

# The gap between narratives and practices

## Darfur: the responses from the Arab World



October 1-2, 2009

Isabelle Birambaux

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## Darfur: the responses from the Arab World

Isabelle Birambaux

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## Introduction

The crisis in Darfur has generated one of the most extensive responses ever prompted by a civil war in Africa. One of the biggest humanitarian operations in the world and one of the most expensive and biggest peacekeeping operations are in Darfur.

The Darfur conflict is a multidimensional issue with ethnic, tribal, cultural, political and economic aspects. Due to the complexity of the conflict, the responses from the different stakeholders involved have been manifold. The multitude of diplomatic initiatives from different organisations and states revealed a gap between narratives and practices, which this conference aims to highlight.

The Arab world, whether as individual states or through the Arab League, was remarkably passive since the conflict erupted until the ICC issued its arrest warrant against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. Arab nations' reactions to the Darfur conflict have reflected a certain inhibition regarding direct action and a general – perhaps nationalistic – aversion to any kind of political, humanitarian or military intervention that might set a precedent for future international interventions.

On 1–2 October 2009, the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) and the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR), with the cooperation of the Norwegian Peacebuilding Center (Noref), brought together a number of experts and policy makers in Tunis to discuss the role of the Arab world – in terms of perceptions and policies – in the conflict in Darfur. This meeting examined the needs and opportunities for a more positive engagement by the Arab world in resolving this crisis, as well as finding ways to engage Western countries and international organisations with the Arab world in redressing massive violations of human rights in Darfur.

What follows are some of the key points from the debate, which are presented here in accordance with the Chatham House rule on confidentiality.

## Darfur in the Arab debate

### ICC indictment and the responsibility to protect: a question of double standards

The Arab response to Darfur was widely felt by the participants to be a reaction to Western double standards regarding international justice and the responsibility to protect civilians. The different approaches of the West and the Arab world towards the Darfur crisis are reflected in the debate in the media. While the media debate in Europe and the US was guided by the responsibility to protect civilians in Darfur and the need for international justice to resolve this crisis, the mainstream Arab debate often seriously questioned or even ignored these principles to the benefit of other perspectives.

The ICC decision to issue an arrest warrant against the Sudanese President al-Bashir has triggered among Arab public opinion an unprecedented wave of media reactions discussing Darfur from the point of view of the concept of international justice, as well as many critiques directed at the Western community. There was a growing suspicion of a Western conspiracy to weaken the Arab and Islamic world, applying double standards of international justice.

Many questioned the political independence of the ICC and its instrumentalisation by Western powerful states. According to some participants, the Islamist and nationalist voices in the Arab world focused especially on the double standards of the Western community,

angrily contrasting the ICC indictment against al-Bashir with the lack of similar reaction against US and Israeli military, as well as against political leaders responsible for a number of war crimes such as those in Iraq, Afghanistan and Gaza. The ICC indictment was seen as an attack against the Arab and Islamic world by the imperialist West. Some participants perceived that some Arab governments even reacted by creating a victimisation narrative for al-Bashir, which was later picked up by the media.

Most participants agreed that this focus on the arrest warrant of al-Bashir by the ICC shifted the attention of Arab public opinion away from the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, which has been downplayed or even disappeared from the picture.

It was noted that Darfur became an arena for a clash of civilisations, whereas no attention was paid to the fact that Darfur has a predominant Muslim population. Instead of being presented as fellow Muslims like the victims in Chechnya and Bosnia, the non Arab Darfurians were viewed as an ethnic fifth column in Sudan. For some participants, most striking was the reaction of some Arab states, such as Egypt, which appeared to be more concerned with what happened with the Muslim population in countries like Bosnia and Chechnya than with the humanitarian crisis in its neighbouring country.

It was pointed out that the ICC indictment displaced the attention from the call for justice for Palestinians to the call for justice for al-Bashir, presenting it as a neocolonial attempt to indict a sitting head of state. It was widely felt that the ICC debate moved attention away from the Darfur conflict in itself and the interests of Sudanese civil society.

Another major question that emerged was the issue of the responsibility to protect the civilians, which also triggered a wave of criticism in the Arab world. There was a sense that the failure of the international community to protect Muslim civilians in Palestine, Iraq, and Yugoslavia just left the plight of the Darfurians ignored.

Some voices expressed their concerns about the strong focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Arab world and pointed out that the critique of double standards can also be directed at the Arab world. It was noted that when the war in Darfur broke out, Arabs' attention was mainly focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the war in Iraq.

