

## COMMENTARY

# Sudan, Rwanda dissed for Bosnia, Kosoco: Why?

**Special to Sentinel-Voice**

It's been ringing in my ears for the past eight months. A question asked plaintively by the Roman Catholic bishop of the Sudan at the World Council of Churches meeting last December, as NATO was instituting its Serbian bombing campaign and the world's eyes, through CNN, turned to the plight of the Kosovars.

Bishop Taban of the Diocese of Torit, recalling the decades of human rights abuses in the Sudan, pointedly asked us, Christians from around the world, if the people of the Sudan were less important, less human, less worthy of being saved than their Kosovar brothers and sisters.

If not, why, then, does the world choose to turn its back on the atrocities, the starvation, the human rights abuses in the Sudan while it chooses to help those in Kosovo?

That was his implied question and one for which I still have no answer.

Nor can I answer the

question of Rev. Jesse Jackson of why the world turned its full attention to his effort to have released two American soldiers held in Serbia one week and the next week ignored his attempt to free hundreds of prisoners of war in Sierra Leone. Likewise, I can't answer the question of Kweisi Mfume, the chief executive officer of the NAACP, who raised similar concerns about how we allowed the massacres of millions of Rwandans to occur without the world even seeming to blink.

I can only wonder aloud if, even as we head into a new millennium, the racism of the past one is not still with us and undermining even our nation's and our world's foreign policies and even our moral ground.

Are the lives and the pain of the people of color in the world still not valued?

We sent a former U.S. Senator to help negotiate the peace settlement in Northern Ireland; yet we hear of no such support for peace negotiations in the Sudan or

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By Bernice Powell Jackson



other African countries.

Indeed, the Sudan has experienced civil war for much of its 40 years of independence, enjoying only a brief interlude of peace.

The present government, led by northern Sudanese, came into power after a coup and has continued the fight between north and south and the competing visions of a unified Sudan.

The north is primarily Arab and Islamic, while the south is mostly African and Christian and traditional religions.

Over the past decade the war has not only enveloped the Sudan, but has involved many neighboring nations, further destabilizing an already fragile region.

The government of the Sudan itself has been accused of a multitude of human rights violations, including bombing of civilians, genocidal campaigns against the people in the Nuba Mountain region, arbitrary arrests, torture and summary executions and the kidnapping of women and children into slavery.

It is estimated that it spends \$1 million a day on the war, while tens of thousands of Sudanese starve to death from famine and floods. Indeed, only days after Bishop Taban preached at the World Council of Churches meeting, his office was bombed.

Still the cries of the people of the Sudan are not heard,

even after a 1998 famine so great that it rivaled the one of a decade ago when some 250,000 people died.

More than half of the children of the Sudan are malnourished and in two areas surveyed by UNICEF the rates passed the 60 percent mark.

Despite the world's inattention, some progress toward a negotiated settlement has been made by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a group of African nations. In addition, the New Sudan Council of Churches helped draw up a grassroots settlement between warring factions in the south.

But these efforts need funding and attention from the outside world to end the war and ensure a fair and democratic referendum in the south.

Some have called for an arms embargo and a freezing of government assets as long as human rights violations continue.

Then there is the troubling issue of increasing

international investment, particularly in the rich oil fields of the south which are still controlled by the northern-led government and which may begin pumping much needed money to re-fuel the war.

While humanitarian efforts have continued in the Sudan, at an estimated \$365 million per year, people are still starving.

It seems that the world has turned a deaf ear to the cries of a people who have been ravaged by hunger and war for so many years, so a re-energized effort at helping the people develop economic survival skills is critical.

"My people have asked me to give voice to their cries," said Bishop Taban at the World Council of Churches meeting.

Eight months later their cries are still unheard, the plight is still unknown.

And until our nation and the world hears the cries of all peoples of the world for justice and freedom equally, we stand on shaky moral ground.

# Davis' diversity double-cross on Proposition 209

**John William Templeton  
Special to Sentinel-Voice**

"Juneteenth," the new novel from Ralph Ellison, depicts a scenario as universal for African Americans as his first novel, "Invisible Man."

The book, which the author spent 40 years developing, describes the relationship between a White-appearing child taken in by a Black Southern preacher, who teaches the youngster the magic of public speaking. One day the child disappears to resurface as a segregationist race-baiting U.S. senator.

Ellison must have foreseen a stunning day in California's state capitol when Gov. Joseph Graham Davis—whose political career began as an aide to Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and whose 1998 gubernatorial campaign was rescued by the strong support of San Francisco Mayor Willie L. Brown Jr.—decided to veto SB 44.

This bill, drafted by the leader of the Legislative Hispanic Caucus, Sen. Richard Polanco, refined the constitutional amendment known as Proposition 209, by noting that the proposition did not prohibit

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illegal outreach and recruitment programs to solve disparities among underrepresented groups.

Since Prop. 209's passage, many local governments have ended their entire affirmative action programs, accepting the premise that such programs are reverse discrimination. The result has been a massive decline in contracting with women and minority-owned businesses by the state of California and its localities.

In a rebuff of Prop. 209 and Prop. 187—targeted at immigrants—a massive voter turnout ended 16 years of Republican rule by electing Davis by 20 points over conservative Republican Dan Lundgren.

However, Lundgren, as attorney general, supported the bill. Davis' veto was a surprise

to the Democratic leadership of the California Assembly, which had overwhelmingly passed the corrective measure.

The bill is actually consistent with the language of the proposition, which states that none of its provisions shall supersede federal law. A host of federal regulations require the state and localities to maintain quite active affirmative action programs.

Ironically, Davis decided to drop an appeal of Proposition 187 on the same day that he vetoed SB 44. The law would have forbidden state services such as education and healthcare to illegal immigrants. In addition, the state of California extended a statute of limitations on suits against German companies for use of slave labor during World War II.

It was a confusing day that indicated that Davis' concern, like the senator in "Juneteenth," is an obsession with being re-elected. Since his election he has hesitated to be too closely aligned with the Black, Latino and labor forces that spurred his campaign.

In fact, Davis was himself the beneficiary of reverse affirmative action. After two losses by Bradley and two more losses by female candidates, Davis benefited from the view that only a White male could carry forward

the Democratic cause, although he was widely regarded as a non-charismatic campaigner.

Davis' rationale is that the voters adopted Proposition 209, although surveys indicated 25 percent of those who voted for it were confused by the seemingly innocuous language. In addition, he had no such inhibitions with dropping Prop. 187.

The California governor is practicing the Clinton strategy of triangulation that tries to steal issues from Republicans. For core constituencies of the Democratic party, it often means taking worse medicine from friendly officials than opponents could have ever administered.

It will take a revival of political energy among the African-American community, the unspoken target of Prop. 209 and several other measures intended to reduce the Black political powerbase which boasted two statewide elected officials and an assembly speaker.

Here and across the nation, moving into the 2000 election cycle, we must learn to play in increasingly money-driven politics. Blacks will not be taken seriously until there is an internally-generated source of political funds that can counter initiatives or back opponents to officials who stray from our interests.

Why did Davis double cross Blacks who nurtured his career? Because he thinks he can. If nothing happens, he'll be right.

John William Templeton is executive editor of "Griot," the African-American, African and Caribbean business daily at [www.Blackmoney.com](http://www.Blackmoney.com).

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