

Darfur peacekeepers sought

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terrified that the same soldiers who expelled them from their homes and villages may now be sent supposedly to protect them," she added.

"With the looming threat of fresh military action by the Sudanese army, the Security Council must deploy peacekeeping urgently to protect civilians," warned Peter Takirambudde, Africa director of Human Rights Watch (HRW).

"Adopting a resolution is a crucial first step toward stopping the bloodshed in Darfur, but member states must also do all they can to compel Sudan to accept a U.N. force," he said.

So far, however, even the United States, which joined with Britain last week in submitting a draft resolution that would authorize a deployment of up to 17,300 troops and another 3,000 police, appears unwilling to exert serious pressure on Khartoum to accept such a force, which would replace an increasingly ineffective 7,000-strong African Union (AU) peace-monitoring operation whose mandate is set to expire at the end of next month.

Washington, which has denounced the violence that has been directed by the government and government-backed Arab militias mainly against Darfur's African minorities as "genocide", dispatched its top Africa official, assistant secretary of state Jendayi Frazer, to Khartoum late last week.

But Frazer, who noted before setting out from Washington that the security situation in Darfur was "deteriorating very quickly", was reportedly unable even to secure a meeting with President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who has repeatedly rejected appeals that he accept a U.N. force mandated to impose peace on the region.

Despite her apparent failure, Washington's ambassador at the U.N., John Bolton told reporters Monday that he wanted the pending resolution approved by the Council "in the next couple days".

"The time for talk is over," he said. "It is time for action. It is time for this Council to uphold its responsibility and pass a resolution immediate-

ly authorizing the deployment of U.N. forces."

Still, most analysts believe that the Council is unlikely to approve any resolution that would impose such a force on Khartoum without its approval. Sudanese government representatives chose not to attend Monday's closed-door Security Council session on Darfur.

Diplomatically, there doesn't appear to be any willingness to put serious pressure on the government of Sudan, other than theoretical pressure," according to Colin Thomas-Jensen, an analyst at the International Crisis Group (ICG) here. "There's lots of bluster, especially from the U.S., but no sense of real action."

Russia and China — both permanent members of the Council — have expressed strong reservations about the draft, although it remains unclear if either would veto it if it came to a vote. Qatar, currently the Council's sole Arab member, has also strongly supported Khartoum's position.

Washington, however, has shown itself increasingly reluctant over the past year to exert strong pressure on Russia and China over the situation in Darfur due to the much higher priority it has attached to gaining their cooperation in its growing confrontation with Iran.

The Bush administration has called on the Council to impose sanctions against Tehran if it fails to accede to demands that it stop enriching uranium for its nuclear program by the end of this month.

The month-long war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon — and the European Union's agreement to send some 7,000 peacekeeping troops there to police a fragile cease-fire — has also made it less likely that the U.N. will be able to

quickly put together the kind of "robust" U.N. peacekeeping force that most analysts believe will be necessary to stop the violence in Darfur, a region that is roughly the size of France.

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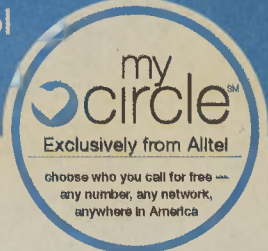
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