



DO NOT STAND IDLY BY

SAVE
DARFUR

Statement by Janice Kamenir-Reznik, President
Jewish World Watch
LACERS
May 23, 2006

I am here today representing Jewish World Watch, a Los Angeles based coalition of 40 synagogues with a combined membership of around 200,000 people. The mission of this organization is to educate and activate the community against genocide, to help build the political will necessary to empower the leaders of our country to take all reasonable and necessary steps to protect the innocents of the world from the ugly hands of ethnic and religious cleansing and horrific bigotry, and to raise funds to provide relief to the refugees. Our organization is guided by the notion that one's failure to act in the face of evil makes one an accomplice to the evil. It was Martin Luther King who wrote that in a civilized society, few are guilty, but all are responsible. We must take those words to heart and allow them to shape our deeds.

Darfur is a region in Western Sudan. In the last 3 years, more than 400,000 Black African Muslims in Darfur have been killed; 2-3 million have been dispossessed and rendered homeless. The refugee camps are filled with women, almost all of whom have seen at least one their children murdered and have seen their husbands castrated and killed before their eyes. It is reported that 90% of the women of Darfur have been raped by the Khartoum government's janjaweed militia; as the women forage for firewood needed to reconstitute the food they receive from relief organizations, they are prime targets for gang rape. UNICEF reports that 500 people per day continue to die in Darfur. The so-called peace agreement which was signed two weeks ago has not stopped the dying; its impact will not be known for another 6 months to one year, if at all.

Since the inception of Jewish World Watch, we have done a great deal to mobilize the entire community about Darfur. Aside from the synagogue community, we have worked with the Archdiocese and we have collaborated with many community organizations on educational programs to raise awareness. We sent more than 20,000 postcards to President Bush urging that more be done by the US to stop the genocide. And, we have raised the funds to build 2 medical clinics in Darfur; through campaigns at Jewish, Public and Catholic High Schools, the children of this city have raised more than \$100,000 to build water wells for the refugees. We are currently addressing the issue of rape by introducing solar cookers into the refugee camps thereby eliminating the need to hunt for firewood. We are also conducting a major toy drive this summer to bring educational toys to the children in the camps.

The Jewish community knows too well the consequence of silence in the face of genocide. We can learn a great deal from Pastor Martin Niemoellerr who, during the Nazi years, was silent and indifferent to the lot of Jews and others who were on Hitler's hit list. When, in 1937 the Nazis came for Niemoeller, he wrote these celebrated lines:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out--because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out--because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak for me.

Jewish World Watch is here today in support this divestment initiative, guided as much by the words of Martin Luther King as by those of Pastor Niemoller.

By and large, the Jewish community abhors divestment campaigns—the reason being, that all too often they are used unfairly and unjustly against Israel.

However, we cannot desist from using this very important weapon solely because there are those who misuse or abuse it. Indeed, it is our position that a regime's actions **MUST** rise to the level of a genocide before we would support the use of divestment. And, to use this remedy, the claim of inhumanity must not be specious or politically motivated. Rather, the claim **MUST** be grounded in a moral imperative to save lives and to not stand idly by, indifferent to the death of innocent civilians.

JWW believes that relative to Sudan, the divestment tool is not only morally appropriate, but is indeed, a moral imperative. The Sudanese regime is engaged in a genocide of a large portion of its population. The criminal, genocidal acts of the Sudanese government against its own citizens are so morally egregious that all political and economic means must be used to save lives.

You have all heard stories of righteous people during the holocaust who hid Jews in their attics and basements. These people risked their own lives and the lives of their own children. These righteous rescuers demonstrated their unwillingness to allow evil to destroy their souls and their humanity—many of them paid the ultimate price, and their memories are a special blessing. No one in this room today is being asked to risk their lives, or the lives of their children. Many of you might wonder, like I often do, whether you would have been able to risk your life or the lives of your children to save another person from Hitler. I don't think any of us can answer that question with certainty. By comparison, today, no one is being asked to anything even remotely heroic when compared to the acts of the rescuers whom we all venerate and hope that we'd emulate. You are being asked to divest LACERA funds from Sudan--a known perpetrator of genocide. By voting in favor of divestment, you actually have the opportunity to save lives and possibly help to bring about an end to a genocide. You are so fortunate to be given this opportunity. We implore you to vote in favor of divestment—to take a moral stand of which we you, your children, your families, and indeed, all of the citizens of our city can be proud.