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Inglis turns attention to conflict in Darfur

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Just a year ago U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis sat at home watching the film "Hotel Rwanda" with his eldest son, Robert. When the credits rolled and the film ended, Inglis found himself overwhelmed with disbelief.

"I was disturbed that I was in Congress at the time period of the movie," said Inglis about the genocide that happened in Rwanda a decade ago. "I was aware that I had done far too little."

The movie has spurred Inglis to act on another troubled region of Africa. He has turned his attention to the conflict in Darfur, in the west of Sudan where 200,000 people have died and another two million have been left as refugees in recent years.

The United Nations has described the conflict in Darfur as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.

On Wednesday, Inglis and other concerned lawmakers convinced the House to overwhelmingly approve legislation condemning the genocide in Darfur.

Inglis has also called on President Bush to appoint a U.S. special envoy to the region.

"Genocide will happen when the world turns its eyes away," Inglis said. "But it is harder to perpetrate when the eyes of the world are on it in a sustained way."

After reflecting on the events in Rwanda, Inglis said he realized how important it is that the United States act in Darfur.

"It starts with focusing the light of freedom on the situation ... and continues with diplomatic pressure," he said.

Using military intervention is a last resort, Inglis said.

But he said the United States needs to "hold open" the possibility.

A government-supported militia group of Arab-tribes people called the Janjaweed is at the root of the

conflict, according to Inglis. The group has led attacks on Christians and even Arabs who don't support them.

Last month a U.N. official said incidents of violence are on the rise. Roberta Cohen, a senior fellow specializing in humanitarian issues at the Brookings Institute, said the situation is deteriorating and aid workers are being attacked.

Cohen welcomed Inglis' call for a special envoy, but warned that the candidate must be the right person.

"It really depends what authority and muscle is behind the person," Cohen said.

The United States and the U.N. need to strengthen a peacekeeping mission by African nations as well as apply more diplomatic pressure, according to Cohen.

Inglis said visiting Sudan may be on his agenda in the near future.

"We need to be aware of what is going on in the world," he said. "That is the responsibility of members of Congress."

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