

DARFUR: GENOCIDE TODAY

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION GUIDE



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Key information

Darfur is a region in Sudan, home to a population of around six million people, from nearly 100 different tribes. Some tribes are nomadic or semi-nomadic, meaning they move around the land with their livestock. Others are farmers who remain settled on their own land. Most nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes consider themselves to be of Arab descent whereas most farming tribes consider themselves to be of black African descent. Nearly all are Muslims. Geographically Darfur is a very large region, about the size of France. Historically, it was an independent state before it became part of Sudan when Britain took control of the country in 1916. Under British control there was barely any investment or development in Darfur. In 1956 Sudan gained its independence from Britain, with Darfur remaining as part of the country.

There were many regional tensions, particularly as people in Darfur felt that they were neglected and marginalised by the Sudanese government in Khartoum, the capital city. Development, spending and resources were concentrated on the capital and the centre of the country (a continuation of how things had been under British rule) – hundreds of miles away from the Darfur region, where people were struggling. In 1983-4 there was a famine in Darfur which killed nearly 100,000 Darfuris, compounding the difficulties facing the people of this area.

Historically there had been many tensions between nomadic and farming tribes over water and grazing land but disputes were usually resolved using the local justice system. However in 1989, Sudan came under the control of General Omar Al-Bashir, who seized control of the country in a military coup. Bashir's government promoted the growth of Arab nationalism and adopted a policy of Arabisation in Darfur – favouring Arabs over black Africans particularly in land disputes. Tensions grew and the government in Khartoum fuelled conflict by pouring many weapons into the region. There were attacks on local sedentary African farming communities by nomadic Arab tribes. The government was complicit in 'ethnic cleansing' and enslavement of black Africans.

Prompted by all these grievances, in 2003, two rebel movements – the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) began to attack the Sudanese government – hitting military targets such as airbases. In response the government launched Arab militias called the *Janjaweed* (which translates as 'devils on horseback'). The *Janjaweed* were sent to attack black Africans in Darfur, as the rebel movements consisted of people from this ethnic group. Sudanese forces and the *Janjaweed* attacked hundreds of farming villages across Darfur and have killed thousands of people. Over 400 villages have been completely destroyed and the violence has resulted in millions of homeless civilians. They have used the slash and burn method – destroying villages first by military air support, then using the *Janjaweed* to launch ground attacks, killing and raping as they move around. The villages and fields are burnt down and then re-burnt later in the season to prevent the land from being farmed and the village from being repopulated.

This conflict is therefore between the black African farmers (some of whom belong to the rebel movements SLA and JEM) and the *Janjaweed* militias, which Arab nomadic tribes have joined. The Bashir government are seeking to destroy the African farmers – the rebels – and have

provided air support, helicopters and fire arms to the *Janjaweed* and the incentive of land to Arabs for joining the militias.

Sponsored by the government, the *Janjaweed* have continued to target black Africans in Darfur for the last 12 years. The United Nations has described the situation as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Over 2.7 million people have been displaced and are living in camps across Darfur. About 300,000 Darfuri refugees are now living in neighbouring Chad. The UN estimates that around 4.7 million people are still affected by the situation; denied basic human rights and relying on humanitarian aid.

Key questions

Why are events in Darfur defined as genocide?

Genocide is defined as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- Killing members of the group causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

The genocide in Darfur is not based on religion as both sides are Muslim. The *Janjaweed*, sponsored by President Bashir's government, are targeting the black African farmers, with the intent to destroy this ethnic group. An international arrest warrant for Bashir was issued in 2009 by the International Criminal Court, for crimes against humanity and war crimes and following this in 2010 a further warrant was issued for crimes of genocide and ethnic cleansing. He is the only sitting head of state wanted for such crimes and events in Darfur have now been taking place for 12 years, yet Bashir still evades justice, even managing to travel internationally without being detained.

How is Darfur similar to other internationally recognized genocides?