Another critique was directed at the Arabs' approach towards atrocities, which mainly depend on who committed them. According to some participants, the reason why the plight of the Palestinians is magnified is because the killer is a foreigner: while relative tolerance prevails when these atrocities are committed by Arab rulers. Black African researchers working on this issue also questioned their relationships to the Arab world as there was a growing consternation about the double standards of the Arab reaction: crying about Bosnia and Chechnya while remaining quiet about Darfur was perceived as very troubling.

It was noted that this apparent lack of interest in the Darfurian cause might be related to the perception of Sudan as not forming part of the Arab region and to the lack of sound information, as it is often ignored that Muslims are killing other Muslims in this conflict.

## Arab grievances towards the West

It was noted that in Arab eyes, the West often supports regimes that oppress their population, as for example the illegal occupation of Israel in the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

It was widely felt that Arab countries considered the ICC indictment as a great conspiracy. Some participants pointed out that Arab political leaders also believe that the testimonies used by ICC were biased as they came from foreigners whose credibility was doubtful, and suspected a retaliation against al-Bashir for his position towards the US. It was suggested that from the Arab perspective, the ICC indictment was seen as part of some sinister Western plot against the Arab world, while from the EU perspective, the indictment seemed a neutral example

of creating justice. One participant questioned whether in reality, the situation in Darfur has become a proxy for a lot of different agendas and whether the ICC is using it as a test case to extend its policies and power.

Some suggested that the Western countries' failure to address these critiques might be responsible for the lack of vital public debate about justice and accountability in the Arab world. One participant pointed out that as well as a gap between narratives and practices of the Arab world concerning Darfur, there also exists a gap between narratives and practices in the West. The Arab public debate about Darfur thus highlights the lack of discussions in the West.

It was also noted that unlike Western history, the concept of humanitarian intervention didn't enter into Arab history, as no war has ever been launched for humanitarian reasons. This is the reason why the Arab world finds it difficult to understand that a country can declare a war for humanitarian reasons and not in defence of its own national interests. This might explain the waves of criticism against the US, which is suspected of instrumentalising a humanitarian intervention to protect its own strategic interests, such as oil.

## Arab states' political responses towards the conflict in Darfur

Some voices spoke out in defence of the Arab world as during the last few decades, the Arabs have faced severe challenges related to their own development and infrastructure, as well as the nuclear aspirations of Iran and the war against terrorism. Therefore the blame for the situation in Darfur can't be put on the Arab world alone, as the challenges the Arab world has to deal with go beyond their capacities.

Some experts underlined the amount of effort made by the Arabs, both collectively and individually, to curb the humanitarian crisis in Darfur prior to the arrest warrant of al-Bashir. The Arab League in particular undertook an incredibly high number of initiatives in

the field of peace negotiations, international diplomacy, peacekeeping efforts and to introduce fair judicial trials.

According to some opinions, the effort of the Arab League is such that it is providing more assistance than any country in the world, through refugee aid initiatives to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, and through the financial support of peacekeeping operations of the African Union. Nevertheless, some experts reported the absence of Arab and Islamic NGOs on the ground, except for a Saudi Arabian presence for a few months.

It was underlined that the concerns about the Darfur situation were also expressed at the political level through the involvement of the Arab League in peace negotiations with the armed movements and other stakeholders in Darfur.

The report published by the Arab League in 2004 was considered proof of these efforts to help revive the peace process, to deal with war crimes and to finally relaunch the Darfur dialogue. But according to one participant, this report should be translated into English in order to engage a more active dialogue with the West.

## No joint actions and common strategy

Experts agree that despite all these efforts, the Arabs didn't develop any common strategy in dealing with Darfur through the Arab League.

It was hoped that the Arab League would have the role of a full partner with the African Union as the Darfur issue is both an Arab and African issue. It was questioned why despite the number of its initiatives, the Arab League never announced itself the leader of such a peace process and why its peacekeeping efforts remained relatively low in comparison with those of the African Union. Some noted that in 2006, the Arab League had the opportunity to play a much more important role but it did not take this chance,

instead remaining behind the Government of Sudan. In many issues, the response of the Arab League was the response of the Sudanese Government. Some participants explained that the Arabs' stance was defensive in order to protect Sudan, especially because of the suspicion of double standards from the West. Outside intervention was seen as a threat to internal stability and national sovereignty. It was widely felt that the fear of intervention was a driving force for the Government of Sudan to respond so harshly to these discussions, and it was also understood by the Arab League as a threat to the stability in Sudan due to the many interests in Sudanese oil and regime change.

