

# 12 Ways to Deny A Genocide

Genocide Emergency: Darfur, Sudan

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<http://www.genocidewatch.org/aboutgenocide/12waystodenygenocide.html>

The Sudanese government's response to accusations of genocide has, from the beginning, been a classic example of the strategy of denial that accompanies every genocide. The strategy employs predictable tactics designed to obscure clear perception of criminal conspiracy with an ink-cloud of denial. The objective of denial is to paralyze the political will of those who might take action to stop the genocide and punish the perpetrators. [2005: All of these denial tactics are still the official Sudanese government line.]

Israel Charny outlines the tactics of denial in "Templates for Gross Denial of a Known Genocide: A Manual," in The Encyclopedia of Genocide, volume 1, page 168. All of them are being used by the Sudanese government.

**1. Question and minimize the statistics.** Sudan's Foreign Minister Mustaf Osman Ismail said on 9 September 2004, that no more than 5,000 people have been killed in Darfur since February 2003. [2005: The Sudanese government has not raised its estimate of deaths since.] In contrast, 50,000 [2005: 160,000] deaths is considered a low estimate by the U.N., World Food Program, and the ICRC. The Sudanese Embassy in Washington said the interviews were all conducted with Darfur refugees in Chad, not in Sudan, so were invalid. But refugee accounts are among the most reliable indicators of crimes because witnesses testify freely, without fear. The interviews were conducted in Chad because the Sudanese Embassy refused to grant visas to the investigation team. The U.S. has proposed a Security Council resolution that would send investigators into Darfur to gather evidence of the crimes where they were committed, which Sudan rejects.

**2. Attack the motivations of the truth-tellers.** Dismiss U.S. charges as products of election-year politics in America, or of anti-Islamic imperialists who have demonstrated their hatred of Arabs in Iraq at Abu-Ghraib prison. This ad-hominem "moral disqualification" argument was the red-herring used by the Sudanese Ambassadors at both the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and the U.N. Security Council. It is aimed to appeal to fellow Islamic countries like Algeria and Pakistan.

**3. Claim that the deaths were inadvertent,** as a result of famine, migration, or disease, not because of willful murder. This is the usual line given to relief officials to turn the blame back upon them for not supplying more assistance, hypocritically ignoring the systematic obstruction the Sudanese government has placed in the way of visas for humanitarian workers and delivery of food and medicine.

**4. Emphasize the strangeness of the victims.** Whether they be classified as infidels, primitive tribalists, or of another race and caste, they are unlike us. Thus, the highly influential Sudanese "Arab Gathering" considers black Africans to be "abd" (male slaves) and "kahdim" (female slaves.) and advocates their exclusion from Sudanese public life. For Americans or Europeans, such de-humanization is expressed as, "They're Africans. They do these sorts of things to each other."

**5. Rationalize the deaths as the result of tribal conflict,** coming to the victims out of the inevitability of their history of relationships. Thus, the Sudanese Ambassador to the U.N. in a BBC interview on 11 September 2004 claimed that the deaths were just the result of age-old tribal conflicts between cattle herders (Arabs) and farmers (Africans). In fact, there were no such genocidal raids in Darfur until the Sudanese government armed the Janjaweed in early 2003 and used the Sudanese air-force to support them.

**6. Blame "out of control" forces for committing the killings,** distancing responsibility from the Sudanese government. The success of this tactic was demonstrated in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1556, which blames the killings on the Janjaweed militias and actually demands that the Sudanese government disarm the Janjaweed and bring their leaders to justice. In fact, it was the Sudanese government that armed the Janjaweed in the first place, and continues to protect them. Not one major Janjaweed leader has been arrested. Criminals already in jail for years have simply been renamed "Janjaweed," and sentenced for crimes they did not commit, punished by amputations under Sharia law.

**7. Avoid antagonizing the genocidists, who might walk out of "the peace process."** This real politik argument is used to frighten diplomats who fear "upsetting the peace process" in Naivasha for the south, or in Abuja for Darfur. In 2005 the argument has become: "don't upset the fragile new order in Khartoum since signature on the agreements settling the civil war in the South. Let's now concentrate on getting the Darfur 'rebels' to reach a similar agreement with

Khartoum in Abuja, under the African Union.” Meanwhile the ethnic cleansing of Darfur is nearly complete, and genocidal massacres and rapes continue daily. This argument, which diplomats repeatedly and naively espouse, ignores the fact that genocidists are serial killers. Policies toward them based on fear lead only to appeasement and further genocide.

**8. Justify denial in favor of current economic interests.** This is a key reason why Russia opposes an arms embargo on the Sudanese government. It has just sold twelve MIG-29’s to Khartoum, and continues to be a major supplier of other arms. Besides being another arms supplier to Khartoum, China is a primary developer of southern Sudan’s oilfields and imports Sudanese oil. China has threatened to veto U.N. sanctions.

**9. Claim that the victims are receiving good treatment,** while baldly denying the charges of genocide outright. The Sudanese government claims that the internally displaced are receiving excellent treatment in IDP camps, and will be even better off when they are moved to “safe areas” under complete Sudanese government control. The Sudanese show visitors the same “model” IDP camp, just as the Nazis showed the ICRC Theresienstadt. When Kofi Annan tried to visit another site, the Sudanese quickly evacuated it, leaving him to ask, “Where are the people?” [2005: When Annan interviewed rape survivors in Darfur, the Sudanese responded by arresting his interpreter the next day. The government also arrested the director of Medécins sans Frontières, Sudan the same day for publishing a well-documented report exposing widespread rapes by Sudanese soldiers and Janjaweed in and around IDP camps.]

