

In the closing days of August, I read a moving book: "The Translator, A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur" by Daoud Hari.

Before you go any further, let me warn you. Some of the book's descriptions of genocide are graphic beyond revulsion, but you should force yourself to absorb them, because then you will begin to understand the evil that is being committed right under our noses... and why it must be stopped.

Consider this testimony, from a man who had been tied to a tree:

"One of the Janjaweed men started to kill me in a painful way. My daughter could not bear to see this, so she ran toward me and called out, 'Abba, Abba.' These words... mean 'Daddy, Daddy.' The Janjaweed man who had tied me to the tree saw my daughter running to me. He lowered his rifle and he let her run into his bayonet. He gave it a big push. The blade went all the way through her stomach. She still cried out to me, 'Abba! Abba!' Then he lifted up his gun, with my daughter on it, with blood from her body pouring down all over him. He danced around with her in the air and shouted to his friends, 'Look, see how fierce I am,' and they chanted back to him, 'Yes, yes you are fierce, fierce, fierce!' as they were killing other people. My daughter looked at me for help and stretched her arms in great pain toward me. She tried to say Abba, but nothing came out. It took a long time for her to die, her blood coming down so fresh and red on this -- what was he? A man? A devil? He was painted red with my little girl's blood and he was dancing. So what was he?"

Had enough?

If reading that passage was painful, imagine being there.

Now think about that one murder happening 400,000 times and you have a sense of the Darfur genocide is about.

Last winter, I visited a high school and talked with students about Darfur. "Why should we care what happens there?" a student asked, rather defiantly. "We have problems of our own."

Yes we do. And Darfur is one of them. Violence, instability, chaos and genocide in foreign places are potent ingredients for terrorism and military flashpoints. They tend to find ways to creep into our own immediate interests, so our self-interest demands a muscular diplomatic engagement in stopping genocide.

That's the smart thing to do. It's also the right thing to do.

I would act if I saw danger draw near my daughters, or yours. And so would you. We would stop a little girl from running into a busy street; why wouldn't we try to protect her from running into a fixed bayonet? We are our brothers' keepers, our sisters' keepers, and especially the keepers of their children. Even children we don't know, in foreign places we've barely heard of.

I'm not saying it all falls on us. I am saying we should lead the moral argument and demand more global outrage and global solutions to end the genocide, punish its perpetrators, and repatriate the two million refugees who were forced out of their homes. As Hari writes: "If the world allows the people of Darfur to be removed forever from their land and their way of life, then genocide will happen elsewhere because it will be seen as something that works. It must not be allowed to work."

What can we do?

The House and Senate have already passed my amendment to study expanding the Abeche Airfield in Chad - near the border of Sudan - for humanitarian intervention. Chad supports this effort. Now the Defense Department must act.

France has its own airbase in the vicinity of Darfur. We and other nations can establish a "no fly zone" to protect villages in Darfur from being bombed and strafed from Sudanese planes.

The United Nations is proving itself impotent with the painfully slow and inadequate placement of peacekeepers. The international community must increase pressure on the regime in Sudan to stop dragging their feet - and the feet of the peacekeepers.

By doing these things, and others too, we will send a universal message that we will not stand idly by when little girls are raped and murdered and hoisted on bayonets.

One more passage in "The Translator" offers a compelling reason for the U.S. to lead the way. Daoud Hari finds himself and two colleagues - including an American journalist - in a Sudanese courtroom, after weeks of torture and imprisonment. He writes:

"What was extraordinary was that standing in the back of the courtroom were four U.S. soldiers in their uniforms: a Marine, two U.S. Army officers, and a U.S. Air Force officer, I had some idea that some wheels were turning to do something for us. But look at these guys. My God, you have no idea what they looked like to us... Depending on your situation in the world, U.S. soldiers may not always be what you want to see, but for the first moment in all this time, I thought that I would probably not die today."

That is the hope that America should and can bring to the smoldering villages of Darfur. That is what should make us proud.

If we act.