Some experts recorded that many Arab countries did not forget how al-Bashir supported the Arab world during the Gulf War and how he stood against America in support of the Gulf countries. Arab leaders were especially fearful that the ICC indictment could be used as a precedent against a sitting head of government, which might threaten their own integrity and sovereignty. The ICC's verdict to issue an arrest warrant for the Sudanese president was seen as an unprecedented event. Some remarked that this will certainly have an impact on the Arab world regarding international law, and the concept of sovereignty and immunity enjoyed by presidents. Some feared that the ICC indictment might increase the Arabs' suspicions when committing themselves to international rules as past experiences have proven how the West often applies double standards when dealing with international rules.

## Competition

One of the reasons mentioned by the participants for the lack of Arab joint action may be linked to the numerous initiatives some Arab states undertook individually. Qatar, Libya and Egypt were independently active in seeking solutions to the crisis. But most of these initiatives were motivated by the strategic interests these states have in Sudan, and issues related to their own national security, like political stability, water and security in the Red Sea.

It was acknowledged that these initiatives also reflected their own regional ambitions. They are competing with each other to place themselves on the Arab map and be recognised as regional leaders. Nevertheless, it was felt that competition between Egypt, Libya and Qatar is not taking place with the strategy of using the Arab League as a peace leader negotiator in the region. Although the arrest warrant against al-Bashir paved the way for a greater Arab unity for a while, the Arab League was not in a position to go beyond its own internal fragmentation and the competing initiatives of its member states, which undermine its global efficiency.

There was a sense that the engagement of several international initiatives that don't complement each other, but rather contradict themselves, made it extremely difficult to solve the crisis.

It was pointed out that despite all the Gulf funds – which overwhelmingly represent the most important source of foreign direct investment in Sudan – most of the humanitarian aid and resources to support the Africa peace facility came primarily from the EU and not from the Arab League. Even Canada provides more aid than the 22 members of the Arab League put together.

Some reproached the Western world for being the first to take the initiative in dealing with the Darfur crisis, and therefore being in some way to be responsible for the marginalisation of the Arab world. The West is suspected of trying to change the political regime in Sudan hoping that Sudan would adopt new policies regarding its internal problems in Darfur and in the South.

# African Union versus Arab League: Policies and practical capacities in conflict management and mediation

It was also highlighted that beyond the gap of the narratives between the Arab world and the West, there was a gap between the Sub-Saharan Africans and the Arabs' response.

## Response of the African Union

By the time the African Union involved itself in Darfur, the crisis was already international. One participant defined the African Union's response as a regional approach to an international problem. It was perceived that due to the terrible Rwanda experience, this response moves from the principle of non interference to what was called non indifference, which means having a proactive involvement to solve the crisis. Like the rest of the international community, the African Union was blamed for not doing anything to stop the massacres during the genocide in Rwanda.

The peacekeeping efforts of the African Union in Darfur from 2004–2005 were seen as successful. According to one expert, the Abuja peace process turned out to be a failure for the African Union because it lost control over the negotiations due to the so-called deadline diplomacy, which was mainly driven by the Quartet (US, UK, France and EU). For him, the reason the negotiations failed was that various actors rushed to achieve an agreement, regardless of whether compliance mechanisms were in place or not. This deadline diplomacy undermined the credibility of the African Union with the different Sudanese factions and IDPs.

It was pointed out that on the military track, the African Union peace mission also failed because of its lack of financial resources. The African Union was too ambitious in its mandate to protect the population without having sufficient resources. The lack of money and the inability of the African Union to lead the decision making in the peace process were cited as the reasons why the African Union lost control over the Darfur peace talks. This failure was seen as the major motivation to transform the African Union's peacekeeping mission into a UN mission.

## African Union versus Arab League

It was widely felt that the African Union was far ahead of the Arab League in terms of its institutional architecture, political will and support of most of its member states. It was noted that the African Union has both the mechanisms and the regime in place to intervene and deal with a conflict like the one in Darfur. The African Union was considered to represent the most pragmatic umbrella to deal with such a conflict. It was estimated that due to the democratic developments in African countries, Africans were more prone than Arabs to act in the international system following the international rules and thus embrace the ICC and international humanitarian principles around it.

It was noted that in comparison, the Arab League didn't fulfill the expectations from the outside in terms of conflict prevention, management mechanisms, human rights, good governance and responsibility to protect, as none of these issues were voiced by the Arab League.

It was questioned whether these differences between the African Union and the Arab League could be related to the different political cultures and historical processes that the Arab world and Africa went through. One participant advanced the argument that political liberalisation happened in Africa but not in the Arab world, and believed that because of their political openness; Africans were able to debate interventions selectively, while Arab countries didn't get to the point

where they were able to debate these issues in a more open manner. It was noted that in the African context however, civil society has proven to be a bit ahead of their heads of state, requiring their leaders to be accountable for their actions.

