

**“Peace and Righteousness Shall Kiss”**  
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**Introduction**

- For the past seven months my job has been senior advisor to the US Government for bringing peace to Darfur. What is Darfur? It is part of Sudan, a large country in northeast Africa. Darfur is *not* part of South Sudan, which became an independent country on July 9 after a fifty year revolt against the Government of Sudan. There are now two independent countries: Sudan and South Sudan. Darfur is (North) Sudan’s western-most region. In 2003 an armed revolt broke out because some tribal leaders decided that the people of the region had been oppressed and discriminated against by the Government in Khartoum for too long. Those engaged in the revolt were mostly from African tribes. The government, to suppress the revolt, recruited some members of Arab tribes to fight on its side.
- Before we go further I need to clarify: Don’t be misled about my reference to Africans and Arabs in Sudan. If I brought Darfuri African tribal leaders and Arab tribal leaders here and sat them down in this sanctuary, you wouldn’t be able to tell them apart. You would see all of them as black. They would be able to make the distinction, but the difference is cultural, not racial.
- Darfur has been in a state of conflict for 8 years. That conflict has caused 300,000 deaths, has displaced 2 million people from their homes into camps and propelled another 325,000 across Sudan’s western border into Chad. Darfuris and the international community have accused the government in Khartoum of grave human rights violations – war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide – in conducting the war.
- For the past few months our Sunday bulletin has included on the prayer list “peace, justice and reconciliation in Darfur.” How can we bring the Christian mandate of peace-building to Darfur?

**Reconciliation**

- The prophet Isaiah wrote (5:4) The Lord “shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” So we begin with God, the peacebuilder.
- Paul of Tarsus, the former Pharisee, grew up steeped in such passages. In his second letter to the Corinthians (Ch.6) he offers a sweeping theological vision of God as peacebuilder.

“In Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, not counting the sins of the world, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”

- The peacebuilding work is a central role of Jesus Christ. But Paul doesn’t stop there. God assigns *to us* the task of peacemaking.

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## What does Reconciling – Peacebuilding – Mean in the Real World?

- Over the course of history, and particularly over the past two centuries, many colonies or regions of larger states have resorted to arms to protect their rights: the American colonies; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Haiti and Mexico; and in our own lifetimes Kosovo, South Sudan, and Darfur. In the case of Darfur, the rebels have not demanded independence but an end to repressive government and justice for the crimes committed against them. How can peacebuilders respond?

### 1. Governments Pay Attention to Serious Political Violence Overseas

- In the case of rebellions occurring in other parts of the world, the U.S. Government usually takes action only after the violence has already broken out. That was the case in Darfur. By 2004 various advocacy groups, like the Save Darfur Coalition, were reporting to the world that the Government of Sudan was responding to rebellion in Darfur by recruiting certain Arab militia groups – horse and camel-mounted marauders from northern Darfur known as Janjawit. Backed by the Sudanese military, the Janjawit were attacking villages peopled by the ethnic groups from which the rebels were drawn, slaughtering the men and raping the women.
- The situation became so serious that in the fall of that year Secretary of State Colin Powell – by the way, not a man given to extreme rhetoric – told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that genocide, acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, an ethnic group, had been committed in Darfur. The UN Security Council investigated. It found not genocide but “evidence of war crimes potentially as grave as genocide.” The Security Council referred the matter to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which eventually indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and two others. Many private Americans played a role in this drama, including the students, church groups and Jewish groups which make up Save Darfur. They and the US Government were saying, “The violence in Darfur must stop and there must be justice for those crimes committed. They were echoing Psalm 85, “Righteousness and peace *will* kiss.” Justice and peace must be joined together. So the first step in peace-building in Darfur was drawing attention to the conflict and calling for justice.

### 2. Talk

- A lot of peace-building is talking. Some of it, a small amount, is speech-making, but most of it is conversation – with a great variety of people. In Sudan’s capital Khartoum I speak with government ministers and senior advisors to the President. I speak to Darfuri members of parliament. I speak with ruling party and opposition party representatives. In Darfur I speak with ordinary people I meet in the displaced persons camps. I talk to traditional tribal leaders – umdas, sheikhs, sometimes a sultan. I speak with governors and state ministers. I talk to representatives of non-government organizations working to provide food or health services or supporting schools for camp children. I speak with human rights activists who take considerable risks to meet with me. I speak with Africans and Arabs, farmers, camel herders, and cattle herders.
- In the camps in particular I try to speak to people in Arabic. I start my conversations with *As-salaamu aleikum wa rahmatullah wa barakathu*. It is the standard greeting with which Muslims start almost every verbal intervention: “Peace, God’s mercy and his blessings be

with you all.” It does not matter that I am Christian and they are Muslim. We worship the same God, although in different ways. The saying is just as Christian as it is Muslim.

