

OTHER VIEWS

Doing what's right in Darfur

Sen. Brownback: U.S. compassion will show our greatness

By U.S. SEN. SAM BROWNBACK
SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

For too long the government of Sudan has permitted the continuation of violence in Darfur by thwarting diplomatic efforts and refusing to accept a robust international peacekeeping force. The situation in Darfur is deteriorating, and immediate actions must be taken to protect civilians and halt ongoing atrocities.

Since 2003, more than 200,000 people have been killed and more than 2 million people have been displaced. This is an entirely unacceptable situation.

Last year, violence in Darfur displaced 500,000 innocent civilians; 1,800 attacks on aid workers took place, an increase of 67 percent over the previous year. As a result, many aid workers were forced to evacuate the region, leaving only 13,000 workers to care for roughly 4 million people, 2.5 million of whom have been displaced from their homes.

Increased attacks on civilians and aid workers have hampered the flow of aid and assistance to displaced civilians, resulting in dangerously high levels of disease and malnutrition in some camps.

Compounding the problem, regional instability is growing around Sudan. Sections of neighboring Chad and the Central Africa Republic have been pulled into the vortex of violence.

The existing African Union force in Darfur, with only 7,000 troops to patrol an area roughly the size of France, is vastly undermanned and has been effectively neutered by the Sudanese government.

Diplomatic efforts to bring peace to Darfur led by Special Envoy Andrew Natsios are an important and necessary part of achieving lasting peace in the region. However, innocent lives are at stake, and we must be prepared to take strong action against the Khartoum government if diplomacy continues not to yield positive results.

Sudan's oil revenues have enabled the Khartoum government to sustain the genocide by funding the Janjaweed mili-

tia, which continues to carry out vicious attacks on innocent civilians. The implementation of punitive measures such as the targeted sanctions, denial of access to oil revenues, and NATO assistance included in the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act are long overdue. The parties responsible for the genocide in Darfur must pay a price for their role in continuing their attacks on civilians and their refusal to accept international peacekeeping forces.

Many Americans have acted to help end the genocide by divesting their personal investments from companies that do business with the Khartoum government. To date, six states, in addition to many municipalities and universities, have restricted their own investments in companies whose business in Sudan benefits the Khartoum government.

In the face of the ongoing genocide, the American people have shown their compassion and conviction by voicing their strong opposition to the violence in Darfur. The message from the American people is clear: Genocide will not be tolerated.

It is my hope that these values are contagious and spread to those whose economic relationships with Sudan allow the Darfur genocide to continue.

Specifically, we need to work with the Chinese government, which accounts for more than half of Sudan's annual oil revenue. During a recent trip to Sudan, Chinese President Hu Jintao announced that China would cancel millions of dollars of outstanding Sudanese debt. Hu Jintao also announced that his government would fund the construction of a presidential palace for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, a man who has carried out two genocides in the last two decades, the first in Southern Sudan and the current one in Darfur. Rather than providing no-strings-attached economic aid to a genocidal regime, China should use its economic leverage to pressure the Sudanese government to end the humanitarian crisis.

Now is the time for the American

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MUSTAFA OZER/
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Displaced Sudanese wait for a medical checkup in front of the Turkish Red Crescent Hospital in the Darfur city of Nyala on Feb. 21.

government to show its greatness by acting with compassion for those who are suffering.

"Not on my watch," wrote President Bush on the margins of a White House memo concerning genocide, and now is the time that America follows through on that pledge.



U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican, wrote this commentary for the Orlando Sentinel. He is a candidate for the GOP's 2008 presidential nomination.

Plea to Bush: Stop the genocide

By JOHN MORLINO
SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Dear President Bush: Shortly after taking office, you vowed not to allow another "Rwanda" to take place during your term. Later, when the systematic annihilation of a people began in Darfur, you were the first world leader to call it by its rightful name: genocide.

Yet today, half a million defenseless civilians have been killed in western Sudan as a result of attacks orchestrated by their own government. Moreover, 4 million more face the prospect of death from starvation, disease and further assaults.

Much to my dismay, you, as well as many of those reporting on the carnage, continue to express optimism over announcements of various cease-fire and peace agreements. This, despite the fact that the Sudanese military and their proxy militias routinely follow each of these "breakthroughs" by stepping up their level of violence.

And while the general public is gradually becoming aware of the perverse reality that the architects of this mass murder continue to have veto power over the deployment of a powerful protection force to the region, you have been less than forthcoming about the reasons behind this arrangement.

Perhaps, if the White House press corps and the mainstream media highlighted the quid pro quo between you and Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir — his sharing of intelligence information with you for your "war on terror," in exchange for your protecting his sovereign right to commit crimes against humanity, effectively deeming the lives of innocent men, women and children in Darfur expendable — it would be more difficult for you to feign interest in this crisis.

As I write this letter, I cannot stop thinking about a political cartoon I saw during the recent holidays. It depicted a child from Darfur sitting on Santa's knee. The child spoke of having only one wish: "A chance to live."

Since then, I have been unable to get the following images out of

my mind: I imagine that, like you, I am a husband and father — except that I am living in Darfur. The year is 2003. My family and I are awakened one morning by screams and explosions. I run outside and, through the smoke and fire, I see dozens of armed men storming into our village on horseback. I then witness and experience the unthinkable. I am viciously beaten until I can no longer stand. After which, I am forced to watch both my wife and my 7-year-old daughter gang-raped by six of the attackers. Before losing consciousness, I see my 3-year-old son burned alive.