One participant suggested having a closer look at what the African, Sub-Saharan and Horn of Africa regions have gone through in the recent years. Since 1990, there have been a series of failing or weak states in these areas, as well as so-called new wars linked with insurgencies and state disintegration, like those in Sierra Leone and Somalia. The Arab world has a completely different contemporary political history and has been marked by persistent authoritarianism and interstate wars like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the Iran-Iraq war. Although Africans and Arabs have similar responses when it comes to concerns about neocolonialism or imperialism, Africans seem to be more in favour of interventions due to their historical background.

Some argued that there is no competition between the African and Arab strategies but rather that it is difficult to give each state a role and to coordinate that role. Regarding the relationship between the Arab League and the African Union, it was mentioned that the disagreement is not between the two organisations but rather between the different member states.

## Identity question

Beyond the divisions experienced by the two organisations, some pointed out that it was important to look at the identity problems in Darfur, because this issue is linked with the roots of the conflict. It was stressed that racial prejudice between Arabs and Africans influences the dynamics surrounding the conflict as well as the efforts for a successful peace process.

As the ruling class, Arabs project themselves as a white culture and consider black people as slaves. According to some participants, the Government of Sudan considers the leadership of the Darfuri movements as

low class citizens, which has implications for the process as a whole. The Sudanese Government made concessions to the international community but not to the Darfurians, which contributed to the failure of the DPA. On the other hand, it was pointed out that Darfurians have very strong feelings against Arabs and against northern Sudanese.

Some argued that the problem can't be limited to the identity and racial question alone; it is also important to include the political and religious problems between the North and the South.

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## Debate in the Security Council

### Afro-Arab Division on UNMIS (Resolution 1706) and ICC

It was highlighted that the Afro-Arab divisions reflected themselves in the Security Council. Resolution 1706 adopted by the Security Council in 2006 authorising a UN mission (UNMIS) in the South was seen as a very problematic move, because of the tensions it triggered among Arabs and Africans. There was a clear division between the Arab and the African members of the Security Council. Qatar, which was the only Arab member of the Security Council, abstained on resolution 1706, along with China and Russia. Even the Africans were divided over that resolution, especially Sub-Saharan and North Africans. These divisions introduced a kind of schizophrenia and caused tensions between the African Union, the Arabs and the West.

It was believed that with resolution 1706, al-Bashir was trying to play the neocolonial card to win the sympathy of AU members but it failed for three reasons. First, because the African Union adopted the most interventionist security regime in the world for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Second, because they decided to intervene, as the memory of Rwanda was still in their mind. Third, because the AU was frustrated with the obstacles Khartoum laid in the way of its peacekeeping efforts, including the obstruction of AMIS' implementation.

The participants also noted a clear division between Arab and black members of the African Union regarding the ICC indictment: Botswana, Ghana, Chad and South Africa were the only countries to object to the Libya-led initiative to not cooperate with the ICC. Both the UN and AU Security Councils strongly disagreed on the ICC issue. For the African Union, it was clear that the desire to fight impunity shouldn't be an obstacle to peace.

## The UN response to the Darfur crisis

It was explained that long before the adoption of resolution 1706 in 2006, the UN Security Council was trapped in a debate on Darfur, with Sudan deploying its diplomatic skills to either block or to delay any UN actions in Darfur.

Participants said that after a report from the Commission of Human Rights, the UN began to pay attention to the Darfur conflict. As Kofi Annan gave its annual speech for the Commission on Human Rights in April 2004, at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the beginning of the Rwanda genocide, he pleaded that Darfur should not be another Rwanda. Prior to that session, the Commission sent a team to Darfur, interviewing people crossing the border and wrote in record time a report that should have been released before the session ended. On the basis of this report, the EU and the US adopted a strong resolution regarding Darfur. As pressure increased, Sudan tried to delay actions so that the Commission would have 11 months before he next session. The Government of Sudan began to skillfully negotiate and the Commission accepted a deal with Sudan, according to which Sudan would let the team enter its territory in exchange for the Commission not publishing the report.

It was explained that at the same time Sudan persuaded the African group, with the support of the Arab members, to impede the US-EU resolution. Following that fiasco, pressure was mounting on the Security Council to address the situation. It was only in late May 2004 that the Council adopted its first formal statement on Darfur, condemning the violence. It expressed its concerns about the Sudanese Government impeding humanitarian assistance, called for the deployment of a monitoring mission in Darfur and expressed support for the AU to alleviate the situation.

Although two resolutions condemning the violence were adopted and regular reporting from the Secretary General was requested, it was decided not to take any steps that would have a tangible impact on the ground such as deploying a UN mission in Darfur. The efforts of the African Union soon became a perfect excuse for everybody not to take action, as due to the UN agenda it could not contemplate the deployment of another peacekeeping operation.

