

TESTIMONY OF DAOUD IBRAHIM HARI

Hearing on *Darfur and the Olympics: A Call for International Action*, June 7, 2007
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on
National Security and Foreign Affairs

The Gravity of the Current Situation in Darfur

1. Introduction

My name is Daoud Ibrahim Hari. I am also known to some by another name: Souleyman Abakar Moussa, a name I chose to protect myself and my family from the repercussions of my involvement in getting the story of the genocide and refugee crisis out to the wider world. I am 34 years old and one of only three refugees from Darfur allowed into the United States since the genocide began against my people in 2003. I arrived at John F. Kennedy International Airport the night of March 15, and now live in Asbury Park, New Jersey. I knew that in leaving, I might never see my mother, brother and sisters in Darfur again. I thought about all I wanted to do to help them and all the others in Darfur and in the refugee camps in Chad. I continued to cry in myself, but felt hopeful about the new and very different life I was about to find.

2. My Personal Story: How do I know what I know?

My time is very brief. And my experiences are very long. I will tell you a few things about myself, my past before the war, and then something of my recent experiences – especially as they answer the important question you may have: *How does he know what he knows?*

I was born in the small village of Musbat in Northern Darfur. There were so many other villages like mine that are no more. In my village everybody knew each other – and had for generations. In my case, we were Zaghawa, one of the major tribes of Darfur. Like most Zaghawa, my father was a camel herder. I had 4 brothers and 3 sisters and, as a second child, my job was to take care of our little goats and sheep. It was for us a special way of life and while always hard provided a life for us children

that was free of care and always interesting. I completed high school in El Fasher, the largest town in Darfur, where I learned some English.

In 2003, air strikes by the government of Sudan against us were occurring on villages all around. We knew it was just a matter of time before they struck us. Government helicopters came in late summer. The men of the village helped the women and children run away into the hills and valleys. Many died, including one of my brothers; two of my sisters and their families disappeared during the chaos of running away and are still missing. Since then, another brother has gone missing. I saw all this with my own eyes; my village no longer exists—the village is dead. Just one of the hundreds of thousands people who have met similar fates since 2003. I became a refugee in Chad.

I wanted to do something to help. The government of Chad however wouldn't let me work, and when I saw nongovernmental organizations like the Red Cross working to help people and decided to see if I could help them. I first started working with the Red Cross and Africare as a translator. I happened to meet some German journalists and worked for them. Next, I worked with a Japanese journalist and soon journalists began to ask for me. I continued working with NGOs, too. A lot more work came my way. I met Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* in mid 2006.

I have translated for journalists in eastern Chad along the border with Sudan and the Central African Republic, and entered Darfur 6 times with journalists from the BBC, the New York Times and NGOs like Human Rights Watch. There was fighting everywhere we went. I was sometimes very scared, but I felt it was my duty to help get the story of what was happening in Darfur out to the world. I saw many terrible things: bodies burned, unexploded missiles in water points, poisoned water, mass graves, very small children killed—burned to death: I buried them with my own hands. The Darfuris we met would tell us horrible stories that I didn't want to hear. It was sometimes too painful to translate for the journalists. I met many people who had become crazy because of the violence and their grief.

You may have read my story in the May 14, 2007 op-ed piece written by Nick Kristof in the New York Times and in an earlier article in the *Chicago Tribune* by Paul Salopek on October 9, 2006. Paul and I were arrested by one of the rebel militias and held for 35 days before being turned over to the Khartoum army. We faced death several times and I experienced repeated beatings and torture before being miraculously released in Khartoum on September 9, 2006. Intervention by American politicians including Representative Christopher Shays and Governor Bill Richardson with key Sudanese officials was critical in securing our release. I could say so much more here, and perhaps you will want to ask me later about such experiences.

3. The situation in Darfur

The experiences I've described are, sadly, not the exception. Many have met far worse a fate than I have. But my role as translator and guide has provided me an opportunity to see the situation on the ground in Darfur in a way that few have.

During the past 3 years and more, I have seen, and have shown journalists, the real face of genocide. For me the situation is personal. For you it is political. For us there is no relief and no prospect of a solution in sight. For one thing it is complex and perhaps hard to understand. It is a mistake to describe it as simply "good" versus "evil," a contest between seeming innocent black African farmers and nomadic Arabs. First of all, both farmers and nomads, African and Arab, are Darfuris and have lived, sometimes very uneasily, together sharing and trading for centuries. We will have to live together again somehow. Both the rebels and the janjaweed unfortunately have contributed to keeping the fighting going.

1. Khartoum and the rebels may have started the conflict for one reason, but are now caught in a conflict that no one party has any control over any longer. And that means, no one party has the power to secure or impose peace. The rebel groups are divided among themselves since the signing of a cease-fire accord in May a year ago – some "pro-agreement" and others opposed. Loyalties are fluid and

treachery is common. If you think about it, a successful peace requires agreement among those fighting and negotiations, but with the splintering and demoralization of rebel groups and the failure of the government to impose a military solution, the task of getting all the parties to the table will be long and complex.

2. But it must be done and the role of China will be critical. From the ground in Darfur, it is obvious that Chinese support for the government in Khartoum, military, economic and political has made it possible for the army to continue to fight in Darfur. Their political support, in the UN Security Council and elsewhere, has given the government protection, you would say “cover,” to avoid sanctions and to overcome them when they are imposed.
3. Peacekeeping troops can't stop the killing alone, but they can help. The current African Union peacekeeping force of 7,000 is inadequate. Remember that Sudan is the largest country in Africa and Darfur itself is larger than France. Think about that. Even the addition of the 20,000 UN peacekeeping force promised by the Security Council are small in comparison to the need. And there is a problem that needs to be considered. Even if such a force could be assembled, it is difficult to imagine that they could be deployed successfully in the field and re-supplied without the assent of the government in Khartoum. The alternative of entering from Chad has political and practical problems that make it unlikely. Still, such a peacekeeping force, if deployed, could make a big difference in reducing the violence and giving everyone time for serious political negotiations. But no one should believe that simply having peacekeepers on the ground, given the chaos, will prevent them from becoming drawn into the dynamics of the conflict as has happened with AU forces. What then?
4. Gaining access for peacekeepers and starting serious negotiations could be aided by smart pressure on the government including targeted economic and political sanctions similar to those proposed by President Bush last week – but more serious and less symbolic than those proposed.

4. Recommendations

I want to leave you with three thoughts, three recommendations:

1. Pressure the government of China to stop their “blind eye” and active support for the government in Khartoum that makes the on-going genocide in Darfur possible.
2. Pressure the government in Khartoum and the rebel groups to accept the deployment of the larger joint AU-UN peacekeeping force authorized in Security Council Resolution 1679 (2006).
3. Undertake a serious multi-lateral process to reach political consensus and give it the resources and time needed to succeed. It is the only way forward.
4. Provide Iraq-style legislation to allow others like myself, in dire danger, to come to this country as refugees, including the women and children, many who are widows or orphans and risk horrible harm in the refugees camps. Specifically, authorize the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in N'Djamena to screen and refer such cases to the United States Government for resettlement.

Thank you for listening to my story.