- My Arabic is not as fluent as I would like, but I ask Sudanese staff in the political section of our embassy to help me with translation into Arabic of my basic points. In simple phrases I tell them that the US Government has appointed me to intensify our diplomacy on behalf of peace in Darfur. I tell them I have made a half-dozen trips to Darfur, visiting cities and towns, and camps. I describe peace talks that have taken place between the Sudanese Government and the armed rebel movements. Often they disagree with what I have to say. Many people in the camps are skeptical about the value of the peace talks. Using their language helps to put us on common ground and makes the conversation less hostile and more productive.

### 3. **Work with Allies: Al-Mahmoud, the Peace-Builder**

- I work with partners. I spend a lot of time with international organization officials assigned to UNAMID, the joint UN-African Union peace force of 23,000 assigned to Darfur. It includes troops and police and civilian staff from many different countries, mostly African. When I go to Darfur, I overnight in UNAMID camps and I get basic information about what is going on from the leadership, battalion commanders at various sites and civilian advisors.
- I have other partners. In the early months of this year I spent a lot of time in the small oil-rich Gulf country of Qatar. It was the site of peace talks on Darfur between the Government of Sudan and two armed rebel movements. Qatar is a rather strange place, full of five-star hotels, new skyscrapers, modern shopping malls, and city freeways filled with late model BMWs and Mercedes. There are only 350,000 Arab Qataris but there are half a million Filipinos and a half a million Indians who work the natural gas fields, run retail establishments and keep the hotels running. Qatar is also the home of Al-Jazeera, the satellite television network, which now rivals the British Broadcasting Corporation for the largest viewing public in the world.
- My major partner in Qatar is Ahmed Ibn Abdalla al-Mahmoud, for the last 8 years Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. For 2½ years he hosted peace talks, trying to encourage a half-dozen divided rebel movements to join in a common front to negotiate with the Government of Sudan.
- I had an opportunity to see Mahmoud’s peace-building skills up close. The Government of Qatar brought several hundred Darfuris from various walks of life to a conference in Qatar to provide their views on the peace agreement being negotiated. A group of displaced persons from resettlement camps arrived in Qatar very upset. They claimed the Government of Sudan had prevented some of their leaders from coming. They boycotted the opening session and were milling about angrily outside the hall. Mahmoud, a slight aristocratic figure in turban and immaculate white robe, walked straight into their midst. I thought there might be an angry confrontation. However, speaking confidently but humbly and drawing on Islamic religious language, Mahmoud promised to bring the missing people to Qatar by the next day. He defused the situation, and the boycotters entered the hall. A special flight brought the missing persons soon after.
- But Mahmoud was frustrated by his inability to persuade some rebel leaders to come Qatar. He spoke to me several times of his exasperation with one leader who spurned his pleas. Hearing him out, I had a thought. I said to him, “Our prophet Issa – Jesus in Arabic – said, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.’” An enormous

warm smile lighted up his face. And a few weeks ago al-Mahmoud celebrated the signing of a peace accord with one group, a significant step toward peace.

