

Clooney map project aims to shed light on Sudan

WASHINGTON, USA: Hollywood heartthrob and human rights activist George Clooney launched Google-powered mapping project on Wednesday, 29 December 2010, aimed at preventing abuses in Sudan, where an independence referendum looms.

"We want to let potential perpetrators of genocide and other war crimes know that we're watching, the world is watching," Clooney said, kicking off a project that plans to use commercial satellites to monitor the region.

"War criminals thrive in the dark. It's a lot harder to commit mass atrocities in the glare of the media spotlight," said the 49-year-old Academy-Award winning actor and film director.

The "Satellite Sentinel Project" (www.satsentinel.org) will combine satellite imagery and field reports to monitor the restive border region in the run-up to Sudan's referendum on independence for the south on 9 January 2011.

Among the partners are "Not On Our Watch", a human rights group co-founded by Clooney, the UN satellite program UNOSAT, the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Google, and anti-genocide group the Enough Project.

Attention

Google's Map Maker technology can provide an "early warning system to focus world attention... on human rights and human security concerns," a statement from the Enough Project said.

"Deterrence is our objective," said Enough Project and "Not On Our Watch" co-founder John Prendergast, a leading American rights activist who formerly worked as an adviser on Africa to former president Bill Clinton.

"We want to contribute to the prevention of war between North and South Sudan," said Prendergast.

"If war does ignite, we want to hold accountable those responsible, and hopefully deter human rights crimes that would be committed in the context of war."

The 9 January referendum that will probably lead to the partition of Africa's largest country was a key plank of the 2005 peace agreement that ended 22 years of civil war in Sudan.

Most voters in the largely Christian south are expected to vote for independence, but many are worried about the possible fallout from the division and the potential for further violence.

Source: AFP