

# Statement on the Occasion of the Save Darfur Rally

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The humanitarian crisis in Darfur remains grave and demands urgent actions to “Save Darfur.” Three years ago the proxy militias known as the *janjaweed* began a ruthless campaign of death and destruction against the non-Arab population of Darfur, with the support and acquiescence of the Sudanese government in Khartoum. After a brief respite of relative calm last year, there was hope that talks sponsored by the African Union between the government in Khartoum and rebel groups in Darfur might bring an end to the ferocious fighting that terrorizes innocent civilians.

Subsequent events have shattered those hopes. As the security situation deteriorates both in Darfur and across the border in neighboring Chad, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the 2.5 million who have fled their homes and the million more at risk of starvation has become a daunting challenge to the international community. In November of 2005, Pope Benedict XVI urgently appealed to the international community to protect the basic human rights of the people of Darfur.

In early 2004 Bishop John Ricard, then Chairman of the Committee on International Policy, warned that Darfur was “rapidly becoming the newest symbol of human depravity and ethnic cleansing.” Since then, many well-intentioned attempts have been made to stop the spiraling cycle of violence. The U.S. Catholic bishops welcome the Administration’s latest efforts to strengthen the mission of the poorly funded, ill-equipped and undermanned peacekeepers from the African Union who have sought to bring some measure of protection to the helpless civilians of Darfur. Since last year, the bishops have repeatedly urged passage of the “Darfur Peace and Accountability Act.” Our bishops’ conference welcomes the recent action of the House of Representatives, which joined the Senate in approving a version of this important legislation. But with more than 400,000 dead, these measures are not enough.

The U.S. Catholic bishops join with the leaders of other faith communities and all people of good will in an urgent appeal to the President and our elected representatives to strengthen their efforts to bring a definitive end to the intolerable moral and humanitarian crisis in Darfur. Sunday’s Save Darfur Rally should remind our leaders that our nation cannot remain silent in the face of killings, rape and wanton destruction. Our country can and must do more, much more, to defend and protect innocent civilians in Darfur. Anything less would be unworthy of us as a people committed to human life and dignity. We must “Save Darfur.”