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Statement by Janice Kamenir-Reznik, President
Jewish World Watch to the Regents, University of California
January 19, 2006

I am here today representing Jewish World Watch, a Los Angeles based coalition of almost 40 synagogues with a combined membership of around 150,000 people. The mission of this organization is to educate and activate the community against genocide; we aspire 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. 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.

The Jewish community knows too well the consequence of silence in the face of genocide. We can learn a great deal from Pastor Martin Niemöller 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 Niemöller, 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 of this divestment initiative, guided as much by the words of Martin Luther King as by those of Pastor Niemöller.

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. For this remedy to be appropriately invoked, 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. Certainly, where genocide is being perpetrated, as is the case with Sudan, there should be no question about the propriety of invoking the remedy of divestment.

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 UC 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, regents, 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, the students and indeed, all of the citizens of our state can be proud.

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