|  |
| --- |
| **U.N. Fails Darfur Again**NBC paid nearly $1 billion to broadcast from Beijing, but the stain of Darfur won't go away from these gamesBy Nat HentoffDecember 4thThe Village VoiceOriginal Source: *http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0749,hentoff,78541,6.html* |
|

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Consider this a battle plan—which includes intersecting campaigns under way here and abroad—to rescue the survivors of this century's first genocide: the hundreds of thousand of lives that are at stake in the Darfur holocaust. To begin with, forget the United Nations as a savior. As famed British playwright Tom Stoppard put it plainly: "If the United Nations could die of shame, it would have been dead years ago." To put another nail in its coffin, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon—the Alberto Gonzales of that feeble body—convened, in concert with the African Union, peace talks in Sirte, Libya, on October 27. But the talks soon collapsed because the leaders of the two main rebel groups refused to come, thanks to their acute distrust of Sudan's Hitler, General Omar al-Bashir. On the first day of the conference, Bashir, in a slick propaganda move, declared a cease-fire in Darfur, presumably disarming the Janjaweed, the government's mass killers and rapists. On the very next day, Bashir's bombers attacked civilian and rebel targets in West Darfur. As genocide historian Eric Reeves reported, neither the U.N. nor the African Union condemned these bombings. The only way to end this genocide is by putting intense, continuing pressure on China to compel Bashir to stop the bloodbath. China is, by far, the chief buyer of Sudan's oil and has substantial other investments in the country—while also being Bashir's main arms supplier. At the U.N. Security Council, China protects Sudan against any possibility of real sanctions aimed at Bashir and supports Sudan's obstructions of the much-heralded Security Council Resolution 1769, which will supposedly send 26,000 troops and civilian police to Darfur, along with helicopters, by the beginning of next year. With Bashir holding supreme power, that deadline—or any other—will never be met. The shooting-down of U.N. Resolution 1769—along with the hopes of Darfur's survivors— received only scant attention in the American press, mainly the five small paragraphs on page A10 in the November 22 *New York Times*: "U.N. Concerned Over Darfur Force." But with the value of the dollar falling around the world, who cares about a Darfur force? Where is Darfur anyway? China's dictatorship doesn't appear to be very motivated to use its financial clout to force Bashir to give up his plan to "cleanse" Sudan of black Muslims and reward the Arab Janjaweed and other worthy followers with the title to their lands. But China has such enormous hopes for its role as the host of the 2008 Olympics—anointed with the slogan "One World, One Dream"—that it's spending huge sums of money to make Beijing appear worthy of the honor, humanizing the nation's image as an ascending superpower with soul. In the glow of the Olympics, the country's leaders hope, hardly anyone will remember the lone dissident figure standing in front of tanks rolling on their way to the massacre in Tiananmen Square. What China fears most is that its glorious coming-out party will be tarnished in the months before the games begin. The ruling council was rattled months ago when a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed by Mia Farrow labeled the upcoming games "the Genocide Olympics," necessitating some face-saving on the part of Chinese officials, who briefly acted concerned about the troubles in Darfur. But after a flurry of subsequent press reports on the campaign by Mia Farrow, Eric Reeves, and others to shame China, the country only hardened its support of Bashir, figuring that these small-scale human-rights pests would soon fade away. But they haven't faded away, and there is now a campaign targeting the corporate sponsors of the Summer Games—companies like General Electric (which paid $900 million for the broadcast rights), Coca-Cola, and Johnson & Johnson. Once again, there's apprehension in Beijing. "Concerns are mounting that the Beijing 2008 Olympics could face a rash of bad publicity. If so, how can corporate sponsors avoid getting hit?" asked *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Mei Fong on November 15. Fong, winner of a Pulitzer Prize for reporting on environmental issues, noted: "Already, some activist groups say they are broadening their attention from attacking China's government to targeting Olympic sponsors. . . . The scrutiny threatens to take what was originally seen by many multinational [corporations] as a certain PR bonanza—a chance to attach themselves to the immense national pride surrounding the Olympics *in the world's most promising market*—and turn it into a potential headache." (Emphasis added.) "One World, One Dream" can become a nightmare. China is a ripe target for a range of human-rights organizations—as well as parents worried about lead in their children's toys. But on no issue is China as dramatically (and repellently) vulnerable as its complicity in the more than 450,000 deaths in the genocide in Darfur—to say nothing of the huge numbers of women who have been raped by the Janjaweed militia. "In letters sent last month to Olympic sponsors," Mei Fong reported, "Robert Ménard, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based group promoting global press freedom, warned: 'We plan to publicly challenge those companies that are participants in the Beijing Games. . . . We will address their shareholders, their clients and the general public.' " The campaign to dishonor corporations that avert their eyes from the Darfur horror is only beginning. As will be detailed in next week's column, a report card by New York's Olympic Dream for Darfur describes 19 Olympic corporate sponsors and what, if any, attempts they've made to pressure China to persuade General al-Bashir—if not for the sake of victims, for the sake of their own reputations and profits—to end these ghastly atrocities. No sponsor has yet pulled out of the games, but they're feeling the rising heat—as is Beijing.  |