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Introduction to the Special Issue on Darfur

Samuel Totten and Eric Markusen

In launching the first issue of *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, we, the four editors (Alex Alvarez, Herb Hirsch, Eric Markusen, and Samuel Totten), feel compelled to address one of the most pressing issues facing genocide scholars today—the current crisis in Darfur, Sudan. It is a crisis that erupted in early 2003 and continues today. It is one in which government of Sudan troops (GoS) and the Janjaweed (Arab militia) are responsible for the mass murder of an estimated 180,000 black Africans (primarily from the Fur, Zaghawa, and Massaleit tribal groups) and possibly more than 250,000 others as a result of genocide by attrition (depriving the more than two million internally displaced persons of adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care).

Once again—as happened in Rwanda in 1994 and in Srebrenica in 1995, to mention but two instances—the international community’s response to the unfolding crisis was late in coming and far too tepid and anemic when it did come. As far back as December 2003, Jan Egeland, UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, declared Darfur to be the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, and yet the international community proffered words over action in “addressing” the crisis. While various non-governmental organizations decried the situation in Darfur, the UN Security Council dithered by issuing one timid resolution after another in which it made idle threats to sanction Sudan if the killing, mass displacement, mass rape, and destruction continued. The mass murder—some, including the US government, deemed it genocide, while others, including the UN, deemed it crimes against humanity—continued unabated, but the United Nations did not see fit to alter its response in any real way.

Instead of taking firm steps to halt the mass killing, rape, and wholesale destruction of the black Africans’ villages and their way of life (it is estimated that more than 2,000 black African villages have been utterly destroyed and burned to the ground), the UN Security Council welcomed the African Union’s offer to deploy troops as monitors in the Darfur area. The UN Security Council knew full well that the AU mission would be not only undermanned and under-resourced but working with an inadequate mandate, but it did not seem to care about such critical limitations and liabilities. It is also true that the AU mission ostensibly provided the UN Security Council with an easy “out.” That is, as long as the African Union was on the ground in Darfur—and continued to demand that it be allowed to handle the crisis on its own—the UN Security Council was more than willing to capitulate to these demands, for the simple but profound reason that this provided the council with a rationale for not acting. Such an approach also met the specific wishes of at least three of the permanent members of the Security Council: China (which has huge petroleum interests in Sudan), Russia (which has a large and extremely lucrative arms deal with Sudan), and the United States (which now considers Sudan a partner in its so-called war on terrorism). Once again, *realpolitik* won out over real humanitarian concern.

This special issue on Darfur provides a glimpse into various aspects of the crisis. René Lemarchand, an expert on the Great Lakes region of Africa, contributes an

overview of the crisis that places it within the larger context of Sudan's history. Scott Straus, a political scientist at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, presents a comparative study of the genocides perpetrated in Rwanda (in 1994) and in Darfur. Samuel Totten, a scholar of genocide studies at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, provides a critique of the US State Department's Atrocities Documentation Project—whose data resulted in the determination by the US government that genocide had been (and possibly continued to be) perpetrated in Darfur—along with a critique of the motives and ramifications of the “finding” of genocide. Kelly D. Askin, a lawyer, scholar, and expert on mass rape, delineates and discusses the crimes that have been perpetrated against girls and women in Darfur since early 2003. Jerry Fowler, a lawyer and the staff director of the Committee on Conscience at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, presents an argument as to why and how, under international law, the situation in Darfur constitutes genocide. Finally, Canadian military officer Major Brent Beardsley, who served as personal assistant to the force commander of the United Nations Mission in Rwanda during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, reflects on the failure of the international community to stop the genocide in Rwanda and the significance of the latter vis-a-vis the ongoing tragedy in Darfur.

The aim of this special issue on Darfur is to provide readers with a sense of what is taking place on the ground in Darfur, the international community's reaction to the crisis, and the ramifications of the latter for the people of Darfur, and for efforts to develop effective means for preventing and/or stanching genocide. In many ways, it is also a lamentation for lives lost and an expression of frustration and anger over what could have been but wasn't, since the international community seems stuck in its affinity for *realpolitik*.