

Based on accounts from the scene, it looks like things are getting worse in a hurry in Darfur. At the U.N. summit in September, countries included an affirmation of their "responsibility to protect" their populations and the necessity for collective action to protect people when a government fails in this basic responsibility -- or worse, as in the case of the Sudan government, is actively complicit in war crimes against civilians. It would be tragic if, having declared this bold new principle, governments couldn't then bring themselves to act on it effectively in Darfur.

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The United Nations, responding to the deteriorating security situation in Western Darfur, has ordered nonessential personnel out. The U.S. Agency for International Development has closed its field office in Genina. Nongovernmental organizations are feeling similar pressure, nor is the deterioration confined to the west. "The humanitarian space is closing," one Westerner e-mailed me from Darfur. Veteran Sudan-watcher Eric Reeves ([sudanreeves.org](http://sudanreeves.org)) notes that the supposed "banditry" taking place along the roads looks to humanitarian workers on the scene more like coordinated political violence, with attacks on relief convoys. The U.N. special adviser on genocide, Juan Mendez, back from a late September trip to the region, noted in his report: "Though government officials attribute these attacks to banditry and common crime, their coordinated planning and apparent use of intelligence to prepare the attacks suggest a degree of organization and fire-power that is consistent with Janjaweed activity, albeit under a different name."

Khartoum has also been taking steps to halt aid, blocking essential equipment and restricting visas. Anyone who knows anything about the history of governments perpetrating or abetting ethnic cleansing and genocidal acts will recognize that restricting access to outsiders and forcing humanitarian organizations to curtail operations due to security concerns have often been precursors to mass murder.

<http://washingtontimes.com/op-ed/20051024-094722-4985r.htm>