One participant stressed how fascinating it was to see how a developing country with limited means like Sudan could basically force the Security Council to bend to its will. He said that in May 2005, there was great pressure for the UN to step in, to relieve the African Union, as it was felt that a UN deployment would be more effective in Darfur. The resolution was adopted, on which Qatar, China and Russia abstained. But Sudan succeeded in challenging the Council and having the resolution rejected. He pointed out that the fact that a developing country was able to block the Security Council's course of action was massively significant. He further explained that in September 2006, al-Bashir came to New York challenging the international community by reproaching the UN on how its member states could presume to explain how justice works in a country like Sudan, with a century old history of justice and courts.

Although everybody agreed that the atrocities in Darfur were unacceptable, differences appeared when it came to adopting measures: China, which was economically engaged in Sudan emerged as the

strongest advocate of caution and restraints on Darfur. Russia was against taking any strong measures against Sudan, and both Algeria and Pakistan tended to show solidarity for Khartoum. All these UNSC member states abstained on the 'meatiest' part of the resolution related to atrocities, sanctions and the ICC, with the exception of Russia which voted in favour.

## The African Union–UN hybrid operation

It was stressed that the Sudanese government was not only able to block key resolutions on Darfur but it also successfully delayed some key UN decisions, a move that would lead to a subsequent transformation of the conception of UN intervention.

At the end of 2005, certain members began suggesting a transition from the African Union, which was not able to provide an adequate level of protection, to a UN operation with a single UN mission to cover all of Sudan, including Darfur. The African Union initially accepted this plan but later backtracked and refused the transition due to very skilled Sudanese diplomatic activities.

The reasons mentioned were that after two years of maintaining a very difficult operation on the ground when no other actors were ready to step in, the African Union was not ready to relinquish control merely because the West appeared to be ready to take it on.

In late November, the African Union came up with a new concept of a peacekeeping operation that would involve the UN providing a short term strengthening of the African Union's operation on the ground and the creation of a new hybrid operation between the AU and UN. However, it took 10 months to adopt the resolution to create that hybrid operation.

Meanwhile, Khartoum insisted that the African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) should be predominantly African and started to create many bureaucratic obstacles. This

made it extremely difficult for the UN to pursue the deployment because of the harsh conditions set by Khartoum. For the first time, the UN created an operation for which it assumed full financial responsibility, but for which it would not retain full command.

Another reason mentioned for the delay of the deployment was that it was agreed to fill all positions jointly, which appeared to be a difficult process with long negotiations. Participants expressed their concerns about the UNAMID's structure, as there were two separate operations in one country. The Government of Sudan agreed to an operation in Darfur, but only in principle as it soon became clear that they would not permit it until certain conditions were met.

It was widely felt that the engagement of the UN in Darfur would have a broader implication for the UN as an institution, as it changed the peacekeeping concept and generated a new kind of partnership between the DPKO and the AU Commission. It was pointed out that it created a very new relationship between the African Union and the UN, which was considered as a positive development.

## Negative effects of framing UNAMID as a humanitarian intervention

The insistence on establishing a peacekeeping operation was perceived as distracting the debate from the peace negotiations. According to one participant, this focus on the peacekeeping operation was in a sense responsible for the counterproductive deadline diplomacy during the Abuja talks, as the stakeholders were in a hurry to reach a peace agreement.

It was highlighted that the focus on deploying a humanitarian intervention also contributed to the Sudanese rejection of the peacekeeping mission in Darfur, which fundamentally opposed it and helped the Sudanese Government to portray itself as the victim of neocolonial campaigns. It was felt that in the Arab and

African context, there was a certain resonance to this, as the memory is still fresh of how humanitarian arguments have been abused to justify missions that had geopolitical purposes, as for example during the war in Iraq.

It was noted that the framing of UNAMID as a humanitarian intervention inflated the expectations of what the UN peacekeeping mission could achieve. The high expectations UNAMID created both in the international community and in Darfur triggered a wave of disappointment.

## Responses from the West: EU, US

### Response from the US

As regards the US response to the Darfur crisis, it was highlighted that at the beginning, the US reaction was not aligned with the humanitarian, historical, political or regional realities of Darfur. It was only in 2004 that Darfur began to be noticed, one year prior to the signature of the CPA between the North and the South and in the same year of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. In September 2004, George W. Bush, Colin Powell and some members of the US Congress called the situation in Darfur genocide. This meant that the urgencies of the Darfurians were broadcast fervently throughout the US.

