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Genocide still raging in Sudan is rapidly bleeding into Chad

By James P. McGovern

Unless the international community insists on deploying a U.N. peacekeeping force in Darfur and providing protection for the refugees and the displaced inside Chad, the worst of this horrible crisis has yet to happen.

U.S. Rep James P. McGovern's fact-finding trip in Africa took him to Kenya, Ethiopia and Chad. This is the second of two articles for the Telegram & Gazette on his trip.

Almost a year ago, I was arrested in front of the Sudanese embassy in Washington, D.C., protesting the ongoing genocide in Darfur. I felt then — as I do now — that the world community is failing the people of Darfur.

I just took my first trip to Africa. I sought, but was not given, a visa to travel to Darfur, which is located in western Sudan. Despite appeals by our embassies in Africa and by me, the Sudanese government refused to officially respond, which is the way they say “no” to people they don’t like.

So, instead, I flew to neighboring Chad, a country that has been very much affected by the Darfur tragedy, with a major influx of hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees now living in camps along the eastern border.

I flew on a United Nations plane from the capital, N’Djamena, to Abeche in the east. We then drove to Gaga Camp, which has a population of nearly 15,000 Sudanese refugees. The crisis in Darfur has displaced more than 2 million people inside Darfur; more than 240,000 have sought safety in Chad; and 450,000 people have been killed.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees runs Gaga Camp with help from a number of U.N. agencies, Africare and other nongovernmental organizations. Much of the work is supported by the United States.

The camp is impressive in terms of the organization, service and dedication of those working there. All the people living there have been forced from their homes — usually very violently — by the Sudanese government or their allies, the Janjaweed militias. These refugees have seen many of their loved ones murdered, burned and mutilated before their

very eyes. I met an American nurse who told me that one of the biggest challenges is to help the refugees, and especially the children, deal psychologically with the trauma they're experiencing.

Virtually every person I met had a horror story to tell. A woman harvesting onions at one of the agricultural sites in the camp told me her husband was murdered by the Janjaweed. Holding a tiny baby in her arms, she continued to work the field, and with tears in her eyes, she said she had no choice but to flee for her life.

A man, who looked much older than his age, cried as he told me that his son had been killed by pro-Sudanese government-backed forces.

There are countless women at Gaga Camp who are widowed, who have been raped and who have lost their children. It is so very sad.

After an overnight in Abeche — complete with mosquito netting and lots of bug spray — I flew to Koukou, where a major humanitarian crisis is unfolding. When we arrived at the airstrip, there were more than 9,000 Chadians gathered together, lying in the hot sun without shelter.

A few days earlier, their villages were attacked by Sudanese Janjaweed and their allies in Chad. Hundreds were killed; thousands were displaced from their homes. The United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and various U.S., French and Italian relief agencies were at work providing food, water, medicine and tents. In anticipation of fast-spreading disease, a medical team was giving vaccinations to the children.

At a small clinic, I saw a number of men who had been shot during the raid, including a 12-year-old boy. In another room, I witnessed a group of elderly women badly malnourished and suffering from trauma. Outside the clinic, sitting under a tree with her four children, I met a woman whose husband was killed in the attack. She barely had time to cover her husband's dead body with a sheet before she fled.

The crisis in Sudan is bleeding badly into Chad. The same group that is murdering in Darfur is working with anti-government forces in Chad and murdering Chadians.

It's all spreading rapidly. Unless the international community insists on deploying a U.N. peacekeeping force in Darfur and providing protection for the refugees and the displaced inside Chad, the worst of this horrible crisis has yet to happen.

The United States and other countries talk the talk on Darfur, but we have not been prepared to walk the walk. There is a genocide in which hundreds of thousands have already been killed. The slow reaction of the world community reflects poorly on all of us. We once said, "Never again." Did we mean it?

James P. McGovern is the U.S. representative to the 3rd Massachusetts District.