

African Union summit focuses on Darfur

LANDRY HAARMANN | STAFF WRITER

On Jan. 30, at an African Union summit, Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir was blocked from becoming leader of the African Union for the second time. The following day an A.U. peacekeeper was shot in the war-torn Sudanese region of Darfur.

Instead of al-Bashir receiving the position, members of the African Union decided to elect President John Kufuor of Ghana.

According to The Boston Herald, "Sudan's government has been accused of retaliating against civilians and supporting paramilitary groups from nomadic Arab tribes blamed for some of the worst atrocities in the conflict."

Sophomore Becky Pittman thinks such allegations may be one of the reasons the African Union blocked al-Bashir from becoming their next elected leader.

"It seems like they don't want al-Bashir to treat all of Africa the way he treats his own country," Pittman said.

Tension has existed between al-Bashir and the African Union for some time now. In September 2006, the African Union threatened to pull peacekeeping troops out of Darfur if al-Bashir did not allow U.N. peacekeeping troops into Darfur.

Currently, the African Union is still handling the Darfur situation, and U.N. peacekeeping troops have not been deployed. However, at the sum-

mit, al-Bashir agreed to allow deployment of hybrid U.N.-A.U. peacekeeping troops.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke at the summit and urged leaders not to elect al-Bashir.

"Sudan's President Mr. Bashir longs to be given the A.U.'s presidency. The A.U. cannot allow itself to comfort the oppressor." Tutu said, according to BBC News.

"I appeal to those leaders meeting at the A.U. summit to stand up to tyranny and stand by the people of Darfur," Tutu said, speaking of al-Bashir's failure to bring peace to Darfur and his attitude towards efforts being made by different peacekeeping groups in and out of Darfur.

Sophomore Eric Steginsky holds sentiments similar to Archbishop Tutu, believing that by blocking al-Bashir's bid to lead the African Union they are sending him a message.

"By passing Omar al-Bashir over, the African Union is showing that they want peace," Steginsky said. "They are showing al-Bashir that they will not tolerate his refusal to allow U.N. peacekeeping troops in Darfur."

The situation in Darfur largely dominated the summit's talks. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon also spoke at the summit.

"The toll of the crisis remains unacceptable," Moon said, according to BBC News, speaking of the estimated 250,000 dead and the 2.5

million displaced refugees. "Together we must work to end the violence and scorched-earth policies adopted by various parties, including militias, as well as the bombings which are still a terrifying feature of life in Darfur."

Despite the fact that rebel groups, known as the Janjaweed, signed a peace treaty in May, violence in Darfur increased, permeating into neighboring countries of Chad and the Central African Republic.

First-year Chelsea Hornick-Becker feels that the violence stems from deeper problems and that peacekeepers may not be a cure-all for the Darfur situation.

"A lot of people care, but they don't know why it really happens," Hornick-Becker said, referring to Africa's long history of colonization, instability and bloodshed. "(The violence) did not come out of the blue."

Hornick-Becker has questioned whether deployment of U.N.-A.U. peacekeeping troops will really be as beneficial as some think.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu elaborated on the importance of peacekeeping troops in Darfur.

Tutu said, "(Darfur needs) a strengthened force with U.N. troops and a robust mandate to protect the innocent."

Tutu also stressed the importance of immediate action.

Tutu said, "They have suffered terribly, and they cannot wait any longer."



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DENIS SASSOU-NGUESSOU, THE NAMED CHAIRMAN OF THE AFRICAN UNION

World Social Forum invokes issues of appropriate activism

Demonstrations interrupt activist forum

ATREESE WATKINS | STAFF WRITER

The prospect of meaningful change. One day's travel. Loss of three days' wages. A well-fed foreigner asking for an impossible entrance fee.

These were what faced dozens of homeless, hungry Kenyan children.

"(The street children) invaded a five-star hotel food tent and feasted on meals meant for sale at the World Social Forum in Kenya's capital," according to BBC News.

The World Social Forum was established to protest the efforts of the World Economic Forum, a yearly meeting to discuss such issues as economic partnerships. The World Social Forum developed as a "self-organized" counter to the corporation-supported WEF mega-conference.

This year, those in charge of the forum came under fire from locals for their attempt to charge a \$7 fee for participants. Local citizens, who were enthusiastically in-

vited to attend and give a local perspective to the forum, were outraged when they discovered the entrance fee was worth over three days' salary.

The living wage in Kenya is less than \$2 per day.

After revoking this fee, there was still much resentment over the price of meals at the conference, which was also \$7.

"This kind of problem goes way back," said Max Carter, campus ministry coordinator. Carter made connections with the story of a family of Quaker leaders, the Smileys, who held several yearly retreats on American Indian issues without ever inviting an American Indian.

Most of the youth attending the conference were do-

ing so at the expense of participating in food-procuring activities. For many, charging them for food created a burden. According to BBC

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Max Carter

Campus Ministry Coordinator

News, the children had been begging for food. After being told they would have to pay for meals, the children stormed the tent and feasted.

This, viewed alongside the demonstrations earlier in the

conference against the entrance fee, created a strange paradox for the World Social Forum - a protest against the policies of a conference meant to protest against another conference.

"This is a huge issue with the progressive movement," said junior David Norton, who has experienced a range of liberal organizations in his professional and academic experiences. "There is a divergence between the means of proliferating a perspective and what that perspective is meant to achieve."

Much of this has to do with how activists are gaining access to resources.

"I think we simply need to be more creative to find ways

of reaching out to the people with the resources without caving in to the culture, and we need to give them more credit that they will be open to it," Carter said.

This distance between means and ends was resolved at the conference when coordinators decided to eliminate the fees and stop charging participants for meals.

"We are now not charging anybody; the event is free so that many people can participate," Boniface Beti, WSF media director, said to BBC News.

This event brings up a bigger issue, which confronts Guilford, Kenya's capital city, and activist communities throughout the world.

"The means don't justify the ends because in the means you already have the seeds of what you want to accomplish," Carter said, paraphrasing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "By using a medium that is so inconsistent with the message, you are sowing the seeds of failure."