Nevertheless, it has been remarked that US policy between 2004 and 2008 was not that which would have been required to deal with genocide. Instead, US policy became more a rhetoric of threats. But despite the harsh discourse, US policy also consisted of relief aid, supporting the AU-UN hybrid mission, engaging in peace negotiations and indirect support of the ICC indictment.

The influence of activism over the US response was a question at the centre of the debate. Some participants

explained how activism has played an important role in guiding public opinion and policymaking, especially since 2004. The question was raised whether public opinion was steering US politics or if it was the other way round. Some participants pointed out that public opinion on Darfur was useful for the White House as a means of pressure and a way of legitimising their policy towards Darfur, especially during the Bush administration.

The Save Darfur Coalition was perceived as the most successful of the activist NGOs, as the one that has a real influence on US policy. It was the Save Darfur Coalition that in summer 2004 sounded the alarm about genocide and ethnic cleansing and stressed the need for urgent and decisive action. It was highlighted that its lobbying and activism have changed US public opinion and the behaviour of some policy makers towards a very supportive role of the ICC. Nevertheless, one participant disagreed on that point and explained that the support of the Save Darfur Coalition to ICC came relatively late and underlined that it neither called for military actions nor for a regime change. But it was widely felt that the mobilisation for supporting Darfur in the US was significant, and largely because of the Save Darfur Coalition campaigns; Sudan ended up having a very high profile both in US and international media.

It was argued that due to pressure and criticism by the activist community for not acting sooner, Obama decided in March 2009 to name retired Air Force General J. Scott Gration as the special Envoy to Sudan. This nomination came shortly after the official ICC indictment of al-Bashir and his subsequent decision to expel 13 NGOs from Darfur.

During the first few months, Gration's efforts focused on humanitarian relief to fill the gap left by the expelled NGOs. Although most participants praised Gration's efforts and diplomatic activities aimed at formulating a comprehensive policy towards Sudan, they also criticised his lack of diplomatic skills when dealing with Darfurian leaders and with the media. It was pointed out that his personal character has

triggered a strong opposition against him among leading Darfurians activists, who asked the White House to fire him.

According to the participants, Gration helped to change the policy of the US administration; as during the Bush administration, the priority was to develop cooperation between the Government of Sudan and the CIA on intelligence and the war against terrorism. The special envoy to Sudan appears to be attempting to pave the way to normalising the relation with Khartoum, and meets with rebel factions in an attempt to bring them together and facilitate a peace process. Gration moved away from the discourse that there is an ongoing genocide towards a more integrative policy approach, a position which apparently was not supported by the rest of the administration.

Some conclude that if Gration was to be removed, nobody else would take over this approach of engagement as there is an increasing call for a harsher line of action against Sudan, including regime change.

Nevertheless, voices from the Arab world pointed out that Gration's approach was wrong. The main critiques directed at him rely on the fact that Gration is not consulting the key US partners and is not coordinating his actions. It is argued that instead of being worried about whether the elections will happen on time, he should be concerned about how the elections will actually happen.

## **The EU's role towards the Darfur crisis from 2003 until today**

As for the EU's response, it was pointed out that the EU reaction came relatively late, as the cooperation was suspended due to the military coup by al-Bashir. In the early 1990s, there was little engagement in Sudan by the EU and the financial engagement in the region was not very strong as the crisis erupted. The first EU reactions came when the critical situation of refugees became obvious and it was not until 2004 that the European Commission started to mobilise funds for

Darfur. Now the EU is providing over EUR 5 million in humanitarian aid and development assistance, and the Commission action contributes EUR 3 million to support the joint mediation. Since 2005, Darfur has become the EU's greatest humanitarian operation.

Nevertheless, it was noted that the EU deployed more rapidly in Lebanon than it did in Sudan, highlighting that the EU is prioritising its neighbourhood and doesn't look at conflicts in faraway countries. It was only in April 2004 that the EU began to mobilise politically.

It was noted that when it comes to political engagement, the 27 EU member states tend to deal bilaterally with Arab states, which was mainly explained by the fact that the EU doesn't have a clear structure in its foreign policy affairs. A difference of treatment towards the Arab and African states was also noted. As far as its engagement is concerned, the EU member states tend to engage more with Africans than with Arab states. The EU engagement with Arab states tends to deal with environment and trade, rather than looking at conflicts, as illustrated by the development of the Euro-Mediterranean Union.

Nevertheless, it was argued that in the field of peace negotiations, the EU had been active as for example during the Middle East Quartet efforts on the peace process between Palestine and Israel. It was also highlighted that with the EU Special Representative (EUSR), the EU maintains relationships with the Arab League through the Gulf Cooperation Council on an economic and technical level. Through that relationship, the Arab League was able to pledge USD 150 million for the African AMIS mission and the EU ended up being the main donor, thanks to which the AMIS mission became possible. It was said that the EUSR played an important role in efforts to bring Muslims together through joint negotiations, regular contact to persuade the Government of Sudan and of South Sudan, and that it has been quite proactive in the quest for a peaceful settlement in Darfur.