My "dream" ends with a scene in a refugee camp in western Sudan. The year is 2007. All of the aid workers have left our area. The limited supplies we have may be our last. My wife did not survive her brutal attack, so it is just my daughter and I who remain from our family. She is 11, now. Severely traumatized, she has not spoken since the day she was unmercifully violated. It is late at night, and, like every night, she is crying herself to sleep.

For an untold number of people living in Darfur, my "dream" is their reality. To be sure, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan was not far off when he described the conditions in western Sudan as akin to "hell on Earth."

Mr. President, you are, first and foremost, a husband and a father. As such, I feel compelled to ask you: If your wife and daughters were among those at grave risk in Darfur, would you ask for permission from the perpetrators to save them? Would you wait more than four years for their answer?

Would you merely issue hollow words of warning to those responsible for genocide — and let your family die?

John Morlino is the founder of a nonprofit organization called The Essence of True Humanity Is Compassion, The ETHIC, www.the-ethic.org. He directs The ETHIC's Darfur Pledge campaign, www.DarfurPledge.org, an all-volunteer grassroots effort to end the genocide in western Sudan. He wrote this commentary for the Orlando Sentinel.

Sharpton defines challenge in slavery revelation

WASHINGTON — If you think about it, there should be nothing particularly surprising about the discovery that one of Strom Thurmond's relatives once owned the Rev. Al Sharpton's great-grandfather. That's how slavery worked — human beings owning other human beings, buying them and selling them, often passing them down to the next generation like sentient family heirlooms. Haven't we already hashed and rehashed that whole sad story?

Actually, no. What makes the story that broke over the weekend so compelling is that we know the charismatic activist Sharpton and we knew the one-time segregationist Thurmond. The ancestors of such public figures can't be dismissed as mere historical abstractions. They were real, flesh-and-blood men and women who played their roles, voluntarily or not, in the horrific

institution that so indelibly stained this nation.

Because we know so little about slavery at the individual level, we really don't know slavery at all.

"I almost fell off the chair," Sharpton told me by phone Monday, describing the moment when a team of expert genealogists, working with the *New York Daily News* for a Black History Month project, met him at the studio where he does his radio talk show and told him of his link with Thurmond.

As Sharpton tells it, the researchers had just informed him that his great-grandfather, Coleman Sharpton Sr., once lived near Edgefield, S.C. Previously, he had never been able to trace that side of his family back further than the grocery store his grandfather, Coleman Sharpton Jr., had owned and run in Florida. Sharpton said he thought he knew where the ge-

nealogists were headed — Sharpton once was entertainer James Brown's road manager, and Brown was from near Edgefield, so Sharpton thought he was about to be told that he and the late Godfather of Soul were related.

"I thought I had it all figured out while they were talking, and I was getting my reaction ready," Sharpton recalled. When the researchers from the Web site Ancestry.com dropped the Thurmond bomb, the normally voluble Sharpton could only take stock in disbelief: "Strom Thurmond's family owned my family," he said, according to the *Daily News*.

Sharpton learned for the first time that his name came from Alexander Sharpton, a prosperous Edgefield County slave owner. Nothing unusual there — that's the way we got our surnames, from our ancestors'

owners — but still a shock when a sweeping historical fact is made personal.

"Just now, I was going through the airport in Miami and a guy saw me and asked for



GENE ROBINSON
Washington Post Writers Group

an autograph, and I stopped to give it to him, and it hit me," Sharpton said. "I was writing my name because my great-grandfather was owned by a Sharpton. Every time I look at my name, I'm looking at the contract that America provided for us."

Alexander Sharpton's son Jefferson married a woman named Julia Ann Thurmond, who turns out to have been Strom's first cousin twice re-

moved, according to the genealogists. When Jefferson died broke in 1860, patriarch Alexander transferred ownership of "Coleman, age 25 years, Biddy (female) age 22 years old, Harrison aged about 4 years and Bachus aged about 8 years" to Jefferson's four children, along with "the future increase of the said female slave."

The four slaves were then sent temporarily to the custody of another relative in Florida, where their labor was to be used to pay off Jefferson's debts. The Civil War intervened, and after emancipation Coleman worked as a wood hauler. His son, Coleman Jr. — Sharpton's grandfather — not only owned the grocery store in Liberty County, Fla., but also was a preacher, which Sharpton had not known.

I tell the Sharpton family story in some detail because the rest of us have similar family sagas, but few can trace them all the way back to a specific owner

or plantation. The point is not to wallow in slavery, but to know it so that we can fully comprehend its lessons. For Sharpton, learning his family history was a reminder of unspeakable cruelty and monumental injustice — but also a personal challenge.

"I think of my grandfather, the son of a slave, the son of a man who was bought and sold in that horrific manner, and my grandfather opened up a grocery store and took care of his family and raised 17 children," Sharpton said.

"That's what his generation did. Now what are we going to do? Are we a generation that wants to be defined by nothing more than using the N-word and having all this gangster attitude? This information doesn't just put the responsibility on society, it puts the responsibility on me. On us."

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From the left | Doonesbury by Garry Trudeau



From the right | Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley

