partners than peacemakers. It is not surprising therefore that these countries have sabotaged any genuine desire for restoring peace in Sudan with the AU framework. Beyond AU, at the UN for instance, many African countries have objected to a recent UNCHR proposal seeking to appoint a special rapporteur to the Sudan and condemn the actions of the state in arming Janjaweed. They also

supported Sudan's candidature of the member of UNCHR in spite of the country's poor human rights record. It is strongly recommended that African countries should broker indigenous continental solution to resolving the crisis in Darfur. In the short term, countries should call on both the Sudanese government and rebel forces to disarm as a matter of urgency. They should use the existing AU and UN approved framework for third party mediation of conflicts, such as the one initiated by Chad since 2003, to bring warring parties in Darfur to the negotiating table and facilitate peace deals between them. In the long term, African countries should utilise the AU structure for peacekeeping and explore possible means of peacekeeping intervention in Sudan.

So far the international community has played greater part in resolving the crisis in Darfur more than any actor both within Sudan. From the humanitarian assistance to conflict resolution, both government and non-governmental actors in the international system – Red Cross, EU and member states, UN and member organisations among others – have all played key role in resolving the conflict. Far from complacency, the effort of the international system so far leaves much to be desired. Key multilateral actors in the international system, such as UN and EU as well as state actors like USA, UK and Germany, have often held contradicting positions on how the crisis in Darfur should be resolved. Their reluctance to take urgent steps often allows for escalation of the conflict. For instance, when the western rebellion emerged in 2003 key actors in the international system refused to intervene fearing that such action could jeopardise the negotiations that were taking place at the time between the government of Sudan and southern rebels (SPLA). In the short term, therefore, the international community should find a common position on how to resolve the crisis in Sudan. It is recommended that if the conflict did not stop following UN ultimatums such as the resolution announced on 31st July 2004 which gave Sudan a one-month ultimatum to disarm the Janjaweed, the international system should use the UN peacekeeping mechanism to apply force in resolving the conflict. In the long run, there is the need for industrialised countries of the global north to provide developmental assistance to Sudan with a view to bridging the huge growth and development gaps that exist between different parts of Sudan.

6. CONCLUSION

The crisis in Darfur is the cumulative aftermaths of ages of conflict and confrontation between rival ethnic, religious and socio-economic groups in Western Sudan. However, the conflict assumed its current sordid degree of escalation following the rebellions that were started by SPL and JEM in early 2003 and continues to date. The crisis occurred against the backdrop of the attempt by the Sudanese government to use violence against civilian populations residing in Darfur who are suspected of supporting the rebellion. So far, the

crisis has affected over a million civilians and likely to exacerbate if the crisis is not resolved. Taken together, the crisis is a manifestation of a violent response by deprived Sudanese, those placed at the margin of state welfare and development. Being a culturally diverse society and one dominated by a minority Arab ruling class from the upper Nile region of ht country, the western rebellion, like those staged by the SPLA in the south, can be configured into the wide spectrum of Sudan's political instability as a product of unequal development and access to power in different part of the country.

On its face value the crisis in Darfur appears like a recent development. However, a deeper examination has revealed that the crisis is deeply rooted in ages of resource and racial conflict between Darfurians of Arab and African descent. These conflict usually occur between settled African farming communities and nomadic Arab over grazing land and trampling of animals on food reserves and farms. Because of the relative correspondence between racial (Arab versus Africans) and economic activities (African as farmers and Arabs as nomads), the conflict has tended to take a definite direction as one between African farmers and Arab nomads. In the past, successive Sudanese governments have continued to construct the crisis as resource based, deliberately excluding racial factor. However, since 2003, both racial and ethnic factors have played significant role in fuelling the current state of the crisis. One exception in the divisive conflict, is that in Darfur, which is a predominantly Muslim dominated region, the Arab ruling class has found it difficult to mobilise religious difference, as it used to do so in the name of Jihad in its two decades of confrontations with southern insurgents.

Because of its volatility, the crisis in Darfur, affecting over a million people, there is an urgent need to find a lasting solution that will enable the affected people to return to normal life and warring factions resolve their difference. Far from taking arms, resolving the crisis in Darfur requires genuine and creative initiatives and visions on the parts of the Sudanese government, rebel forces, African countries and the international community. Such solution requires both domestic and international goodwill as well as short and long term efforts.

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