



WOMEN FOR PEACE:
Nobel Women's
Initiative Delegation
to Thai-Burma border,
South Sudan,
Chad-Darfur Area
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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In July, the Nobel Women's Initiative led a group of prominent women on a three-week fact-finding mission to investigate the status of women in Burma and Sudan. The group met with women's groups, government officials and representatives from international organizations, and visited clinics and refugee camps to hear first-hand what is required to bring a sustainable peace to these areas.

The delegation met with women who build schools; form rape crisis centers; provide legal aid; give health care; support political prisoners; defend migrant laborers; campaign for equality; advocate for peace; and fight violence against women. With unfathomable resilience, these women defend ideals that one might expect would be long dead: the ideals that democracy will reign in Burma, that justice will be done for the women of Darfur, that violence will end in Sudan.

Nobel Peace Laureates Jody Williams (1997) and Wangari Maathai (2004) led the delegation, together with actress-activist Mia Farrow. They were accompanied by other notable women including the Chair of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, Dr. Sima Samar, notable human rights activist Dr. Gloria White-Hammond and labor activist Qing Zhang, as they traveled to countries and regions directly linked to the crises in Burma and Darfur: Thailand, Ethiopia (the seat of the African Union), South Sudan and Eastern Chad (home to thousands of refugees from Darfur).

There are several links between Sudan and Burma. Both Sudan and Burma have long-standing dictatorships, supported by foreign currency, brought in through natural resource revenues. In both countries, China's military, political and commercial support is critical for the survival of the regimes. Both are host to long-term violent conflicts and counter-insurgencies against uprisings by marginalized peoples. Both have seen the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war, and other forms of systemized violence against women.

Summary of Findings

In Burma, the regime's "Roadmap to Democracy" is more likely to point to distraction than to genuine democracy. The first step of the roadmap was a referendum on a draft constitution staged in the immediate aftermath of a catastrophic cyclone, during which villagers were forced to vote "yes" in order to get aid. The final stage of the roadmap is an election in which the leadership of the main opposition party, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and most of the parliamentarians elected in the 1990 elections, cannot stand for election.

The international response to Cyclone Nargis, which hit Burma's Irrawaddy Delta in May this year, has inadvertently strengthened the hand of the ruling junta. While the September 2007 uprisings by monks and nuns provoked a response by the international community, and in some cases, condemnation of the junta's crackdown, the international community softened pressure on the regime in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. Aid has been channeled through the regime, and an estimated 25% percent of the aid has been skimmed off the top by the military. Thousands of cyclone survivors have been left without humanitarian relief. Seven Burmese working to get aid into victims were arrested and imprisoned, and there has been no freedom of movement for local groups trying to get aid to the survivors.

Despite the claims of Burma's allies and patrons, the regime is not loosening its grip on democracy activists. There are over 2000 political prisoners in Burma, and almost half of them were arrested in the wake of the September uprisings.

Women in Darfur and throughout Sudan are organizing themselves to create meaningful peace talks through the meaningful participation of women. While peace talks are stalled, women are working to re-vitalize talks, and ensuring women have roles and voices in the negotiations. They want justice and reconciliation, security for their families, and livelihoods for their communities. While national women's organizations from Khartoum and elsewhere are supportive of these efforts, and want to work alongside women in Darfur to work for peace, many Sudanese organizations are kept out of Darfur, and not allowed to travel in the region.

In Darfur, there is no peace to keep, and the political process is in a shambles. The peace process for Darfur remains in limbo as mediators struggle to organize and co-ordinate efforts, and bring increasingly disparate groups to the table. The Government of Sudan has continued to obstruct progress while feigning co-operation, and the rebel groups continue to fracture.

The North-South peace deal remains fragile, and stability in Sudan depends upon its strength. In the years following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between North and South Sudan in 2005, international support to implement the peace deal and keep the peace has been waning.

