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## Put Peace Before Justice

By Franklin Graham

NYALA, Sudan  
**I**N 2001 a hospital operated by my relief organization in the southern Sudanese town of Lui was bombed nine times by forces of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir. Two years later, I had what would be my first of three meetings with Mr. Bashir, now one of the most wanted men on the planet. When I confronted him about these attacks he was fully aware of them. After our meeting they stopped. Mr. Bashir is rightly accused of great cruelty and destruction. But I have been able to deal with him.

It now looks as if the International Criminal Court will finally bring Mr. Bashir to his knees. Tomorrow the court is

### Arresting Bashir would just create more chaos in Sudan.

expected to announce its decision to issue an arrest warrant for the president, the first time it has sought the detention of a sitting head of state. Yet arresting Mr. Bashir now will likely only create further chaos in Sudan, which in recent years has been convulsed by separate conflicts in the south and in the Darfur region in the west.

The court may have good intentions. After all, any civilized person would condemn Mr. Bashir for his behavior. I have done so to his face.

In 16 years of relief work in Sudan, I

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have witnessed much of the violence that his government has inflicted. An estimated 300,000 people in Darfur have died and 2.5 million people have fled their homes in the wake of fighting among rebels, government forces and their allied Janjaweed militias. Nor does the destruction stop there: Our organization has identified nearly 500 churches that were destroyed by Mr. Bashir's forces.

But arresting Mr. Bashir now threatens to undo the progress his country has made. In 2005, Sudan's government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed an accord ending the civil war in the south. The agreement paved the way for elections in the south later this year, as well as for a referendum on southern independence scheduled for 2011. The accord has brought benefits to Sudan, but it isn't clear that they will last. Mr. Bashir, who fought members of his own party to approve the deal, is critical to the peace process.

I want to see justice served, but my desire for peace in Sudan is stronger. Mr. Bashir, accused of genocide and crimes against humanity, is hardly an ideal peacemaker. But given all the warring factions in Sudan, there is no guarantee that his replacement would be better.

For all his faults, Mr. Bashir has demonstrated that he is able to cooperate. On several occasions he has complied with my requests. When a hospital we operated in eastern Sudan was seized by government forces, Mr. Bashir granted us limited access. Mr. Bashir also made television time available for us to broadcast a Christian program at Christmas and Easter.

More important, Mr. Bashir helped make the peace agreement a reality. Now, his arrest could threaten the south's elections and referendum, and hurl the country back into civil war. His removal could also spur retaliation by Bashir loyalists and other forces against civilians, United Nations peacekeepers or international aid workers.

We do have other options. The statute

that established the court allows for the United Nations Security Council to postpone the court's proceedings for 12 months, giving Sudan the time it will need to achieve peace. In that period President Bashir should do everything he can to ensure that the provisions of the agreement go fully into effect, and to cooperate with the United Nations and the United States to bring about political stability in Darfur.

President Obama can also do his part. He should move quickly to appoint a special envoy to Sudan, as he has wisely done in other hot spots of the world. Economic problems at home should not distract America's president from exerting leadership to avert a crisis that threatens the future of Africa's largest nation.

The removal of Mr. Bashir will make it harder to negotiate an end to the crisis in Sudan. Ultimately, justice will be served by a power higher than the International Criminal Court. In the meantime, justice without peace would be a hollow victory. □