

# An exchange on the crisis in Sudan's western Darfur region

30 August 2004

*The WSWS received the following letter on the article "Sudan: Western powers move towards military intervention" . It is followed by a reply by Chris Talbot, the article's author.*

Dear Chris (Talbot),

I am a regular reader of the *World Socialist Web Site* and am in complete agreement with its assessment of world affairs with particular reference to its ideological orientation but I completely differ and feel betrayed by this article on the genocide in western Darfur.

Your difference with Western imperialism and its sinister motives globally should not blind you to the evils of the Islamic government of Sudan. The West would be correct to take military measures against a regime that sets out to annihilate a people just because they are different. Your column leaves a lot to be desired, in fact it construes to your tolerance of the deeds of this Islamic fundamentalists regime that has consistently denied black Africans human dignity.

The West is evil, has devious intentions worldwide but intervention in Sudan is not only desirable but imperative to save humanity and to demonstrate to the Islamic fundamentalists that the world will not condone its terror tactics against innocent civilians who like all other people require to be accepted as equal citizens in the land of their birth. Islamic fundamentalism is wrong when it targets people who have not wronged Moslems like the black African population in the Arabic world.

So you say "genocide" is an exaggeration of the West, please reassess your conclusions otherwise you make us feel that if its blacks being annihilated it does not require any attention, that blacks are subhuman and therefore the world should back off and let the Moslems rid the Sudan of these subhumans.

FD, Cape Town

Dear FD,

The people of Darfur are suffering a massive humanitarian disaster and the *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the criminal activities of the Sudanese National Islamic Front (NIF) government in arming and supporting the Janjaweed militia against defenceless and innocent civilians in western Sudan. Despite numerous reports and visits by scores of journalists, no evidence has emerged that more than tens of thousands (the figure usually given is 30,000) have been killed by these militia. If we insist on giving a truthful assessment of what is taking place, this in no way minimises our opposition to the Sudanese government.

We don't accept your suggestion that we are not giving attention to the annihilation of black Africans in Darfur because we think

the term "genocide" is an exaggeration. We drew attention to the attacks on the population in Darfur last February when the first reports became available—long before the present widespread media coverage.

But it is not only the numbers of deaths involved that demonstrates that what is happening in Darfur is not genocide. The Janjaweed militias are using pro-Arab racism, but they are attacking and killing people from more than one ethnic background. People from various tribal groupings, including also those of Arab descent, have been the victims of their attacks. Neither can the conflict be viewed as Muslims ridding Sudan of "subhuman" blacks when most people in Darfur are Muslims.

In refusing to use the term "genocide" we made it clear that we are opposed to pro-imperialist politicians and their supporters in the media who—on a regular basis—point to and exaggerate the brutality of regimes in the developing world to justify their operations.

We did not give any support to the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the Taliban in Afghanistan or the Milosevic government in Serbia. But we rejected any attempt to justify imperialist intervention by pointing to the Saddam's use of chemical weapons against the Kurds, the Taliban's brutal oppression of women, or the treatment of Albanians in Kosovo. We have also shown that exaggerations and outright lies were used by the media to support the United States, Britain and the Western powers. For example, investigations of graves in Iraq have so far revealed 5,000 bodies compared to the "remains of 400,000 people in mass graves" cited by British Prime Minister Tony Blair to justify the war on Iraq. [See "Britain: Blair's claims on Iraqi mass graves refuted"] Are we giving support to Saddam Hussein—who undoubtedly was a brutal ruler responsible for killing and torturing large numbers of people—by insisting on the truth?

You say that Western intervention in Darfur would "save humanity." Can you cite one country where Western governments, the United Nations, or for that matter African forces acting on their behalf, have saved humanity by a military intervention? Have the people of Iraq or Afghanistan benefited from Western occupations? No. Even in Sierra Leone—cited by Blair as a success story—one must ask what has been achieved by over four years of British and UN occupation? The militias and warlords fled into neighbouring countries so that whilst the people in Freetown were spared from their killing, raping and looting, the people in Liberia, Guinea and Ivory Coast were certainly not. Sierra Leone remains the poorest country in the world, with a government just as corrupt

as its predecessors that led it into civil war in the first place. In Ivory Coast, after French and UN occupation, the situation is no better. (See Ivory Coast: Two years of French and United Nations occupation”]

Further you say that Western intervention would “demonstrate to the Islamic fundamentalists that the world will not condone its terror tactics against innocent civilians.” But how would this be demonstrated to the Sudan regime? When millions of people throughout the world know that the United States administration is carrying out criminal activities in Iraq, how can it act on their behalf to bring justice in Sudan?

