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EDITORIAL

Darfur, Another Year Later

In January, President Bush said this about Darfur: “My administration called this genocide. Once you label it genocide, you obviously have to do something about it.”

Yet, last week — nearly one year later — this is what the International Criminal Court prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, told the United Nations Security Council about Darfur: “Genocide continues. Rapes in and around the camps continue. Humanitarian assistance is still hindered. More than 5,000 displaced persons die each month.” How can this still be?

The world has long declared its revulsion at the atrocities committed by Sudan’s government and its proxy militias in Darfur and done almost nothing to stop it. It took years of political wrangling to get the Security Council to approve a strengthened peacekeeping force with deployment set for Jan. 1. More than 11 months later, the Security Council has managed to send only 10,000 of the promised 26,000 peacekeepers. Large-scale military attacks against populated areas continue.

Much of the fault lies with Sudan’s cynically obstructionist president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir. But Russia and especially China — which has major oil interests in Sudan — have shamefully enabled him. So have African leaders. The United States and its allies also bear responsibility for temporizing, most recently over how to transport troops and equipment to the conflict zone.

President Bush said on Wednesday that the United States was prepared to provide airlift. So why has this taken so long?

Now, the war crimes charges Mr. Moreno-Ocampo has brought against the Sudanese leader for his role in masterminding Darfur’s horrors (the burning of villages, bombing of schools and systematic rape of woman) may — may — be changing the calculus in Khartoum.

Mr. Bashir recently agreed to peace talks mediated by Qatar and pledged to punish anyone guilty of crimes in Darfur. Until proved otherwise, the world must assume that all of this is theater designed to fool the Security Council into delaying his reckoning at the Hague.

The African Union and the Arab League, seeking to protect one of their own, are pressing the Security Council to delay a formal indictment and arrest warrant, saying it would hurt chances for a negotiated peace. The Bush administration has threatened to block such a move and we hope it stands firm. President-elect Barack Obama and his advisers have called for strong action to end the Darfur genocide. We hope the next administration moves quickly. But have no doubt: Fixing Darfur, which is increasingly engulfed in inter-rebel warfare, gets harder by the day. The indictment, expected in February, is undeniably deserved. United Nations officials say that up to 300,000 people have been killed in the Darfur conflict and that 2.7 million

have been driven from their homes.

Still it might be worth delaying if Mr. Bashir called off his murderous militias, stopped obstructing deployment of a strengthened peacekeeping force and began serious peace talks. The world is waiting.

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