

# Not Angry? Pay Attention.

by *Jeremy M. Barker*

**R**emember Abu Ghraib? If so, you appear to be in a minority amongst average Americans. But if you do recall that scandal du jour, here's a trick question: What's happening with that debacle now?

Americans have a terribly short attention span when it comes to bug issues in the media. When a report on Republican insensitivities regarding that sad page in our history appeared in this section, it was already old news in the sense that, apparently, no one cared anymore. Instead, America's attention had already shifted to what was unfolding in the western Darfur region of Sudan.

Sudan—a nation torn by decades of civil war and internecine violence—has been home to the single greatest humanitarian crisis of recent years. Government-backed Arab militias known as the Janjawid have carried out genocide against the mostly black African

population of Darfur. More than 1.2 million people have been displaced, including an estimated 120,000 who have fled to neighboring Chad, and according to international aid agencies, a dry summer and interrupted spring planting season are likely harbingers of a coming famine threatening almost a million more lives.

It seemed like things were looking up for the victims in Darfur at the beginning of July, when both Secretary of State Colin Powell and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan paid the region whirlwind visits that focused international attention on the debacle. But

international action against the Sudanese government has gotten bogged down in the bureaucratic process, and international attention has waned.

But that's not because of a steady stream of news about the issue. On July 19, Amnesty International released a thoroughly researched report detailing the "pattern of systematic and unlawful attacks on civilians in North, West and South Darfur states" in which "men are killed, women are raped and villagers are forcibly displaced from their homes which are burnt; their crops and cattle, their main means of subsistence, are burnt or looted."

And on July 23, in perhaps the most significant move the U.S. government has yet made, Congress officially declared the events in Darfur a "genocide." The choice of words is significant—according to a 1948 international

treaty signed in the wake of the Holocaust, the U.S. is legally compelled to act in cases of genocide. As such, the use of that word has become a fraught issue of semantics. During the Rwandan genocide, the Clinton administration quibbled about the use of the word because of its ramifications.

Now Europe is joining the U.S. in pushing for international action to be taken against Sudan, but the people just don't seem to know. Sudan has been pushed off the front pages and the evening news, and no doubt will be wholly forgotten by the next installment of this column. ♦



*Bill Hogarth*

**COLIN POWELL**