

Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
Subcommittee on African Affairs  
Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues  
Written Testimony – 13 May 2009  
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I would like express my sincere appreciation to Senator Barbara Boxer and Senator Russell Feingold for their remarkable effort to bring the issue of sexual violence and gender-based violence against women to the attention of the United States government and to all those concerned about the tragic situation of women in Darfur, Congo and elsewhere in the world.

Today, the situation in Darfur is grave and the suffering of our people has gone on far too long. As a Darfuri woman who was forced to flee the current genocide in Darfur, I feel sometimes that I have left my people behind. I am often overwhelmed and ashamed. But on a daily basis, through my work and my ability to speak out publicly in the United States, I carry with me the plight of my mother, aunts, sisters, and countless other women in Darfur who face brutality and violence as part of their daily life. Beyond my own story, I know many others with similar experiences – we have been threatened and harassed to the point that we must leave our beloved homeland, our families and our friends. Still millions more have been forced to leave their homes to exist in unspeakable conditions in internally displaced persons camps as they continue to endure unimaginable pain.

Sadly, in recent history and in the current crisis in Darfur, war is too often fought with women's bodies. In Darfur, where slaughter continues and insecurity has reigned supreme for over six years, women are the most common targets. Women and children make up the overwhelming majority of the camp population, estimated at eighty percent. Every week hundreds of innocent people in Darfur – especially children, women, and the elderly – lose their lives or are forcibly displaced from their villages. Countless women and girls continue to face brutal rape, humiliation, beating, starvation and disease on a daily basis. The United Nations' *Stop Rape Now* campaign, a partnership of twelve U.N. agencies, reports that hundreds of women continue to be raped in Darfur every day.

In Darfur, rape is being used as weapon of war. It is a systematic tactic to destroy the very fabric of our community. Rape and sexual violence in Darfur is not the product of chaos or uncontrollable troops during the attacks. It is not an after-effect of war. It is well planned and orchestrated in a calculation to break apart families, tear down leadership structures, and leave long-term social, emotional, and physical scars on an entire community. Women are raped when their villages are attacked, when they flee their homes seeking safe refuge, and while they are living in camps for the internally displaced. Abduction and sexual slavery is a tactic used by the Sudanese government and its allied *janjaweed* militia. This terrorizing of women, families, and communities is not a nightmare – it is the reality of daily life in Darfur.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will say again that today, the situation for my people is dire. Girls as young as eight years old are raped and have died as a result. Countless others have been ostracized because of the stigma, abandoned by their husbands and families because they are considered to be spoiled. Many of the children born as the result of rape are left without care to die.

Despite the alarming rate at which rape and other forms sexual violence are used in the genocide in Darfur – and elsewhere – little has been done to address this deadly phenomenon. Until today, there has been no study carried out to determine the actual impact of the sexual violence on women and girls, which is indeed beyond our imagination. There is a lack of trauma counseling and psychosocial support for women survivors. And there is a lack of projects designed to provide fuel alternatives that could keep women safe in the camps. Instead, women go in search of firewood and means of sustenance and risk facing this cruel act of violence.

The recent expulsion of NGOs has put women at risk more than ever before. Some of these NGOs were doing very important work specifically in addressing women's health needs and some other protection projects. Even though the programs were not enough before, now it is crucial to work to keep them alive at all.

The government of Sudan continued to obstruct any effort to put an end to the tragic situation that has going on for years. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, or UNAMID, is failing to meaningfully impact security on the ground due to a lack of resources and slow troop deployment. All international instruments concerned with violence against women such as Resolution 1325 and Resolution 1820 have not been implemented.

Accordingly, I asked you to join me in calling upon the United States government to take the leading role in protecting the women of Darfur and bringing a lasting solution to the conflict in Darfur.

The following steps are crucial to ending the pandemic violence against women in Darfur:

- First, women can only be safe if *janjaweed* are disarmed and Sudanese government forces are distant from the areas inhabited by IDPs and innocent civilians.
- Direct protection of women must become the first priority in response to the conflict in Darfur.
- The U.S. must work to engender the make-up of the UNAMID force by providing the resources, training, and recruitment of more female police within the camps. We must strengthen the command structure to better protect women.
- U.S. Department of State must create effective mechanisms and tools for addressing violence against women in conflict zones.

- The U.S. Mission to the United Nations must ensure full implementation of UNSCR 1820, including a monitoring mechanism and enforcement.
- There must be advancement in the human rights agenda through special attention to women's human rights.
- Studies must be conducted to assess the impact of violence on women in Darfur.
- Support must continue for accountability for crimes committed against women and support must be provided for women to seek justice.
- Projects must be designed to cover the gaps in the protection of women, such as fuel alternatives programs and other conflict sensitive programs to reduce the vulnerability of women to the sexual violence.
- Emergency interventions must be designed to deal with trauma counseling, psychosocial support and empowerment for the survivors of sexual violence.
- Special support must be provided for girls' education, capacity building and promotion of women's leadership capacity in Darfur.
- Special funds must be allocated to support projects that support women in Darfur.

There is much work to be done to protect the women and girls of Darfur. I thank you for inviting me here today and look forward to working together to stop violence against women in Darfur, Congo, and everywhere in the world.

Sincerely,  
Niemat Ahmadi