- The genocide originates from the top: Bashir is the reason for genocide in Darfur – he is fuelling it, just as Hitler and many senior figures in the Nazi party did with the Holocaust and Pol Pot's regime did in Cambodia.
- Despite the impetus coming from the top, many regular citizens are complicit in the genocide. In this case it is the *Janjaweed* militias, just as many people in Europe of the 1940s were actively involved in Nazi Persecution and the Holocaust.
- Because most information is controlled by the government, it is difficult for external countries and agencies to gain a clear understanding of events, and to provide effective help. This was also a problem during the Holocaust, with tightly controlled Nazi propaganda and the war in the countries involved making effective external help very difficult.
- There is criticism that the international community is not doing enough to prevent the genocide from continuing – just as the Allies have been criticised for lack of action during the Holocaust (for example, not bombing Auschwitz) and the Clinton administration were criticised for a slow response to the Genocide in Rwanda.
- The *Janjaweed* militias and Sudanese Army use rape as a weapon to dehumanise black African women and destroy communities and their values, leaving physical and psychological scars. The UN believes that thousands of women have become victims of

systematic rape in Darfur and this use of sexual violence isolates women and emasculates the men who cannot protect them. Rape was also a feature of the Genocide in Rwanda, with Survivors' Fund (SURF) estimating that between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the conflict. It was also used as an instrument of war by the Bosnian Serb military against the Muslim population with UN reports suggesting that up to 60,000 women were raped between 1992 and 1995 in the former Yugoslavia.

How is it different?

- The situation is ongoing.
- The nature of the conflict means that it is hard to collect 'evidence' of genocide as both sides (militia and rebels) are acting violently and committing crimes.
- The problems are compounded by an environmental crisis surrounding water and land use.

What is happening in Darfur now?

After 12 years of conflict, Darfur is facing huge geographical and humanitarian long term challenges. With millions of displaced people, the camps they live in are so overcrowded and volatile, they are a danger themselves, not a source of refuge. There are many uncontrolled firearms in the region so the camps as well as the rest of the land are dangerous for everyone, even the people trying to provide humanitarian services. In some of the camps, the police are no longer allowed access and no one is taking charge of security and justice. It is often unsafe for anyone to leave the camps – for example women would normally go in search of firewood, however if they do, they may end up being attacked and raped by the *Janjaweed* militias.

In 2009, 13 international humanitarian aid organisations were expelled and had all operations in the region suspended by the government of Sudan. At least three domestic organisations were also stopped. This has left millions of vulnerable people without food, water and medicine – leaving the population at risk of starvation and disease.

Elsewhere in Sudan:

Darfur is not the only area of Sudan where civilians live in danger of attack. Since mid-2011 the Sudanese government has been fighting rebels in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, two large states in the region of Sudan's border areas with the Republic of South Sudan.

This conflict cannot be seen in isolation to other events in Sudan and the broader history of Sudan. The grievances of the rebel groups in these two States are similar to those of the rebels in Darfur and like people in Darfur, many in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states feel that they have been neglected and marginalised by the Sudanese government in Khartoum.

Many argue that similarly to Darfur Omar-Al Bashir's government has used its military to launch indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas through aerial bombardments of civilian targets, direct attacks on villages and by blocking humanitarian access. More than a quarter of a million people have been forced to flee the area to South Sudan and Ethiopia.

What can we do?

Not enough is known and spoken about the ongoing genocide in Darfur or events happening elsewhere in Sudan and so we can all learn more and raise awareness about the situation that rages on in the world today. Share resources, thoughts and learning and when marking HMD each

year, commemorate and reflect on Darfur as part of this – our challenge is to raise the awareness, knowledge and understanding of the atrocities amongst the international community.

