

## International Responsibilities: What Darfur teaches us

With Jan Pronk and David Mepham

Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> debate on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007

Organised in cooperation with




*On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007, approximately 200 people came to Théatercafé La Bonbonnière to attend the third Maastricht Debate on the Darfur crisis and the responsibility of the international community to protect. In addition to the appealing head topic, the crisis in Darfur has high media coverage and triggers a controversial debate about the involvement of 3<sup>d</sup> states, it was especially the high popularity of the speakers that made so many people come to the Bonbonnière theatre. The audience was eager to hear and exchange views with former UN Secretary General special representative in Darfur, Jan Pronk, and academic expert on Darfur, David Mepham.*

The opportunity to start discussing the topic already before the official beginning of the debate at a reception with free coffee triggered an excited and engaged atmosphere among the audience. After welcome words by Frans Steffens, Chair of the Labour Party Maastricht (PvdA) whose Young Socialists were co-organisers, moderator James Mackie from the European Centre of Development Policy Management introduced the topic of the debate and the speakers. Stressing that the emphasis of the debate was on analysing the international community's response to the Darfur crisis Mr Mackie claimed that Darfur constitutes an epitome of the shortcomings and problems that need to be tackled within the international community.

### Jan Pronk

This theme was taken up by first speaker Jan Pronk who stressed the forward-looking attitude of him and his speech. He described the Darfur crisis with the words, "everything went wrong and everyone is responsible" underlining this argument with the huge amount of victims of mass killing, mass rape and mass eviction and the inability of the Sudanese government and the United Nations to react to this adequately. As Darfur is "complex and extremely cruel" it is, according to Mr Pronk, difficult to assign clear responsibilities and impossible to find the culprits. While the government's wrong policies can be blamed for heating up the crisis instead of solving it, the responsibility of the international community, however, stems from its total negligence of the situation. Aid was "humanitarian only" and the international community continued its wait-and-see-attitude while being aware of the mass murder going on.

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### African Union


The effectiveness of the forces of the African Union that were trying to bring peace and stability was undermined by lack of international financial resources and willingness to provide these. According to Mr Pronk, the international political climate, which hampered an active, credible and strong position of the UN, and blocked consensus on peace-keeping operations was mainly responsible for this lack of coherent action. Taking this experience as a lesson Darfur can be seen as a “case for future policies of the duty to protect”. While the UN took all efforts to pacify Darfur it was constrained by the political climate as well as by its own rules and provisions. In order to come to a solution Mr Pronk ultimately suggested a UN reform including first, the possibility to have UN armed forces to enhance its powers and second, more channels of direct interaction between the UN and the people.

### Responsibility to protect

Second speaker David Mepham began with elaborating on the concept of “the responsibility to protect” as such. He stressed the paradox entailed in the concept given the parallel existence of the “responsibility to protect”, which establishes the duty to act against third states, and state sovereignty which is basic international law as well. He furthermore pointed to three dimensions that “responsibility to protect” can take: Prevent, React and Rebuild. Regarding shortcomings and failures of the international community in their reactions to Darfur he emphasized the need for collective international effort, i.e. a consensus among states for setting up armed forces to bring peace to Darfur that would have been the best solution to the crisis. While arms should not be first choice, they are sometimes inevitable in establishing peace before “peace-keeping” operations can even be sought.

### International pressure

Furthermore, Mr Mepham stated the effectiveness of international pressure and sanctions that can contribute to solving such a crisis. However, there was an observed incongruence between comments of European politicians on Darfur and the economic actions that followed. He thus called on the European Communities for implementation of the “responsibility to protect” also in economic terms. Finally, six broader lessons can be learned from Darfur or six conditions that have to be fulfilled for international action being successful. First, action should be taken as early as possible, which means that prevention should be primary. Second, the African Union’s role on the continent should be strengthened, however, without raising unrealistic expectations to its ability and effectiveness. Third, the “responsibility to protect” has to be recognized as a global obligation by all states. Fourth, the ability to use robust military force is often necessary in order to solve conflicts and establish peace. Fifth, political solutions should be in the fore anyway as they are critical to long-term success. Sixth, in this the political will of the international community is crucial.

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### Lively debate

These two statements were followed by a lively and engaged debate between the speakers and the audience. Moderator Mr Mackie collected questions ranging from enquiries for more details, over criticism and counter-arguments, to demanding personal information and personal insights from the speakers. Based on their exhaustive experience and knowledge the speakers answered all questions in a comprehensive and extensive manner and thus contributed to create a real debating atmosphere where arguments were exchanged and different opinions heard. The debate was concluded after a total time of 2 ½ hours when all questions were sufficiently answered and the audience left enriched and inspired. The third Maastricht Debate was thus a success for speakers, audience and organisers who all gained valuable insights and well-founded knowledge. We hope for many more fruitful debates, the next being on April 25<sup>th</sup> on Israel & Palestine with Avi Primor and Saman Khoury.

Further information can be found on [www.maastrichtdebates.net](http://www.maastrichtdebates.net)

*Johanna Pütz, Concordantia  
On behalf of the organising committee*

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