

Letters

Two things we must do now if we are serious about Darfur

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From Prof Debarati Guha-Sapir.

Sir, The UN Human Rights Council agreed on December 12 to send a high-level mission to Sudan's Darfur to probe allegations of abuses against civilians. Given that violence and atrocities have been widely reported by the press, UN agencies and parliamentary missions since 2003 there is no reason to think that this human rights investigation could shame the Sudanese government into stopping the violence or agreeing to a UN peacekeeping force.

We estimate that about 125,000 died between 2003 and 2005 in Darfur as a direct result of the conflict. About one in five was due to violence. During 2006, mortality in Darfur decreased below emergency levels. On the other hand, malnutrition has steadily increased, reaching near famine conditions recently in some areas.

Of the 6m inhabitants in Darfur, nearly 4m are currently affected by the conflict. Although insecurity is clearly a major barrier to provision of aid, UN data show 80 per cent of the affected population in Darfur was accessible for most of 2006. Yet only a shameful 3 per cent of the Unicef appeal for Darfur had received funding and not a penny was received for nutrition. The World Food Programme had to reduce its food rations due to shortage of cash.

There is no question that human rights violations have occurred in Darfur and should be documented and redressed. And yes, insecurity is a problem and needs urgent resolution. But the Darfur humanitarian appeals have remained unfulfilled even for populations who were accessible. If we are serious about Darfur, we must urgently do two things. First and foremost, the UN must move towards sanctions that cut closer to the bone - for example by targeting petroleum revenues. This will require persuading China, which sits on the Security Council and holds the oil concession in Darfur. Second, we must increase emergency health and food aid to stop malnutrition sliding into widespread mortality. The emergency funding requirements are so derisory that it would be unconscionable to allow the humanitarian situation to worsen.

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