# Recommendations

## General recommendations

- It was recommended that in the context of Darfur, a focus on Sudan's resources should not be ignored.
- Mapping the interests of the different stakeholders in the region was suggested, which would probably be a great aid to better understand the situation and find commonality between the extremely diverse interests in the region.
- A geostrategic and regional approach that would seriously take into account the neighbouring countries was also recommended.
- Suggested issues to consider were Libya's long term interests in Chad in North West Africa, Egypt's concerns over the integrity of waters and other security concerns. An analysis of those interests would help to draw the lessons of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) where the sustained peace talks were underpinned by the interests of neighbouring countries.
- Another key aspect would be an analysis of the issue of identity in the conflict. Participants pointed out the difficulties of settling any discussions to define Sudanese, Arab and/or African identities. Clear cultural differences between the Arab and African identities in Sudan have been recognised, and in that context it was highlighted that Arab chauvinism is an important point associated with the lack of an Arab response.
- It was recommended that the international community assist Sudan to build a multicultural state based on citizenship where everybody has equal rights.
- Framing the issues in Sudan multilaterally with

special attention to its civil society was recommended. Whether or not Sudanese civil society cares about the ICC and about international legal instruments was called into question. It was stressed that unlike other countries in the region, Sudan has much experience of democracy, and justice was carried out under its own legal institutions. Sudanese civil society might therefore understand that ICC is not going to address their local problems and the long term future of the country.

- It was recommended that consulting efforts on the ground be undertaken in order to acquire concrete knowledge of the population's real needs. More information for a peace agreement would thus be available.
- Listening to Sudanese civil society was suggested when it asked the US not to deal with Darfur separately from the South. It was noted that the notion of one state's solution is not an Arab vision but should be seen as a wish coming from civil society as a whole.
- One participant underlined the need to deal with the ICC position more cautiously, to suspend the arrest warrant for a year based on Art. 16 of the Rome Statute, and to give Sudan time to prosecute the criminals guilty of abuses in Darfur. From civil society's point of view, it was noted that the Sudanese population would be more interested in establishing and strengthening its local institutions. According to this opinion, the majority of civil society in Sudan fully supports the ICC, but wants peace first. It was also believed that the arrest warrant would further complicate the humanitarian crisis, provoking a strong reaction from the Government of Sudan, as was the case with the decision to expel 13 NGOs from the country.

## To the West

- The Arab world believes that the West is leading a monologue rather than entering into dialogue. This is one of the reasons why there is a pressing need to build confidence in international organisations like

the ICC which many believe to only abide by Western standards. Despite the efforts made by Arab NGOs, intellectuals, and many States to deal with the Darfur crisis, the ICC has framed the whole issue.

- It was considered important to release the anger within the Arab world and thus recommended that the West should consider the Arabs as equals and not as subordinates, by seriously developing a dialogue.
- It was felt that there is a strong need for a new Western policy in the Middle East. According to experts, there will be no change in Arab attitudes and stands without a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nevertheless, it was considered that it was very risky to link Darfur with the Israeli-Palestine conflict. The Darfur conflict could be resolved within months whereas the Israeli-Palestine conflict could last years.
- This new orientation of Western policy could also apply to the crisis in Darfur. Sudan has a strong need to focus on political stability, human development, and a transition towards a democratic system. A more democratic and transparent political system would be the key to having fair trials, which seems to be a better option than the ICC indictment. By engaging with these suggestions and admitting this debate, the US and European governments would have a chance to revive practical policies that would be more in tune with the Arab world to afterwards pave the way for a stronger Arab engagement in Darfur.
- The need for a better understanding of the regional dynamics was pointed out. Therefore, the recommendation to appoint somebody who would be responsible for everything, especially on the ground, was formulated. It would help to achieve better coordination of the different actions.

## To the Arab World and the Africans

- Questioning Arab–African relations was recommended.

