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SCHOOLKIDS WIN SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL STAND ON DARFUR

Urged on by comments made to the council by members of the 6th grade class at Temple Israel Day School in Hollywood and by Jewish World Watch (JWW), the Los Angeles City Council voted today to add support for AB 2941 (Koretz-Horton). AB 2941 calls on CalPERS and CalSTRS to divest their funds from the Sudan.

The 6th grade class at Temple Israel Day School in Hollywood and representatives from Jewish World Watch (JWW) met with Council President Garcetti several weeks ago to propose a City Council stance against the genocide in Darfur. The 6th graders today testified before the full Council again imploring them to accept the resolution.

Natan Reches, one of the 6th graders, challenged the Council members to help make a difference. "Why do I ask for your help?" asked Reches. "I ask because I am a small voice that wants to be heard in a crowd of big voices. You are those voices. All of them together will be heard as one gargantuan voice."

The 6th graders had studied the situation in Darfur in class. Assisted by Jewish World Watch, they prepared a resolution on the genocide in Darfur which they presented to Garcetti.

"I was enormously impressed with the maturity and intelligence of these 6th graders," commented Council President Garcetti. "They were extremely well prepared and thoughtful in their approach. I am pleased that as a result of their help the Council voted to take a strong position against the genocide in Darfur."

Councilmember Jan Perry spoke directly to the issue from the Council floor. "The atrocities that are occurring in Darfur are incomprehensible and painful for all who value human dignity and rights," said Perry. "We cannot support a government that continues to allow this brutality and genocide to occur. I stand behind AB 2941 and that hope that the State Assembly disinvests our State retirement funds from Sudan."

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The divestment criteria for AB 2941 include exemptions for sectors of the economy on which the average Sudanese relies for work and sustenance or which provide goods and services that promote welfare, health, education, and religious or spiritual activities.

“We are calling for a campaign of targeted divestment,” said Janice Kamenir-Reznik, President and CEO, Jewish World Watch. “The ultimate goal is to protect the victims in Darfur, so it is important to focus our divestment efforts to maximize the impact on the Sudanese government and its policies while minimizing any adverse impact on innocent Sudanese. Our divestment campaign targets companies that are complicit in the genocide or that are benefiting from it, companies that have refused to take a stance against the atrocities, and companies that offer only minimal benefits to the country’s oppressed and underprivileged.”

Kamenir-Reznik, then summarized the position of JWW regarding divestiture, “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. 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 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.”

Rabbi Ed Feinstein, Valley Beth Shalom Synagogue, reiterated the position of JWW on Darfur and the guiding principle on which JWW was founded “It is a matter of conscience, indeed a moral imperative, that we raise our collective voice against genocide. We must not be silent in the face of profound injustice and inhumanity. Our cities, our states, our nation must raise their voices.”

Jewish World Watch is a Los Angeles based coalition of almost 40 synagogues with a combined membership of around 150,000 people that challenges the Jewish community to advocate for and provide assistance to those who are oppressed. In response to the 400,000 civilians that have been murdered and the nearly 2 million people who have been displaced in the Sudan, JWW chose Darfur as its first advocacy campaign. To date, JWW has raised more than \$500,000 which is being distributed in direct aid to the people in Darfur. Through donations to International Medical Corps and the International Rescue Committee, water wells and two health clinics in refugee camps have been constructed in Darfur

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