

## Clare Short: Darfur is the proof that we are failing Africa

No amount of aid will bring development unless conflicts are ended. 2005 was supposed to have been the year for Africa. But whilst the generalised promises were being promulgated, in Darfur 300,000 people were being slaughtered and 2 million displaced from their lands. This is the world's latest outburst of genocidal killing, designed to drive people from their lands. We have seen an increase in this phenomenon since the end of the Cold War; we have even coined a new phrase for it, we call it "ethnic cleansing". And just as in Rwanda and the Balkans, the world has failed to take action to prevent it. In September 2005 at the UN World Summit, with vociferous support from the UK, it was agreed that the world should recognise that sovereignty entailed a responsibility to protect one's citizens, and that in consequence if any government either could not or would not, that responsibility should transfer to the international community. But at the same time this grand declaration was being agreed, the government of Sudan was failing to protect the people of Darfur, and the international community, including the UK, was also failing to act.

There was, of course, plenty of rhetoric. The US government announced that the killing amounted to genocide - a word that all had avoided in the case of Rwanda because it was assumed the word would trigger the responsibilities of the Genocide Convention and thus a duty to intervene. Many UK ministers visited Sudan and Darfur, including the Prime Minister, the Foreign and Development Secretaries and various junior ministers. They expressed concern, and increased humanitarian aid was pledged because displaced people have to be fed, but no effective action was taken to provide protection.

The cause of the crisis is partly ecological. Arabic-speaking pastoralists and African agriculturalists are in competition for the same land. In addition, a peace had been negotiated between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army of the south, that carved up power, and oppressed groups excluded from the peace process concluded they had to fight their way to recognition. And thus a violent revolt was launched in 2003 by militias who claimed to represent the agriculturalists of Darfur. The government of Sudan responded, as it has over many years, to the revolt from the south; it armed the group hostile to the rebels that represented the pastoralist interest - now widely known as the Janjaweed. And then the conflict got out of hand, and the killing and displacement escalated to massive proportions, fuelled by an ideology that seeks to set Arabs against Africans even though in Darfur both groups are Muslim.

The Security Council held many discussions, and the US and UK in particular claimed to be very concerned. But they were not willing to mandate a UN force with peace enforcement powers, because they did not care enough about the people of Darfur and because they were distracted and weakened by events in Iraq. Instead, the African Union agreed to provide the troops, but they lacked planes, helicopters and other equipment. The EU and others helped with finance, but the money kept running out. Although those who were deployed performed admirably, with inadequate numbers and logistics the killing and raping continued and the ethnic cleansing has been "successfully" completed. Two million people are living in vulnerable camps, dependent on handouts with little prospect of getting back to their lands.

It is now proposed - at last - that the African Union mission should be incorporated into a UN mission, and argued that it should have a stronger mandate. If this is agreed, money will cease to be a problem. But the mission will not be effective unless countries with strong logistics are willing to join the force. Africa can supply soldiers but needs funding and logistics if African Union efforts are to succeed.

The Government has talked a lot about Africa and promised a lot to Africa. On Darfur, it has failed Africa. And this is an example of a wider problem. No amount of aid and/or debt relief will bring development to Africa unless conflicts are ended and state structures capable of providing order and development put in place. This is the problem in Sudan, Congo, Angola, Côte d'Ivoire and many other places.

It is already too late to prevent the ethnic cleansing of 2 million people in Darfur. In the next few months, we shall learn whether the political will exists even to begin to reverse this process.

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\* Claire Short served as Secretary of State for International Development between 1997 and 2003  
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