

Security Council Members Push to Condemn Sudan

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

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UNITED NATIONS — The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court presented a grim portrait of conditions in the Darfur region of Sudan to the Security Council on Thursday, as a majority of Council members pushed for what would be the first statement in three years condemning the Sudanese government.

The United States, long openly antagonistic toward the court, signaled a more supportive approach, with the American ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, endorsing it to prosecute war crimes in Darfur. In the past the United States has shown only passive support, abstaining on votes regarding the court's involvement in Darfur.

“The entire Darfur region is a crime scene,” Luis Moreno-Ocampo, the prosecutor, told the Council, saying the government of Sudan had been bombing schools, markets and water installations, some as recently as May. He said 100,000 people had been displaced so far this year.

If the scale is slightly reduced from what it has been, he said, it is only because “there are fewer villages to burn and loot, less civilians to terrorize and kill.”

He said the strategy of Sudan's government in trying to deflect international attention reminded him of how the military junta in his native Argentina reacted to the notorious disappearances of the 1970s when political opponents were kidnapped and killed. First the government denied the crimes, then it tried to minimize them, then it proposed forgetting them. Finally it tried to turn the focus to political solutions.

Mr. Moreno-Ocampo also said he would soon present evidence in two new investigations, one that would focus on atrocities committed by the rebel forces and another that he hinted could prove that the highest levels of the Sudanese government deployed the entire state apparatus to attack civilians.

Costa Rica, which currently holds a seat on the Council, circulated a statement condemning Sudan for its lack of cooperation, specifically in refusing to hand over Ahmad Harun, the former minister of state for the interior, and Ali Kushayb, the leader of the militia that has carried out attacks against civilians, for trial in The Hague. Sudan's president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, even appointed Mr. Harun his minister of state for humanitarian affairs, in charge of coordinating relief efforts for the people he is accused of massacring.

“The Security Council has been too shy in responding to Sudan's refusal to comply with regards to Darfur,” said Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Costa Rica's foreign minister.

Mr. Stagno evoked previous massacres in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda when the United Nations failed to act, saying, “The ghosts of Srebrenica and Rwanda should awaken us to the fact that some in Sudan believe that the graves in Darfur are not sufficiently full.”

Five Council members, including China, Indonesia and Libya, questioned Costa Rica’s position, suggesting that the body was too one-sided in condemning the government and not the rebels and by failing to pursue talks vigorously while expecting issues of justice to progress.

Sudan echoed that argument. “It takes two sides to end the conflict,” said Akec Khoc, Sudan’s deputy ambassador to the United Nations. “Unfortunately we need parties to dialogue with.” He said Mr. Harun remained a government minister because he retained Mr. Bashir’s confidence.

Nine Council members voiced support for condemning Sudan, meaning Costa Rica could probably force the resolution to a successful vote. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon issued a statement expressing his “deep concern” over the lack of cooperation from Sudan as demanded by Security Council Resolution 1593 in 2005.

Mr. Khalilzad, the American ambassador, expressed perhaps the most vocal support for the International Criminal Court to date by a senior American official, saying that criminal accountability was needed “to enhance security and to send a warning to individuals who might resort to brutality as a way of achieving their aims.”

The United States government has had reservations about the court since the Clinton administration. The Bush administration’s stance has softened somewhat in recent years as the court proved useful on some issues, particularly conflicts in Africa.

“We accept the reality,” said John B. Bellinger III, the legal adviser to the State Department. “It is the only game in town for bringing accountability for the atrocities in Darfur.”

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