

# Red Cross chief says no Darfur testimony

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**GENEVA** - The international Red Cross would never testify in a Darfur war crimes trial because of the group's long-standing pledge of neutrality, its president said Friday.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has the largest presence of any aid group in Darfur, but Jakob Kellenberger said he would never make public the observations of its nearly 2,000 Sudanese and international staff working in the country.

The issue is a sensitive one for the ICRC, which is frequently criticized for refusing to go public with its denunciations of atrocities, most notably during the Holocaust. In 1997, the ICRC admitted a "moral failure" in keeping silent about the Nazi genocide of Jews during World War II, even though it had documented mass deportations and killings.

Since fighting in Darfur broke out four years ago, the ICRC has pleaded with both the Sudan's government and Darfur rebel groups to stop what Kellenberger called "very gross violations of international humanitarian law."

Still, Kellenberger said the ICRC, guardian of the Geneva Conventions on the conduct of war, was bound by its principles of confidentiality and wouldn't discuss the conversations it has held with officials and rebels.

"That's not for the public. That's for the authorities concerned," Kellenberger told journalists at the ICRC's Geneva headquarters. "The ICRC will never be a witness in court proceedings."

Kellenberger, speaking upon his return from a five-day mission to Sudan, said the Red Cross has made countless "interventions" with rebel groups and Sudanese officials at all levels of government. "Where there are violations ... we request that that is not being repeated," he said.

More than 200,000 people have been killed and 2.5 million forced from their homes in the Darfur conflict, which began when ethnic African tribesmen took up arms, complaining of decades of neglect and discrimination by the Sudanese government.

Khartoum is accused of responding by unleashing the tribal militia known as janjaweed. Khartoum denies the charge, but members of the janjaweed have told the media that they were armed by government forces.

The White House has labeled the attacks genocide.

The office of the international court's prosecutor said Thursday he would disclose names next week of suspects in Darfur atrocities and present judges with evidence linking them to war crimes. The judges will have the power to issue warrants, but it remains to be seen if they can be executed. Sudanese authorities have not signed the international treaty that created the court, and claim it has no jurisdiction in the country.