Mr. President, I rise

to comment on the ongoing crisis in

Darfur, a region in western Sudan that

has been the site of atrocities for

months. A recent report from the

International Crisis Group spells out

the horrifying facts of the situation.

The report indicates that 830,000 people

have been displaced as a result of the

conflict, and thousands have been

killed. Government-supported militias

have deliberately targeted civilians,

sometimes focusing on unprotected villages

with no apparent link to the

rebels other than their ethnic profile.

According to credible reports, militia

atrocities have included indiscriminate

killing and mutilation, rape on a massive

scale, and the looting and destruction

of food reserves and other property.

Outright and indiscriminate government

bombing has also been

verifiably reported since the conflict

began.

We must ask ourselves two questions.

First, what can be done to help the innocent

men, women, and children

caught up in this nightmare? The U.S.

must work with the international community

to signal our collective resolve

and to insist that the Government of

Sudan stop playing games with humanitarian

access. Khartoum needs to feel

the pressure, and all parties need to

work urgently for a settlement.

But we must also ask, what do these

developments in Darfur tell us about

the Government of Sudan? The reports

from the region seem to confirm that

the Government of Sudan has no

qualms about backing attacks on innocent

civilians.

I want the administration’s extremely

laudable peace initiative in

Sudan to succeed. Many dedicated professionals

have devoted countless hours

to this enterprise, and many courageous

Sudanese have taken difficult

steps in the pursuit of a just peace. But

my doubts about the prospects for a future

of peace and cooperation are growing,

rather than dissipating, at each

new report on the Darfur crisis. I doubt

the stability and sustainability of a

peace agreed to by a party that accepts

organized atrocities as just one more

tool in its toolbox of governing. What

kind of peace can be achieved with this

kind of partner? Can we truly have

confidence in this government’s good

faith? What kind of future cooperation

can we realistically expect?

As a member of the Foreign Relations

Committee’s Subcommittee on

African Affairs, I have been engaged on

issues relating to Sudan for many

years. I was proud to work with my

colleague on that subcommittee for

several years, Senator FRIST, on the

Sudan Peace Act. I recognize the complexity

of Sudanese dynamics, and I

certainly understand that the situation

in Darfur is different from the conflict

between the Government of Sudan and

the forces of the south, most prominently

the Sudanese People’s Liberation

Movement. But some of the elements

of the Darfur crisis are, unfortunately,

quite familiar. We have seen

obstacles thrown up to humanitarian

access, we have seen the near-total abdication

of responsibility for the basic

security and well-being of Sudanese civilians,

and we see government-backed

militias employed to keep some of the

dirtiest of the dirty working at some

token distance from officials.

On December 16, 2003, the State Department

issued a statement expressing

‘‘deep concern’’ about the humanitarian

and security situation in Darfur.

The statement indicated that:

the United States calls on the Government

of Sudan to take concrete steps to control

the militia groups it has armed, to avoid attacks

against civilians and to fully facilitate

the efforts of the international humanitarian

community to respond to civilian needs.

But it then contained this final sentence:

The fighting in Darfur is not linked to the

ongoing peace talks between the Government

of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation

Movement/Army in Kenya.

I am among many observers who fear

that this sentence was interpreted in

Khartoum as a signal that the disincentives

articulated by the U.S. in

the context of the peace talks will not

be applied because of abuses in Darfur.

I urge the administration to insist

that the Civilian Protection Monitoring

Team be permitted to investigate

alleged attacks on civilians

throughout the country, including attacks

in Darfur. The Government of

Sudan should have no formal or informal

veto power over this team’s investigations.

The team was established as

a confidence-building measure, and it

was agreed to by all parties. But to

suggest that the Government of Sudan

should be able to pick and choose areas

in which the team is permitted to conduct

its inquiries undermines confidence.

I do respect the fact that delicate diplomacy

is ongoing, and I want to be

able to celebrate a lasting end to Sudan’s

north-south civil war as much as

any Member of this body. But none of

that changes the fact that what is happening

in Darfur is inexcusable, it is

undermining the Naivasha peace process,

and it is casting a pall over the future

of Sudan at a time when light had

finally begun to shine on that long-suffering

country. It is time to stop expressing

quiet concern, and to start

treating this crisis with the urgency it

deserves.