



Dedication to the Dead of Darfur

by Eric Reeves

The consequences of internal displacement and refugee flight gained terrible new meaning in Darfur and eastern Chad during 2004.

Unconstrained genocidal violence continued to force many hundreds of thousands of civilians from their homes and villages in all three states of this remote western province of Sudan. Official UN figures indicate that by spring 2005 1.9 million people were internally displaced and 213,000 had become refugees along the Sudan-Chad border. Mortality has been staggering, if relentlessly unreported, and almost certainly exceeds 300,000 civilians who have succumbed to violence, disease, and malnutrition. Massive displacement and deprivation ensure that this number will grow with terrifying rapidity.

Ominously, evidence suggests that even these figures fail to reflect the true scale of the crisis. Hundreds of thousands of individuals beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance and registration are also likely victims of the orchestrated violence that the government-supported National

Islamic Front has directed against the non-Arab or African populations of Darfur.

Attacks on villages have typically been characterized by comprehensive destruction of the agricultural means of survival for the Fur, the Massaleit, the Zaghawa, and other non-Arab groups. Assailants have destroyed houses and dwellings along with agricultural implements, food and seed stocks, and essential water wells and irrigation systems. They have cut down fruit trees and looted cattle and livestock. Those who flee are fortunate to escape with their lives.

Insecurity remains extreme throughout the region and those whom the marauders have forced into refugee or displaced persons camps are too fearful to return to their villages or to the sites of their former lands. The government's murderous Arab militia allies, the *janjaweed*, continue their savage predations virtually unchecked, despite the presence of a small African Union monitoring team.

As a consequence, we may begin to discern an increasingly clear and disturbing picture of the future of Darfur's

uprooted population. Unable to resume agriculturally productive lives, in danger of missing a second straight late spring/early summer planting, the population will be increasingly aid-dependent. While generations of Darfurians have survived in this harsh and difficult land through superb foraging skills, they can't deploy them because of the continuing insecurity in rural areas and even in the immediate camp environs. Women and girls who leave the camps to collect firewood (essential for cooking the raw grain that is often the only food available) risk rape and beatings by the *janjaweed*; men or boys leaving the camps face execution.

Not only has agricultural production come largely to a halt, but the UN cannot possibly feed the three to four million people it estimates will need food during the coming "hunger gap" in Darfur with present logistical and transport constraints. The struggling population of this remote region already requires more than 50,000 metric tons of food per month; the UN and international aid organizations are struggling to provide half this amount. And this is during the dry season. When the seasonal rains begin in earnest (late June/July), impassable roads, unusable airstrips, and raging *wadis* (dry river beds that become torrents following heavy rains) will paralyze humanitarian operations in many areas and the "hunger gap" will escalate.

The rainy season will further isolate hundreds of thousands of people in the more remote camps, and terrible overcrowding ensures that the perils of disease will be even greater than in the summer of 2004. Two years after the beginning of the conflict in Darfur, and almost a year and a half after the UN declared Darfur the world's greatest hu-

manitarian crisis, half of the displaced in camps are without clean water or sanitary facilities. These figures will rise with the onset of the heavy rains.

The world appears prepared to accept these impossibly difficult living conditions for Darfur's displaced persons and refugees. There is no prospect of meaningful international humanitarian intervention, despite what is now clearly genocide by attrition. Darfur's people are gradually weakening, becoming ever more vulnerable to disease, and in increasing numbers facing starvation. Humanitarian workers and convoys are operating in the face of intolerable insecurity. Yet the international community still debates possible sanctions against the government in Khartoum and the eventual venue for war crimes trials.

In short, Darfur looks increasingly like Rwanda in slow-motion. The weapons of destruction are not machetes, but engineered famine, intolerable living conditions, and the violent demographic re-shaping of Darfur's agriculturally most valuable lands. The gods of history may have seen fit to offer us another opportunity to redeem our failure in 1994, but we seem incapable of seizing the opportunity or even recognizing the agonizing similarity of this failure. It becomes increasingly clear that the people of Darfur will not receive the assistance they so desperately require; it is for this terrible reason that we dedicate this *Survey* to them.

Eric Reeves is a professor at Smith College and has published extensively on Sudan.

*Photos: An internally displaced Sudanese woman (opposite) begs for food in Kirinding II camp in West Darfur, September 2004. Credit: J. Carrier
A Sudanese refugee near the Chadian border town of Tine (below) seeks shelter from a sandstorm, February 2004. Credit: UNHCR/H. Caux*

