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## Gun control's best friend

By Dimitri Vassilaros  
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The slaughter, rape and torment of the citizens of Darfur would end if humanitarian aid included guns.

Darfur is a Texas-size region of Sudan. The Sudanese government and its militia proxies have killed roughly 70,000 civilians, raped and mutilated untold numbers of others and caused about 3 million refugees to live in camps.

Sudan could teach Serbia a thing or two about ethnic cleansing.

This carnage has been going on since 2003. The Sudan People's Liberation Army, a small band of revolutionaries from Darfur, were the only excuse the government needed to wage war on unarmed *citizens* in the region, who also happen to be fellow Muslims.

As I was reading story after story about the horrific treatment of the innocents by government-backed forces, I always wondered why there was no mention of the victims fighting back.

"Some do defend themselves," said Bill Garvelink, acting assistant administrator for the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance in the U.S. Agency for International Development. The United States has given about \$600 million since 2003.

"But Sudan has helicopters and AK-47s. People in the camps have machetes," Garvelink said. International treaties covering humanitarian aid prohibit giving any side arms to defend oneself; otherwise no aid workers would be allowed to bring in supplies to a troubled region.

But Sudan is not allowing aid workers much access anyway so the refugees are caught in the middle, he said.

Amnesty International prefers to end the genocide by moral persuasion instead of self-defense.

"We at Amnesty International are not going to condone escalation of the flow of

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arms to the region," said Trish Katyoka, director of Africa Advocacy. "You are empowering (the victims) to create an element of retaliation.

"Whenever you create a sword-fight by letting the poor people fight back and give them the arms, it creates an added element of complexity. You do not know what the results could be."

But we do know what they are now.

Self-defense could exacerbate the situation, Katyoka said. "Fighting fire with fire is not a solution to the genocide. It is a dangerous proposition to arm the minorities to fight back."

Better they should be slaughtered.

Katyoka hopes the United Nations can do something -- someday -- to stop the killing. She also hopes Sudan's leaders are charged with crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court. But at this rate, will there be any eyewitnesses left to testify?

Even Dr. Ali B. Ali-Dinar, founder and director of the African Studies Center at the University of Pennsylvania -- who was born and reared in Darfur -- does not believe in arming the victims.

"That could create a vicious cycle of violence," Ali-Dinar said. "The cycle now is mainly orchestrated by the government. Give guns to the traumatized and it will definitely get out of hand. There is no limit then, for them to stop."

He, too, hopes the international community comes to the rescue -- someday.

(Ali-Dinar will be speaking 2 to 4 p.m. on Sunday at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 5700 Forbes Avenue in Squirrel Hill. There is no charge for admission. It is sponsored by the Pittsburgh Darfur Emergency Coalition.)

Darfur is one more reminder that gun control is genocide's best friend.

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