

At least the United States and others on the United Nations Security Council can lay claim to being world-class dawdlers in the face of two interconnected human catastrophes. They certainly can't take credit for aggressively trying to end worsening crises in northern Uganda and Sudan's Darfur region.

The Bush administration's inadequate response will further tarnish U.S. moral credibility; the Security Council will provide more ammunition to its critics if it cannot agree on strong action.

The greatest victims, as always, will be the civilians caught in conflict.

Killings in Darfur are on the rise. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned the Security Council last week that "the looming threat of complete lawlessness and anarchy draws nearer."

() The United States has several envoys, including Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, shuttling to the region to promote negotiations, including a seventh round of African Union-sponsored talks that began yesterday. But Zoellick will be of no help if he actually believes his recent assessment that this is a "tribal war." That's what was said about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda - and it's an excuse for the international community to again do nothing.

The international community also has largely ignored the 19-year-old war between the Ugandan government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army. The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, has abducted about 30,000 children and forced them into being soldiers and sex slaves. At least 1.4 million people have been left homeless. Thousands have died.

The violence in Sudan and neighboring Uganda are linked: As it now supports the Janjaweed, the Sudanese government also has given aid to the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. A mischievous Sudan destabilizes its neighborhood.

Instead of using its clout to pressure the governments of Sudan and Uganda to protect civilians, the Bush administration has coddled those nations' leaders. The State Department seems willing to doom the people of Darfur so as not to upset Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir's commitment to the peace accord that ended the war between Sudan's north and south. That is a false either-or choice.

The Security Council has a worse record. It has agreed to weak resolutions on Darfur and never passed anything on northern Uganda, where violence has increased since the International Criminal Court last month issued arrest warrants for Kony and top aides. LRA members are now also killing foreign tourists and aid workers, prompting some relief groups to suspend operations.

U.S. and U.N. action can make a difference in these conflicts.

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