

Darfur in 2013 Sounds Awfully Familiar
By Nicholas D. Kristof
20 July 2013

ABGADAM REFUGEE CAMP, Chad — ASIYA TAHIR, 20, had her 4-month-old baby, Mariam, on her back in April when three armed men in Sudanese military uniforms seized her and her sister at a well in Darfur. The soldiers beat Asiya and then — according to both sisters who were interviewed separately — pulled Mariam off her back and laughingly checked to see if she was a boy or a girl. Grabbing Mariam by one arm, a soldier flung her into the distance.

“You’re lucky she’s a girl,” Asiya remembers one of the soldiers saying. “If that were a boy, we would have cut his throat.”

Mariam survived the throw but still has health problems from it. That’s Darfur this year, as Sudan’s state-sponsored genocidal machinery revs up again.

The [resumption of mass atrocities in Darfur](#), after a bit of a lull, has led villagers to flee to this refugee camp, Abgadam, in southeast Chad. It is full of Darfuris who have arrived in recent months after Sudanese government-sponsored militias began a new spasm of murder, rape and pillage against two minority ethnic groups.

Survivors tell the same stories: Armed men, often in army uniforms, burned their villages, killed men, raped women and took everything they had, while calling them slaves or saying that their tribe would be wiped out in Darfur.

It is now [10 years since the Darfur genocide began](#), and we in the news media have mostly tired of the issue. It’s no longer news that the Sudanese government is slaughtering its people.

Yet our silence empowers Sudan’s leaders to pick up where they left off in Darfur. Indeed, survivors say that one of the leaders in this year’s attacks was [Ali Kushayb](#), who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes committed in Darfur a decade ago.

Because of the resurgence of violence, [the United Nations Refugee Agency](#) has hurriedly built this camp for the Darfuris, and it is saving lives. But, while the world is willing to spend more than \$1 billion annually assisting survivors of attacks in Darfur, it seems unwilling to [stand up to President Omar Hassan al-Bashir](#) of Sudan or even speak out very forcefully.

The world has moved on, but the killing continues.

This is the last stop on my annual win-a-trip journey, in which I take a student on a reporting trip to the developing world. The winner, Erin Luhmann of the University of Wisconsin, and I hope to shine a bit more light on the continuing slaughter in Darfur — and on the courage and resilience of the survivors.

Sheltering under one tree here in the Abgadam camp were three small children, all orphans from bloodletting in Darfur. The oldest is a 9-year-old girl named Asiya who is now effectively mother to her brothers, Muhammad, 7, and Yasin, 2. The mother and father were shot dead in their home by a Sudanese government-backed militia, villagers say.

The victims in this year’s wave of attacks are members of two Arab ethnic groups that have not previously been singled out in Darfur, the Salamat (including the three orphans) and the Beni Hussein.

Sudan apparently drove out the Beni Hussein because government officials covet gold that has been discovered on their land. It seems to be expelling the Salamat because it distrusts them and prefers to give their land as a reward to a more loyal Arab group, the Miseriya.

The United Nations [has estimated that more than 300,000 Darfuris](#) were displaced in the first five months of this year — roughly [as many as in the last two years combined](#).

Halima Ahmed, 28, told how a convoy of pickups with mounted machine guns arrived at her village, and soldiers in Sudanese military uniforms then started shooting.

“They shot my husband, and he fell down,” she said. “And then they cut his throat.”

Hawa Mansal, 35, said that all five of her brothers were shot, four fatally. Soldiers debated whether to shoot her as well, but then decided that they shouldn’t kill a woman, she said.

Those killed seem to have been overwhelmingly adult men, but also small numbers of women and children. One Beni Hussein leader here in the Abgadam camp, Sheik Abdullah al-Nazir, told me that five of his sons had been shot dead in the family house; the youngest was 3 years old.

There are no easy solutions when a government commits serial atrocities. But [there are steps that the United States and other countries can take](#) — including speaking out much more forcefully — that raise the cost to Sudan for this kind of behavior.

International criticism has sometimes moderated the brutality of President Bashir. When there’s a spotlight on Darfur, killings and rapes tend to subside a bit. Bipartisan legislation — [the Sudan Peace, Security and Accountability Act of 2013](#) — aims to create such a spotlight. It’s not a panacea, but it may help at the edges.

In the mid-2000s, [an ambitious senator from Illinois complained eloquently](#) that the White House was too silent in the face of evil in Darfur. Is it too much to ask that President Obama recall his own words — and speak out again?

I invite you to comment on this column on my blog, [On the Ground](#), where you can also read the [latest blog posts](#) from this year’s win-a-trip winner, Erin Luhmann. Please also join me on [Facebook](#) and [Google +](#), watch my [YouTube videos](#) and follow me on [Twitter](#).

© New York Times, 2013