Also wouldn’t the Sudanese government justifiably bring to the world’s attention the fact that the US and Britain have been negotiating a peace deal with it for the past four years and were fully aware of its use of militias such as the Janjaweed? Nothing was done by the west to stop this happening because control over Sudan’s extensive oil resources and its strategic position in north Africa were the basis for these peace talks, and not human rights issues.

Sudan’s government may claim to be Islamic, but that has not stopped it from supporting the US-led war against terrorism and handing over Islamic fundamentalists that are alleged terrorists to western intelligence agencies. As we pointed out in our articles only two months ago, the US removed Sudan from its list of countries not cooperating in the “war against terror”—in recognition of the NIF government’s collaboration. In fact for the last four years, ever since oil began to be pumped out of Sudan, the US and Britain decided to work with the NIF government and push the southern rebels they had previously backed into making a deal.

Western governments, taken aback by the response to the humanitarian suffering in Darfur now being shown on the world’s TV screens, may now have decided to make an about turn and move against the Khartoum regime. If not a direct military intervention, maybe they will pay for (and tacitly direct) an African Union force. Those politicians and journalists calling for military force are helping the western governments make this about turn. Journalists reporting the crisis in Darfur and Chad do not usually mention the existence of large oil and mineral deposits in Sudan, or the fact that the US and Britain were backing the Sudan government until a few weeks ago. The *World Socialist Web Site* is not inclined to maintain such a diplomatic silence and is not impressed by the western powers’ new-found concern for the masses of Sudan.

At a more basic level, whilst you claim to be in agreement with our assessment of world affairs I think you have not understood our analysis of imperialism. Imperialism means the financial domination of the whole world by the Western powers, with increasing divisions between them that can only lead to war. It means the extraction of billions of dollars in debt repayment from so-called third world countries, with IMF structural adjustment programmes and the imposition of economic “reforms.”

A huge growth of extreme poverty and unemployment has already resulted from this. Corporate profits from oil and other resources need to be assured, as well as the super exploitation of cheap labour. State provision of education, health and other welfare measures must be slashed. These kind of measures cannot

be imposed without the most brutal forms of rule. To imagine that Western intervention will bring justice to Sudan and that the people of Darfur will have a secure future in the present world situation is to indulge in fantasy.

The people in Darfur cannot be defended against the odious Khartoum regime by the Western powers. Even the food aid they are getting from the west is entirely inadequate. The regime in Sudan, like the bourgeois nationalist regimes in Africa as a whole, defends the interests of the local national elite against the working people and poor masses. Now that the Cold War period has ended—so they can no longer rest to some extent on the Soviet Union—such regimes increasingly compete for Western backing and corporate investment. The Sudan regime is no exception. If Western governments decide they are not satisfied with the present regime in Khartoum and use the humanitarian issue in Darfur as a justification to move against it, whatever results will be an even greater disaster for the population as a whole. The experience of Iraq could hardly be more relevant.

Our aim is to build a socialist movement of working people in Africa and internationally. The international unity of working people against the profit system is the only way to deal with regimes like that in Sudan and throughout Africa. Nationalism, accepting the division of the continent into a patchwork of competing and antagonistic nation states, has been shown to be a dead end. There is not a single national government in Africa that will come to the aid of the people in Darfur unless it has finance and backing from the West, and will benefit the interests of its own elite. The answer to the disastrous situation facing people in many parts of Africa, not only Darfur, is to break the grip of imperialism, cancel all debts to the West, end the exploitation by the multinationals, and develop the vast productive resources in the interests of working people. It means an alliance with the working class of the imperialist countries, as opposed to placing any confidence in the imperialist rulers and their governments.

We hope that you will consider these points.

Yours sincerely,  
Chris Talbot



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