- It was suggested that having the Arab League and the African Union jointly take the lead to resolve the problem in Sudan won't work. One of the reasons mentioned is that Arab countries are exhausted of dealing with this long history of conflict. This means that the Arab League won't engage in Sudan, as it gives unconditional political support to the Government of Sudan with no concern for the humanitarian crisis.
- Another recommendation was to bring together the different initiatives of Egypt and Qatar in the mediation process and connect them to each other.
- A more consolidated Arab League is seen as necessary in order to permit the league to take over initiatives and follow them through. But the participants pointed out that the member states gave no signs of striving to achieve this position.
- There was a sense that the basic problem in dealing with the Arab League lies in dealing with the member states, as there is no single voice of the Arab League. Furthermore, if the League would like to play a significant role, it would need the practical mechanisms to implement its decisions on the ground, and commit itself to having a strategy with its member states.
- Another recommendation was to question if the tremendous number of initiatives on all levels undertaken by some Arab states in the Arab League are really coordinated and led by the League itself. The key question raised was if these initiatives were actually directed at solving the crisis, or whether they had more to do with competition among the League's member states, unable to lead a coherent strategy.

## To the EU and UN

- The EU should take a bigger role in the conflict, including in its relationships, especially to lobby the Arab states.
- The EU has been active but now it has to define its role, for example as a driver for a closer relationship with other nations.

- The EU should work with the US to build a troika which includes China.
- A joint EU–UN achieved mediation is desirable. It would bring together the dynamics of the chief mediation with the hopefully constructive recommendations that may arise from the Mbeki exercise.
- The international community should multitask, as there is a need to bring a joint international approach into play, to continue the military engagement, and to have an effective UNAMID on the ground.
- A comprehensive approach to Sudan that includes Darfur and the conflict between North and South is needed in order to understand the overall situation.
- A framework to reinstate dialogue with the Arab world is recommendable in order to avoid the issue of a clash of civilizations.

## Strategies to raise the awareness and concerns of Arab public opinion about Darfur

- It was underlined that the superficial approach to the serious humanitarian situation in Darfur reflected the lack of trustworthy and sound information about the conflict in Arab media. Some analysts mentioned the need to talk about the suffering of the Darfuri population in order to change Arab public opinion. Thus, one of the strategies to raise awareness should be to improve the flow of information about the Darfur conflict. It was recommended that the US and the EU should support Arab NGOs and media organisations with a serious interest in Darfur, independent of their points of view, as attempts to influence media reports could be understood as a form of cultural imperialism.
- As a consequence, the efforts to engage Arab public opinion on Darfur should also take into account the position of nationalist and Islamist sentiments in the

media, as most Western efforts are generally interpreted as an attempt to weaken the cohesion of the Islamic nations, spreading a Western cultural and political hegemony and also securing control over the Sudanese natural resources.

- The importance of sound information is considered to be a key point for raising awareness among the Arab world. The reasons for poor reports on Darfur in the Arab media were given as: a lack of professional training, severely limited resources to finance media professionals and send them into the field, the difficulty of access to the information, and censorship. There is therefore a great need for assistance from the West in order to strengthen the Arab information network. The media coverage has been limited, as all sources of information about the war were coming from the Sudanese Government, neglecting to identify the Darfurians as Muslims. This led to a focus on the political evolution of the conflict, regardless of the humanitarian crisis.
- Support of independent voices, such as bloggers or media that have credibility in the Arab world, was also recommended to raise awareness among the Arab public opinion, a CNN or *Al Jazeera* effect for Darfur would be necessary.
- The feeling of Western oppression is expressed as a moral outrage at the double standard with regards international justice. There are also suspicions of Western conspiracies to weaken the Arab and Islamic world. This is a basic and longstanding problem that poisoned all Western attempts to try to change the opinion in the Arab world. If this is not resolved, efforts to improve the flow and quality of information will be only of limited use.



# FRIDE

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The crisis in Darfur has generated one of the most extensive responses ever prompted by a civil war in Africa. One of the biggest humanitarian operations in the world and one of the most expensive and biggest peacekeeping operations are in Darfur.

The Darfur conflict is a multidimensional issue with ethnic, tribal, cultural, political and economic aspects. Due to the complexity of the conflict, the responses from the different stakeholders involved have been manifold. The multitude of diplomatic initiatives from different organisations and states revealed a gap between narratives and practices, which this conference aims to highlight.

The Arab world, whether as individual states or through the Arab League, was remarkably passive since the conflict erupted until the ICC issued its arrest warrant against Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. Arab nations' reactions to the Darfur conflict have reflected a certain inhibition regarding direct action and a general - perhaps nationalistic - aversion to any kind of political, humanitarian or military intervention that might set a precedent for future international interventions.

On 1-2 October 2009, the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) and the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR), with the cooperation of the Norwegian Peacebuilding Center (Noref), brought together a number of experts and policy makers in Tunis to discuss the role of the Arab world - in terms of perceptions and policies - in the conflict in Darfur. This meeting examined the needs and opportunities for a more positive engagement by the Arab world in resolving this crisis, as well as finding ways to engage Western countries and international organisations with the Arab world in redressing massive violations of human rights in Darfur.

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