

“Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”



## An Invitation to Jews to Just L.E.A.D

“What is at stake is our own humanity.” ~ Elie Wiesel

### Have You Heard? Background on Conflict in Sudan

Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Peace Prize for his struggle to articulate and understand the Holocaust and his subsequent work for peace. Elie Wiesel experienced first hand the terror of being forcefully evicted from his home and sent to live in a ghetto, of being permanently separated from his mother and sister and sent off to a series of concentration camps. He lived the brutal reality of the systematic annihilation of a people because of their religion - one of the blackest moments in history. The cries of “Never again!” prompted the construction of the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

There is a risk that the proclamations, “Never again!” made after the Holocaust and then again after Bosnia, Kosovo and Rwanda will be rendered empty rhetoric. The Darfur conflict was acknowledged to be genocide four years ago, yet world leaders have failed to insist on the necessary action to stop this grave crime against humanity, threatening to undermine the Convention on Genocide. Jews have a unique and powerful moral voice to move our nation and the world to action to end genocide, but it will take a fresh, concerted and amplified effort to protect the people of Darfur and bring peace to Sudan.

The genocide in Darfur became front page news in 2003. Evidence of the systematic destruction of lives elicited the declaration of genocide by the U.S. in 2004. By the end of 2005 Sudanese government forces and their proxy militia, the Janjaweed, had destroyed 80-90% of the villages of Darfur. In recent years the genocide in Darfur has become more complicated, and the violence more chaotic. The ruling National Islamic Front in Khartoum continues to engage in large-scale military assaults on civilians, on camps of internally displaced people, and on the under-resourced UN-African Union peacekeeping force.

Of the total population of 6 million people in Darfur, over 450,000 have lost their lives and more than 2.7 million have been displaced. Survivors testify that their attackers clearly stated genocidal intent saying, **“We must crush you. You are Black, you are slaves.”** The mandate by a Janjaweed commander was, **“Change the demography of Darfur and empty it of African tribes.”**

The UN estimates more than 200,000 were newly displaced in 2008, a rate of more than 1,000 human beings a day. Stretched humanitarian aid agencies have been hamstrung by increasing insecurity, able to regularly serve fewer than 50% of the 4.5 million people in need. Hit-and-run helicopter support missions are the lifeline for those out of reach.

The genocide in Darfur is not the first time that the government of Sudan has used genocidal tactics against its own people. In the North-South Conflict, the government pitted ethnicities against one another based on race and religion and carried out a campaign of mass starvation, forcible displacement, enslavement, murder, rape, and direct military attacks. Two million people lost their lives. Four million people were displaced. This brutal war came to an end with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005, but this agreement has not been fully implemented. The fragile peace has been strained in recent years.

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## Moral or Halachic - The Imperative For Action

Jews, throughout history, have known the experience of persecution, displacement and genocide. The Hebrew scriptures are filled with such accounts. We read in Leviticus, and hear the voice of Maimonides: we, "must not stand idly by the blood of our neighbor." One might argue that there is an Halachic imperative to act in the face of genocide.

Certainly there is a moral call to action. "Whoever can prevent any person throughout the world from committing a sin but does not, is responsible for that person's sin." (Babylonian Talmud, Chabbat 5-4b) In his 1969 Memoirs, *And the Sea is Never Full*, Elie Wiesel

says, "Hate- racial, tribal, religious, ancestral, national, social, ethical, political, economic, ideological - in itself represents the inexorable defeat of mankind, its absolute defeat.... As we face the disquieting, implacable rise of intolerance and fanaticism on more than one continent, it is our duty to expose the danger. By naming it. By confronting it." Since then he has become engaged in the campaign to stop genocide in Darfur, testifying before the UN Security Council about the importance of international action. These words and his leadership challenge the Jewish community to take action to stop genocide.

## Jews Have the Power to Protect - An invitation to Engage

As our nation faces extreme challenges, it is easy to feel that we have our hands full at home. Indeed, we do! But it does not take much moral imagination to ask ourselves how far our mitzvah goes. Our obligation is to get Darfur into our circle of responsibility in the same way that we are commanded in the Laws of Kings (Chapter 10) to care for those who are distant from us, healing their sick, burying their dead and sustaining their poor in the ways of peace.

As Jews, we can be in infinitely powerful solidarity with our neighbor across the seas: we can take action - in con-

cert with Christians and Muslims across our nation - to stop the genocide in Darfur and create sustainable peace in all of Sudan. The next presidential administration has the opportunity to repair our nation's global image and take leadership in the international community to achieve:

- protection of civilians from violence, starvation and disease,
- sustainable peace for all Sudan, including upholding the CPA, and
- justice for victims and accountability for perpetrators.

We invite you to take the following simple actions as a part of Africa Action's Just L.E.A.D Campaign to build lasting peace in Sudan:

- Include Sudan in a sermon,
- Dedicate a service to Sudan by the Spring of 2009 and host a discussion afterwards,
- Let Africa Action know what your congregation has committed to do for peace in Sudan.

The engagement of your congregation could be the difference between action and inaction by the U.S. in this crisis.

As Joshua led his army to march around Jericho, blowing the shofar, the Jewish community can lead Americans to call for peace in Darfur until all of the impediments to action crumble under the rhythmic demand for justice.

Africa Action can support you by providing additional resources for your services, talking points and analysis for the discussion, and even some buttons and pens to help inspire people through paraphernalia! Contact us:

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