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A mother and the baby she was holding were among those killed in a recent bombing by a Sudanese government plane in the town of Raga, victims in Khartoum's daily routine of starving, bombing or enslaving its own citizens in the south in an 18-year war that has cost more than 2 million lives. But in an interview with editors and writers at *The Washington Times*, Sadiq Mahdi, Sudan's former prime minister ousted in 1989, said that things were looking better and that the rhetoric coming out of Khartoum had changed. The Northern Islamic Front, the Muslim military government, was ready for dialogue with opposition parties, he said. They were ready to go to the peace table, and he was sure of it.

Unfortunately, rhetoric aside, the situation on the ground has only gotten worse. Adding to the problem has been the substantial increase since last year in foreign companies working with the Sudanese government to obtain oil from Sudan. In the Sudan Peace Act, which passed in the House and Senate and has been referred to the Committee on International Relations for further debate, Congress not only condemns Sudan's worsening human rights record, but the House version of the bill prohibits any entity involved in the development of oil or gas in Sudan from raising capital in the United States or trading its securities in any U.S. capital market.

In a country where the government has been enslaving, bombing and starving its own people for decades, will such a measure be felt by the people living there? The facts are that in the year 2000, there were more than 150 incidents in which civilian targets were hit, including humanitarian groups operating under U.N. jurisdiction, according to Nina Shea of the **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom**. Schools, churches and market places are frequent targets, but this increase is no surprise. Oil revenues have allowed the government to buy more military hardware, according to the State Department. To bring it a little closer to home, two Chinese companies working with the Sudanese government for oil raised money in U.S. markets last year, and many others, such as Royal Dutch Shell and Totalfina/Elf, are listed on the New York Stock Exchange, Ms. Shea said.

In addition, oil development has led the Sudanese government to clear civilians living in the area from the land surrounding oil installations. This land is also used for military exercises.

The United States has several options. It can show its outrage by refusing to support companies that help the Sudanese government continue its cycle of violence, as Congress, religious organizations and members of the Congressional Black Caucus are urging. It can support the opposition forces in the south as President Bush has done. Or it can follow the Colin Powell track, which is encouraging all sides to work toward peace at the grass-roots level. The administration must resolve these schisms in its policy, and take the track that would not only deprive Khartoum of bombing power today, but help the people of Sudan build themselves a better future.