

Unpunished for genocide, Sudan's dictator tries to come to U.N.

By Nat Hentoff
October 10, 2013

Over the years, I have reported often on President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan, against whom the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The last offense recognizes his murders of more than 300,000 of his subjects in Darfur. Many thousands more Sudanese have been hurled into wretched refugee camps, suffering further killings and rapes committed by his troops.

Despite these arrest warrants, al-Bashir has yet to be tried. He has been welcomed, without fear of arrest, in Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and China. His avoidance of punishment has been received with indifference by most American media for years. However, London-based Reuters reported last month that he was going to the "U.N. General Assembly and had already booked a hotel in New York" ("Sudan's Bashir, wanted by the ICC, says he will travel to U.N.," Ulf Laessing and Khalid Abdelaziz, Reuters, Sept. 22).

I was sickened, but not surprised. I knew that all members of the International Criminal Court must detain any visitor against whom it had issued an arrest warrant. But the United States, where a hotel suite was waiting for him, is not a member of the International Criminal Court. Of course, al-Bashir knew this.

Reuters quoted the monster: "Nobody in the U.S. can question me or hold me."

At first, our media expressed hardly any shocked indignation at his intended visit. This, even though al-Bashir has continued killing his people and his allies, in, for example, the Nuba Mountains, with little notice, except by New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, who's often on the perilous scene.

But human rights organizations began urging action by President [Barack Obama](#), ▼ whose administration at first didn't have much to say about this multidimensional war criminal's arrival. A particularly incisive and forceful confronter of [Obama](#) ▼ was Ruth Messinger, president of American Jewish World Service, which not only orates against human rights abuses but also keeps working against them.

I've known Ruth since she was involved in real-life educational reform here in New York. She does not give up. Last month, she and numerous other human rights activists signed a letter addressed to [President Obama](#), ▼ asking him to take a stand against al-Bashir's planned visit:

"Our immigration laws prohibit admitting perpetrators of genocide and extrajudicial killings into our country and it is unprecedented for someone wanted by the International Criminal Court for the crime of genocide to travel to the United States.

"While we recognize that the U.S. government is obliged to facilitate President Bashir's visit under the U.N. Headquarters Agreement, we urge you to do everything in your power to prevent the trip."

Furthermore, had al-Bashir landed in the U.S., Ruth and the other signees of the petition called on [Obama's](#) ▼ Department of Justice to explore filing a criminal case against him under the Genocide Accountability Act of 2007.

There was not a word of response from Attorney General Eric Holder. However, some of the media finally awakened to the coming arrival of this unapologetic - and ongoing - war criminal.

With al-Bashir looking forward to his U.N. appearance, I saw only one reference to a report from Smith College professor Eric Reeves, the leading global documentarian of al-Bashir's heinous crimes. His report, "Killing U.N. Peacekeepers: A Ruthless Proclivity of Khartoum's Sudan Armed Forces, Militia Proxies," describing al-Bashir's troops' killings of U.N. peacekeepers in greater Sudan, emphasized that "the weakness of the U.N. in responding to such incidents, implicating the Khartoum regime, has for many years been contemptible" (sudanreeves.org, May 9).

While these horrors were largely omitted from the demonstrations against al-Bashir's planned visit to the U.N., the heat of protestors' contempt continued to rise until The Washington Post reported this on Sept. 25: "Sudanese president cancels U.N. address."

"The cancellation," wrote Colum Lynch, "followed several days of diplomatic efforts by the United States to convince Bashir not to come to the United States, warning it could not guarantee he would not be subject to arrest, according to U.N.-based diplomats."

Al-Bashir, meanwhile, complained that the United States was delaying the visa permission for his arrival, which the [Obama](#) ▼ administration denied.

Because al-Bashir could no longer look forward to dining in New York, nearly all mention of him ceased in various forms of our media covering his desire to come here to the U.N. His genocide and other merciless crimes against humanity still continue - unpunished.

Ruth Messinger, however, has not given up:

"Our nation has failed to address the fundamental problems at the center of Sudan's many civil wars, ethnic, religious and regional conflicts, including the concentration of resources and power with the country's ruling elite in Khartoum. Now is the time to change our fundamental approach to Sudan through a sustained high-level engagement" ("AJWS Opposes Visit to U.S. by Sudanese War Criminal," June 17, ajws.org).

But our "leading from behind" president cannot be counted on to awaken Americans and others throughout the world to end the ghastly terror of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

Instead, journalists, clergy members, teachers, students, legislators and other Americans, for whom bringing the most appalling evildoers to justice is the reason for their being in this world, must organize to put this ghoul in an impregnable cell for the rest of his life.