The International Criminal Court process on Darfur, and in particular, the possible indictment of President Omar Al-Bashir, remains controversial among African heads of state, but many regular Sudanese and others on the ground in Sudan are highly supportive of the Court's work. ***International support for weakening the ICC process will not serve the long-term interests of Sudan or Darfur.***

Major Recommendations for Action on Burma/Sudan/Darfur

We must keep up the pressure on the world's superpowers to 'do the right thing' in Darfur and Burma—and create the conditions for long-lasting peace and democracy.

The inspirational efforts for peace by women on the ground--made at a huge risk to their personal safety--deserve the support and recognition of the international community. It is inexcusable for certain nations to directly support regimes that are oppressing their people and committing systematic, widespread violence against women.

An obvious sign of the repressive nature of both regimes is evident in the mistreatment of women as a means of control. The delegation heard testimony from women in both countries that rape is regularly used as a weapon of war, and also in an on-going basis as a means to keep civilian populations living in fear. This abuse has gone on, even as the women in Burma struggle to feed their families after the devastation of the cyclone and the signing of a peace accord to end the conflict between North and South Sudan in 2005.

For Burma, the Delegation is Calling for:

In Burma, the delegation is calling for the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the cessation of campaigns of violence against ethnic nationalities and dialogue leading to real democracy in the country. It is also calling for the delivery of humanitarian relief post Cyclone Nargis directly to the people in Burma. Since May, the junta has arrested at least 17 people who delivered humanitarian aid to the people of Burma in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. Specifically the delegation is calling for:

- the United Nations, ASEAN and other international institutions to pressure the Burma military regime to make immediate steps toward greater democracy—most urgently, the immediate release of all political prisoners in Burma, including Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi;
- the end to the campaign of violence against Burma's ethnic nationalities, and specifically end the use of rape as a weapon of war;
- the delivery of aid directly to the people of Burma, via local organizations and not into the hands of the military dictatorship;
- a commitment from ASEAN, as well as the UN Security Council, to act upon their own call for democratic reform including freedom of assembly in Burma; and
- China and Russia to follow the lead of India to stop selling arms to the military dictatorship.

For Sudan, the Delegation is Calling for:

The delegation is also calling for an immediate cessation of violence in Sudan's Darfur region, and full support for legitimate negotiations, including women, to build sustainable peace. Of paramount concern is the on-going, systematic violence against women and children including the use of rape as a weapon of war. Also, it is important to note that the on-going violence in certain areas of Sudan and Darfur threatens the security of neighboring countries, including Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The violence is not restricted to a remote area of Sudan; it is upsetting the stability of an entire region.

The delegation is also concerned about the practice of extracting resources from Sudan and indeed all of Africa in exchange for weapons that fuel conflicts and are the cause of untold suffering. It is calling upon the international community—particularly those who do with business directly with African governments and consider themselves friends of Africa—to cease supplying weapons and work instead to build sustainable peace, human security and real development to benefit all the people of Africa.

Instead of supplying these regimes with weapons and political and economic support, we should be focusing our efforts on building a lasting peace. To end these conflicts and achieve a lasting vision of peace, we need to see leadership from African nations, with the full support of the international community. Those who are truly friends of Africa will pursue a relationship that is less exploitive. Specifically the delegation is calling for:

- for Sudan's leaders and the leaders of all Darfur's rebel movements to fully engage with the AU-UN mediation team and re-engage in a peace process;
- for the meaningful inclusion of Darfur's women leaders at all stages in the peace process;
- the international community to fully implement UN Resolution 1769, which allows for the full deployment of UN peacekeepers in Darfur;
- the President of Sudan, Omar al Bashir, to accept responsibility to protect the people of Darfur and allow the resolution to be fully and rapidly implemented for the sake of the people of Sudan;
- the full implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which experts in the region say is key to peace throughout Sudan, including the Darfur region;
- the full support of the African Union and the international community for bringing collective pressure on President Omar Al Bashir and the rebel leaders to end the crisis in Darfur and Sudan;
- support for the International Criminal Court in its work to bring justice to the people of Darfur and
- the end to military support to Khartoum, specifically from countries with major influence in the region.

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