Key Challenges

Restoring justice

There is a desperate need to bring justice to the chaos facing local communities across the region. The traditional and previously established systems of governance have been destroyed and the conflicts within communities have confused law and allegiance. Judges are appointed by the government so there is no justice for those from the rebel groups and black African community – for example, local women who go to the judge because they have been raped by the *Janjaweed*, are convicted of adultery. Judges who used to be unbiased have been killed. Similarly the local police forces are influenced by the ethnic backgrounds of those who work for them – so in some villages the police side with the *Janjaweed*, in others they support the rebels. In other cases, they are groups just acting alone, taking advantage of the chaos, but none of these situations result in fair, unbiased policing to protect the vulnerable families living in these communities.

Restoring the community

Community life was a vital part of the existence for black African village farmers. As so many settlements have been destroyed, hundreds of thousands of people have left their home and forced to live in camps or on edges of other existing villages, not with the people they had previously lived with and around possibly for all their life. This has led to a breakdown of social structures and loss of community cohesion and traditions that are so important to this group. Effectively there have become disenfranchised groups – lacking policing, medical skills, leadership of the community and other key roles as they have all been killed or displaced – so the social network for many has gone.

Restoring infrastructure

Police

Policing varies from village to village, with some local forces against the *Janjaweed* and others supporting them, dependent on the outlook and sympathies of members of the police in the area. Some police forces are on neither side, but taking advantage of the chaos to pursue their own agendas. Therefore, as with the judges, there is a need for consistent and reliable policing to help restore law and order and justice in communities.

Farming

As the *Janjaweed* move through the Darfur region, they destroy village communities completely, burning the village and fields to prevent the land from being farmed. The black African farmers who lived off their own land are now largely displaced, living in camps with no fields to grow crops or tools to use. Furthermore, as it is dangerous to even collect wood, local communities struggle even to make fires to cook their own food, instead relying on aid. This means there is a real challenge to provide a long term future for these communities, whose traditional livelihoods are no longer viable.

Water

As thousands of displaced people leave their villages, travelling to live on the outskirts of other existing villages or makeshift camps, access to clean water is a huge challenge. In many new settlements there is no water, as the locals need external help from aid agencies to drill for water and build wells.

Medical

Doctors and midwives in local communities have largely been killed or fled due to the dangerous conditions they face. Despite the training aid agencies provided to help local medical staff, the *Janjaweed* militias have even killed people in clinics and hospitals when attacking village communities, leaving a desperate lack of medical expertise and provision.

Loss of skills

These communities passed down their farming skills and knowledge from generation to generation, but for many now, there is no land for them to farm and thus use to teach skills and pass on to the next generation. As people leave their homes with barely any possessions and what they have is often stolen on the road, the lack of tools and lack of animals such as donkeys which are vital for farming work in this area, again mean it is very hard to even try to continue with traditional livelihoods, even if there was land to farm.

Providing humanitarian aid

It is often a huge challenge to provide effective humanitarian aid as agencies are unable to reach many areas and communities if it is too dangerous to travel, the terrain is flooded or the government has control over certain areas, meaning international organisations do not have free movements as they had to get permission to travel between towns on the roads. The government also controls what aid resources are being brought in, which often limits effectiveness. Furthermore, aid agencies are riddled with government spies, with many documents going missing and all phone and email conversations being monitored, which again places limits on the work that can be done.

Bringing international pressure

A major difficulty facing us, the international community, is how we can effectively put pressure on the ruling government, which is committing genocide, as the sovereign power. Despite the indictment of Bashir and other leading figures in the Bashir regime, they have resisted any external pressures, and have the advantages of support from China and sources of oil under the land of their vast country.

PHOTO GALLERY

Brian Steidle is a former marine who became a patrol leader for the Joint Military Mission in Sudan. His job was to monitor the ceasefire – an agreement which had been made to end the 20 year civil war between the North and South of Sudan. As he arrived in 2004, a new conflict had begun in Darfur which had already displaced more than a million people. Whilst he was there, he took many pictures realising that he could document what he saw and make people aware of it when he returned home to America.

[You can see more of Brian's photographs of Darfur here.](#)

