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Darfur on the brink

DAVID SWANN FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

For the past two to three years I have been hearing the heartbreaking stories of Darfur refugees in Calgary as they struggle to make a life for themselves after surviving wild atrocities in their homeland in western Sudan. Calgary apparently holds the largest population of Darfuris in Canada. Collectively, we have tried to raise our voices and move the government of Canada to step up its involvement to stop this 'genocide in slow motion' as some observers have described it.

Last week, nine of us from Calgary (including six Darfuris) met with Sen. Romeo Dallaire and held a press conference on Parliament Hill calling for urgent support to the UN Mission in Darfur. Despite this issue being the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, the media found Karlheinz Schreiber much more interesting than this appeal for leadership.

Nearly four years of violence between the Arab-influenced government of Sudan and the increasing number of African rebel factions in Darfur have left more than 250,000 people dead and 2.5 million ripped from their homes and land to live in the squalor and insecurity of refugee camps.

China has finally bowed to international outrage in the Security Council and, through Resolution 1769 in July 2007, agreed to a hybrid force of UN and African Union troops known as UNAMID. Since that time the UN has appealed to member countries to provide essential helicopters and transport vehicles, troops of African descent, and \$1.5 billion for the largest UN peacekeeping mission in history. Only a few countries have stepped up to commit these essentials despite a Dec. 31 deployment target.

The New York Times reported this past week that the United States has already flown in troops for the new force, promised \$40 million in equipment and offered to pay 26 per cent of the total cost of the operation. If others don't step in quickly, this offer may fade. As author and signatory of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, and a significant contributor to humanitarian aid over the past four years, Canada is in a unique position to show significant leadership. However, we have yet to make a financial commitment to this mission.

Obstruction from the Sudan government and dithering by the international community is now threatening to unravel this mission and the world waits. Is there sufficient political will across the world to move forward with peacekeepers? What is Canada's commitment to the UNAMID peace force? Why are we not actively committing from our \$14 billion surplus all that we can to prevent this devastation?

All Canadians of conscience, especially the Darfuri population here in Calgary, wait in desperate hope. Real children, women and men need troops to intervene to allow aid to flow and peace talks to become meaningful. Their very survival depends upon an active and forceful response from Canada, not next year, but now.



David Swann



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