The Special Representative of the Secretary General, Jan Pronk, has recently signed a Sudanese government proposal to create “safe areas” for the black Africans of Darfur, who will be “guarded” by the Sudanese army. Never forget that the U.N. also agreed to a “safe area” plan in Bosnia. Srebrenica was a “safe area” where 8000 men were murdered in 1995 while Dutch soldiers stood by. Pronk was the Dutch Development Cooperation Minister in 1995 and he resigned only after a government study of the disaster seven years later. Now Pronk has recommended the same “safe areas solution” for Darfur. What is wrong with this picture?

**10. Claim that what is going on doesn’t fit the definition of genocide.** “Definitionalist” denial is most common among lawyers and policy makers who want to avoid intervention beyond provision of humanitarian aid. It results in “analysis paralysis.” It is what the State Department investigation and report brilliantly overcame. At the time of writing (September 2004), the European Union, the Secretary General of the United Nations and even Amnesty International still avoid calling the crimes in Darfur by their proper name. It is a pity. There are three reasons for such reluctance:

A. Among journalists, the general public, diplomats, and lawyers who haven’t read the Genocide Convention, there is a common misconception that a finding of genocide would legally require action to suppress it. Under this misconception, having been informed that the U.S. would take no action in Rwanda in 1994, State Department lawyers ordered avoidance of the word. They made their legal conclusion fit the Procrustean bed of U.S. policy. They committed legal malpractice.

Unfortunately, the Genocide Convention carries no such legal compulsion to act. It legally requires only that states-parties pass national laws against genocide and then prosecute or extradite those who commit the crime. Article VIII of the Convention says they also “may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide.” But they aren’t legally required to do so. Article I of the Genocide Convention creates a moral obligation to prevent genocide, but it does not dictate military intervention or any other particular measures.

B. Another misconception is the “all or none” concept of genocide. The all-or-none school considers killings to be genocide only if their intent is to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group “in whole.” Their model is the Holocaust. They ignore the “in part” in the definition in the Genocide Convention, which they often haven’t read.

C. Since the 1990’s, a new obstacle to calling genocide by its proper name has been the distinction between genocide and “ethnic cleansing,” a term originally invented as a euphemism for genocide in the Balkans. Genocide and “ethnic cleansing” are sometimes portrayed as mutually exclusive crimes, but they are not. Prof. Schabas, for example, says that the intent of “ethnic cleansing” is expulsion of a group, whereas the intent of “genocide” is its destruction, in whole or in part. He illustrates with a simplistic distinction: in “ethnic cleansing,” borders are left open and a group is driven out; in “genocide,” borders are closed and a group is killed. The fallacy of the distinction is evident in Darfur, where the intent of the Sudanese government and their Janjaweed militias is to drive Fur, Massaleit, and Zaghawa black African farmers off of their ancestral lands (ethnic cleansing,) using terror caused by systematic acts of genocide, including mass murder, mass rape, mass starvation, and concentration camps run by Janjaweed and Sudanese army guards, where murder and rape are standing orders. Both ethnic cleansing and genocide are underway in Darfur.

D. Claim that the “intent” of the perpetrator is merely “ethnic cleansing” not “genocide,” which requires the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The U.N. Commission of Experts report of 2005 took this way out. It confused motive with intent. (Ironically, the U.N. Commission report even included a paragraph saying motive and intent should not be confused, an exhortation the Commission promptly violated, itself.) Even if the motive of a perpetrator is to drive a group off its land (“ethnic cleansing”), killing members of the group and other acts enumerated in the Genocide Convention may still have the specific intent to destroy the group, in whole or in part. That’s genocide.

**11. Blame the victims.** Claim that the Sudanese government is simply fighting an insurrection by a rebel movement comprised of bandits who themselves commit war crimes. By portraying the situation as civil war rather than genocide, the Sudanese appeal to the common misunderstanding that the two are mutually exclusive, when in fact, as Robert Melson, Barbara Harff, Helen Fein, and others have shown, civil war is very often a predictor and correlate of genocide. Genocide occurs especially during civil wars because war is legalized killing, when even women and children of an adversary group may be seen as enemies of the state.

**12. Say that peace and reconciliation are more important than blaming people for genocide,** especially if the genocide happened in the past. This is the justification for amnesties for mass murderers as part of peace agreements, and for opposition to post-conflict tribunals. But peace and reconciliation are not alternatives to justice. Lasting peace requires justice. Without prosecution of those who commit genocide, an expectation of impunity is created. As Fein and Harff have shown, one of the best predictors of future genocide is previous genocide that has gone unpunished. Without trials, denial becomes permanent.

A brutal civil war is underway in Darfur, and the ceasefire and settlement being negotiated in Abuja might save lives. But the talks could take years. Meanwhile there will be peace in Darfur only with a powerful African Union force, supported logistically and financially by the West, to enforce it, much as NATO has enforced the peace in Bosnia. If the African Union force cannot stop the genocide, the U.N., NATO, European Union, and their member nations should send in troops under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter.

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