#### 4. Take Advantage of Timing and Opportunities

- Peacebuilding is hard work. And, although all wars eventually come to an end, at any given point peacebuilding is usually unsuccessful. Peacemakers need to take advantage of new opportunities – good timing. It requires what the world calls luck or – what we as Christians might term “God’s grace.”
- For Darfur one possible opportunity lies ahead. In 2009 former South African president Thabo Mbeki, the African Union mediator for Sudan, traveled around Darfur. He talked with many groups of people about their fears and hopes. He recommended a grassroots political consultation with the people of Darfur, starting at local government levels. At the state and then regional level the people would choose representatives to negotiate peace with the government in Khartoum. This idea was initially rejected by the Government of Sudan. It worried it might not be able to control the consultation process.
- Then a year ago, a funny thing happened. Khartoum accepted the idea. Negotiations in Doha were going nowhere. The Government thought it might be able to sideline the armed movements and reach a political settlement with the people. In December the UN and the African Union agreed that such a consultation should take place, a Darfur Political Process, but stipulated that it would be supervised by the UN and the African Union.
- The US and other countries were skeptical that such a process could take place while violence was still going on between the government and the armed movements in some areas and when national intelligence officials were making arbitrary arrests of political activists. The US came up with a long list of conditions which needed to be fulfilled before a grassroots consultation could take place. The African Union argued, however, that the process of consultation itself would create the enabling conditions and that a rigid set of conditions could doom the process before it got started.
- At the end of last month a general agreement was reached in the UN Security Council on this Darfur Political Process. It was a very difficult negotiation and left people on both sides dissatisfied. But there is now a prospect that the grassroots consultation will go forward in September after the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. I can not predict confidently that it will lead to peace or even that it will take place as envisaged. However, I do believe that if the process gets started, it may gain its own momentum and have positive consequences unintended by the Sudanese Government. It could even move Darfur and Sudan toward more representative government. With God’s grace it may advance peace prospects.

#### 5. Eventual Justice for Darfur

- And what about justice for the millions of Darfuris who have experienced the death of family members, the rape of their women and girls, and the loss of their properties? Justice must remain a central objective of peace for Darfur. There are several possibilities. The agreement signed last month between the Liberation and Justice Movement and the Government of Sudan provides for a regional court to try crimes against civilians committed since 2003. Khartoum has thus far rejected international observers as an integral part of the court, but that could change. That could be a central demand by the people of Darfur in the

Darfur Political Process, one which the international community might successfully pressure Khartoum to accept.

- And there remain the indictments by the International Criminal Court. Those indictments have not yet brought the accused to the criminal court in The Hague. However, international sanctions against the Government of Sudan are likely to remain in place until that issue is worked out. As we know, the wheels of justice sometimes “grind exceedingly slow.” However, in the end the cause of justice is often served. I remind my audiences in Darfur that it took 15 years to bring Gen. Ratko Mladic, the butcher of Bosnia, to prison in The Hague on charges of genocide. I believe that eventually at least a modicum of international justice will be served for Darfur.
- There can be no peace without justice. Ultimately, “peace and righteousness shall kiss.” It will be up to the international community not to forget the cause of justice for Darfur.

### **What can we do as faithful Christians?**

- You may be asking at this point, “What does Darfur have to do with me as a Christian supportive of peacemaking?” I would like to make three suggestions:
  1. Pay attention to the way in which the world suffers from violent conflict within countries: In the past 15 years millions have died in the Congo and Somalia because of such conflicts; hundreds of thousands have died in internal conflicts in Colombia and Darfur. I need not even mention Iraq and Afghanistan. Don’t just throw your hands up and say, “These people have been fighting each other since the beginning of time.” That is not true. In the past 20 years savage conflicts have ended in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and recently Cote d’Ivoire. Wars have a beginning and they eventually come to an end. As Christians we should take advantage of opportunities to find out about these conflicts and find a link to their solutions. One good way is through the School of Christian Mission. In United Methodist conferences around the country each summer the School of Christian Mission provides in-depth teaching about particular problem areas. The past two years the focus was on Sudan. This year and next the focus is Haiti. My wife Judy has been an instructor at the school the past two years.
  2. Support the United Nations. Academics, journalists and politicians often highlight the weakness of the United Nations, and there are many difficulties with UN peacekeeping. However, UN peacekeepers helped bring peace to Sierra Leone and Liberia. Darfur is a much safer place now than in 2004 because of the presence of UNAMID, currently the largest peacekeeping force in the world.
  3. Support UMCOR, the United Methodist Committee on Relief. UMCOR is busy in Darfur. In South Darfur it is conducting seed fairs. At a seed fair, farmers use vouchers to buy seeds from local vendors. The farmers get the seeds and sellers are able to establish a seed market, contributing to local prosperity and stimulating the private sector. UMCOR is also doing vocational training which enables men and women to develop skills in sewing, food processing, mat weaving, construction, and blacksmithing. Development of new skills provides alternatives to war.

- God is working his purpose out. God is transforming swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and armored personnel carriers into tractors. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Godself and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. And peace calls for justice. “Peace and righteousness will kiss.” Let us be among those messengers and part of that embrace.