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**Chair of the German Bishops' Conference**

**Words of Greeting for the "Darfur: Crimes Against Humanity"  
Campaign Week (15.-21.03.2007) at the Jewish Museum Berlin**

January 2005 saw an historical event in Sudan which most would hardly have believed possible: The protagonists of the civil war, the central government in Khartoum, and the "Sudan People's Liberation Movement" (SPLM) reached an agreement to join forces and form a government. This ended a conflict which had raged for 20 years and taken more than one million human lives.

Beyond resolving the North-South conflict, the peace agreement was seen at that time as a fundamental political condition for all of Sudan's ethnic groups to live peacefully side by side. In reality, however, the people of Darfur in western Sudan are further from peace today than they have ever been. The severe violation of human rights has prevailed there for several years: murder and incendiarism, mass rape, and ethnic cleansing. Not even the refugee camps are spared by the Arab mounted militia, the Janjaweed. The number of refugees and displaced persons living in Sudan and neighboring Chad is estimated at around 2 million. According to the United Nations, up to 300,000 people have lost their lives in the course of the violent expulsions.

In contrast to the civil war which ended in 2005, the Darfur conflict does not have a religious component. At its core are economic interests and an ethnic struggle between the Arab-dominated central government and the region's black population. Rivalries between the ethnic groups of neighboring Chad also appear to play a part and to work against solving the conflict. As an outsider, it is often difficult to understand the exact context of the war. However, it can be said with some certainty that the government in Khartoum is capitalizing on the smoldering conflict between the nomadic Arabs and the black peasants to ethnically cleanse and Arabize Darfur. The paramilitary units of the Janjaweed are reinforced by regular troops to create an ethnically

homogeneous region. In this way, attempts to attain independence are combatted and closer links with the likely oil-rich province are established.

As a result of the expulsions, the systematic killing of the native population, and the government's targeted undersupplying of the region, many – among them the former US Secretary of State Colin Powell – speak of genocide against the black population.

Yet the Darfur conflict still does not receive the attention from international politics required to abate the anguish of such a large number of people. China and Russia pursue energy-related political objectives and therefore support the central government. The USA was also reluctant to take a clear stand for the people in Darfur. So it is a ray of hope that the UN Security Council asked the International Criminal Court in The Hague to launch a criminal investigation into the violation of human rights in Darfur and has recently named the first suspects. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation that the new UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has pledged to make the devastating situation in Darfur a priority and plans to meet with the African Union soon.

As for the church, we are committed above all to providing humanitarian aid. I am grateful for the untiring work of our relief organizations which have – often risking the lives of their workers – helped the refugees as best they could. In doing so, they themselves have frequently become the target of assaults by the mounted militia. For the part of the Catholic Church in Germany, Caritas international has been particularly active in the troubled region. Working together with the Chad Caritas office, efforts are made against all the odds to provide a minimum of humanitarian aid to the victims of expulsion.

However, as churches it is our duty to speak out publicly against the long-standing passivity of the international community. The public's attention must be drawn to the people's suffering and the political powers responsible must be urged to take effective measures. I therefore reiterate the appeal Bishop Dr. Wolfgang Huber, Council Chairman of the Evangelical Church in Germany, and

I made together in June 2004 to the Federal government and the governments of the member states of the UN Security Council: It is absolutely imperative that every one promptly campaigns for finding a solution to the conflict and for allowing the relief organizations unlimited access to the troubled region. Moreover, the Security Council should immediately determine and initiate all the measures necessary for reestablishing security in Darfur and enabling refugees to return protected to their villages. The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the refugee camps and in Darfur necessitates immediate action. To this end, the peacemaking and humanitarian influence of the African Union is called for.

Africa will be on the agenda at the G8 summit, which will be hosted by Germany this year and held in Heiligendamm in June. This will provide an opportunity to address the situation in Darfur and prepare the decisive action of the countries involved. I know that the Bishops' Conferences in other European countries also speak up for this cause with their respective governments.

The Jewish Museum Berlin with its project "Darfur: Crimes Against Humanity," which will take place in the coming days in Berlin, is also taking a clear stand regarding the responsibility of the world community and of our own country. I am deeply grateful to the Museum and its director Professor W. Michael Blumenthal for this initiative. It is my sincere hope that the week of events will stir up the German public in particular and remind the policy makers of their responsibility towards peace in the region. May the project be successful and richly blessed by God, as He promises the peacemakers (Matthew 5, 9).

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