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# Genocide, old and new wounds to security of peoples: interview with Mukesh Kapila\*

di Pina Sodano

**Mukesh Kapila** is Professor of Global Health and Humanitarian Affairs at the University of Manchester. He is also Special Representative of the Aegis Trust for the prevention of crimes against humanity, and Chair of Minority Rights Group International. Professor Kapila has extensive experience in the policy and practice of international development, humanitarian affairs, human rights and diplomacy, with particular expertise in tackling crimes against humanity, disaster and conflict management, and in global public health.

Previously he was Under Secretary General at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the world's largest humanitarian and development network. Earlier, he served the United Nations in different roles as Special Adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner

\* Interview with the Master in Peacekeeping and Security Studies and CeAS, in the University Roma Tre, September 2014.



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for Human Rights in Geneva and then Special Adviser at the UN Mission in Afghanistan. Subsequently, he led the UN's largest country mission at the time as the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sudan, and then became a Director at the World Health Organization.

He has also been Chief Executive of the PHG Foundation, a senior policy adviser to the World Bank, worked as part of the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination system, and advised the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, International Labour Organization, UNAIDS, and many other agencies.

Prior to the UN, Professor Kapila was at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Overseas Development Administration (subsequently Department for International Development), initially as senior health and population adviser and latterly as the first head of a new Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department that he set up.

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**Why are you in Italy and what are the aims of your visit here?**

I have been invited by several organizations – Italian For Darfur, Voice For Nyala – and Universities. This visit in Italy is also the opportunity to meet some Italian key actors fighting for human rights like Gianni Rufini, the Amnesty International Italian Director.

I aim to raise awareness about the situation in Sudan. Ten years ago when I was the head of the UN in Sudan I have witnessed the genocide in Darfur. The Sudanese government deadly militias – then called the Janjaweed – spread death and terror through the black African Sudanese people. This is ethnic cleansing carried out by the official political Arabic leaders in Khartoum.



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Ten years later nothing has changed, the evil in Darfur has even spread in other regions of the Sudan (South Kordofan, Blue Nile States). By my meetings and keynote speeches I intend to tell Italian citizens and leaders that the people in Sudan need action from the international community.

Omar Al-Bashir, the Sudan President, is indicted by the International Criminal Court for Crimes against humanity, He must be held accountable for his crimes and I hope that Italy will be an active part of this justice process.

**You were head of the UN in Sudan in 2003/2004, when the Darfur genocide started unfolding. In your book '*Against A Tide Of Evil*' you describe in details your action after your findings of the genocide and the reaction of the international community. Could you please tell us about that time, and if you think that now, ten years after, something has changed in terms of international community's actions and in terms of individual accountability of those with international responsibilities in protecting human rights?**

In my book *Against A Tide Of Evil* I explain how - as the head of the UN - I tried to gain support from the international community. After having gathered enough evidence to state that crimes against humanity are unfolding in Darfur I got back to Europe and North America, hoping that the world will take action against such horrible mass atrocities. Very quickly it appeared that governments knew exactly what was happening in Sudan -thanks to satellite imagery- but they were not willing to take actions against the Sudanese regime. I have been told that it takes time to make peace and that I should focus on my mandate which was of a humanitarian assistance nature. Basically I have been told to bring humanitarian relief to the



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Sudanese populations without working on the root causes that created the sufferings and the deaths.

I understood then that I had to play by the UN and international community rules. After World War II we said “never again”, after Cambodia, Rwanda and Srebrenica we said “never again” but I understood that evil was happening again in Sudan and there was no political will to make it change.

I was presented with a dilemma: either I play by the rules or I could blow the whistle and refuse to stand by idly while a genocide, the crime of the crimes, was taking place in Darfur. I decided to speak to the BBC in Nairobi in March 2014 and I do not regret it. In vain I had tried for one year to rally support from the UN and the international community. Less than four weeks after I spoke to the BBC the UN Security Council finally held a special session about Darfur because it broke the news.

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**How do you think the international community should have acted 10 years ago on Darfur?**

All measure must be taken to remove a tyrant like Al-Bashir, military force included. It is legitimate to use force when diplomacy and non-violence do not succeed in bringing peace.

**And how do you think it should act now on Sudan?**

I am back from Sudan and South Sudan that I visited this summer and I have seen by myself the extraordinary resilience of the Sudanese people. I visited a hospital in the South Kordofan State in the Nuba Mountains area. The Sudan regime is weekly bombing its own people but people are resisting. The UNAMID (a hybrid peacekeeping mission in Darfur led by both the UN and the AU) has shown its limits, as there is no humanitarian access to hundreds of thousands of people located in remote areas yet.



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We must rethink the humanitarian and political paradigm and strengthens the relationships with partners on the ground – politics, rebel armies, international and national NGOs and agencies–, it is also most important to work with the African Union that is keen to make change happening in Sudan.

The accountability issues are also important; justice must be served to help to mend a country torn apart by 25 years war.

### **Why did you wait 10 years to write your book?**

I had to overcome my own traumas and it took time. I was pressured by friends telling me that it was necessary to tell the world what really happened. My book *Against A Tide Of Evil* is my own story. It is about the story of an insider who witnessed a genocide and who decided that he must do everything he can to let the whole world know that mass atrocities are committed in Sudan.

Writing this book was even more important because ten years later the genocide in Darfur is still ongoing. It is even worse: the evil has spread in other Sudanese region like the South Kordofan and Nuba Mountains where Bashir bombs his black population.

The genocide in Sudan is the first genocide of the digital age but we have been unable to prevent it despite all the information we shared. I hope that my book will help people to understand the scope of the human and humanitarian disaster in Sudan and I also hope that we can change it for the better.

### **Which areas, in Sudan or elsewhere in the world, do you think could suffer the same destiny as Darfur?**

In my book I quote Edmund Burke who once said that “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing”. So basically I think that genocide can happen anytime



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and anywhere as history has already shown. I am deeply concerned about the Rohingya people in Burma, the conflicts in Syria, Irak, South Sudan and Central African Republic are of genocidal nature. All around the world vulnerable people are targeted groups persecuted on the base of their ethnicity, their religion and their gender.

**What can each of us do to stop a genocidal regime?**

Showing solidarity and mobilization is the key. Every one of us can make this world a better place. There are NGO's working in the ground (like [People4Sudan](#)) that need funds. We can also use the social media to raise awareness, if people and especially the youth show everyday their solidarity by using Twitter and FB we can create a global community that wants to be a part of the decision making process in this world and politicians could no longer avoid these movements.