

World Crisis Overview June 6, 2006

At its December 13, 2005 meeting, the JWW Synagogue Advisory Council (SAC) received a report from the JWW Issues Committee* Chair, Rabbi Joel Rembaum, relative to developing a system for ascertaining issue priorities for JWW. The Issues Committee noted to the SAC the following action priorities adopted by JWW at inception in December, 2004:



- The need is generated by genocide or other similarly egregious abuse of human rights
- There is an urgent need to respond
- There is an identifiable goal
- JWW can have a meaningful impact on the need
- It fulfills the mission of the JWW
- JWW has sufficient resources to implement a meaningful response

In his report, Rabbi Rembaum further noted two competing concerns, to wit: that people are continuing to die and to suffer in Darfur with no resolution in sight, and, a single focus may diminish the ability of JWW to maintain supporters and participants. With the foregoing in mind, the SAC adopted the following recommendations of the Issues Committee :

A. That the SAC conduct both an annual briefing on the world crisis situation and an annual evaluation of the JWW work on Darfur. Such a briefing would provide the SAC with insights into current and potential trouble spots in the world.

B. That JWW hold an annual community-wide meeting to be attended by all its synagogues members and their congregates at which an evaluation of JWW will take place and a review of the state of the world. The annual community briefing should encompass both a review of the progress made toward a resolution of the genocide in Darfur and the progress JWW has made in meeting its own goals of outreach, education and fund raising.

C. That the SAC, at each of its quarterly meetings, conduct a review of the situation in Darfur and review its commitment to Darfur as the JWW priority focus.

D. That JWW ensure that its decision making allows it to respond to an emergency genocide (such as the one in Rwanda) without delay, and that JWW become and remain informed about and educate others about human rights violations that rise to the level of abuse suggestive of a genocide.

E. That JWW produce fact sheets, compile a list of resources and explain why JWW must focus on Darfur even in this context.

The following report, prepared by SAC members Peter Finlayson (Temple Beth Hillel) and Victor Gold (Temple Emanuel) responds directly to recommendation C above.

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Human Rights in Crises: A Summary for Jewish World Watch

The purpose of this report is provide a quarterly update for Jewish World Watch of the most egregious human rights crises existing at this time. This supplements my summary of March, 2006. The text of the March summary appears below in normal font. The additional material is in boldface. These descriptions are taken primarily from Human Rights Watch (www.humanrightswatch.org). Other websites consulted were www.oxfam.org, www.amnesty.org (Amnesty International), and www.doctorswithoutborders.org.

As in March, there are so many incidents and outrages now being perpetrated, it seems arbitrary and almost heartless to leave any out. But if forced to choose, the following seem to be the most serious, both in terms of the nature of the human rights violations and the numbers of people affected. With the exception of Sudan/Darfur, there is no effort to rank these in order of most serious. I have, however, added Chad as an adjunct to the Sudan/Darfur crisis since the human rights abuses now taking place in Chad seem to be a spillover from the events in Darfur.

I have been asked to suggest a problem that JWW might focus upon in the event the crisis in Darfur subsides. I cannot say that any other crisis listed below amounts to genocide or is of a scale of human rights abuses that compares to Darfur. In any case, I think it is probably too soon to look for a new cause-the events in Darfur and Chad are still unfolding and I believe it will be some time before we can say with any confidence that the problems there have subsided. If that day comes, the lessons we have learned from the genocides of the last century is that it is important to remain focused and document what happened even after the killing stops.

There is, however, one situation that may merit special attention from JWW, not so much for what is happening but for what is threatened. The government of Iran has repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel and engages in active Holocaust denial. It also appears to be pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. It has for many years been one of the most active sponsors of terrorism in Israel and around the world. In short, Iran threatens to pursue a policy of genocide against Jews and is trying to acquire the means to implement that genocide. We should not be shy or hesitate to focus on an issue just because the intended target is our own people.

1.Sudan / Darfur

For the update on Darfur, please refer to the [March Update](#) report prepared by Honey Kessler Amado.

1a. Chad. Sudanese "Janjaweed" militias along with local Chadian recruits massacred more than 100 people in a cluster of villages in eastern Chad. A total of 118 people were killed on April 12 and 13, a period when Chadian

rebel groups based in Darfur were pursuing a westward offensive on the Chadian capital, N'djamena. The recent militia attacks in Chad seem to be part of a wider pattern of cross-border violence over the past year, during which time the Sudanese state of West Darfur, which borders Chad for more than 500 kilometers, has become increasingly volatile. More than a dozen armed groups, including four factions of the Darfur rebel movements, several Sudanese government-backed militias, and Chadian rebel groups are active along the porous border. Livestock raiding has become common, but the April attacks on the four Chadian villages were unusual for the high number of deaths.

2. Nepal

A brutal civil war has been fought in Nepal for several years between rebels of the Communist Party of Nepal and government security forces. The rural population of this, one of the poorest countries in Asia, has suffered terribly. Both sides in the civil war have engaged in serious violations of international humanitarian law. The human rights situation in Nepal worsened markedly in 2005. King Gyanendra staged a coup against the civilian government, which he claimed was a necessary step to tackle the Maoist insurgency. Security forces arrested all leaders of major political parties. Authorities also severed all communications links within Nepal and with the outside world. Many civil and political rights, including freedom of movement and freedom of assembly, were suspended. Approximately three thousand political, human rights, and student activists were detained for months after the coup. The crackdown forced many human rights defenders to leave the country and others to curtail their work. After months of internal bickering, the political parties in September 2005 organized a series of protests against the king's usurpation of power. However, a renewed clampdown on the press towards the end of 2005 demoralized the political opposition and the media.

Since Maoist forces ended their four-month unilateral ceasefire on January 2, 2006, fighting in Nepal's civil war has engulfed the entire country. Nearly every one of the country's 75 districts has been affected by the fighting between the Royal Nepali Army (RNA) and the forces of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (the "Maoists"). Civilian casualties, which decreased significantly during the ceasefire, quickly returned to previous levels once fighting resumed. The ten-year-old civil war continues to place the civilian population at serious risk of war crimes and human rights abuses while hindering economic development of the impoverished countryside. In April massive protests took place across Nepal as part of a nationwide strike called by Nepal's seven opposition parties and Maoist rebels calling on King Gyanendra to relinquish direct power. The protests have drawn tens of thousands of people into the streets in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Chitwan, and other areas across the country. More than 2,000 people reportedly have been injured and at least nine have died as security forces responded to the largely peaceful protests with live and rubber bullets, beatings, and tear gas.

3. Congo/Uganda

Conflicts raging across Africa's Great Lakes Region, particularly in northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have led to millions of deaths and caused almost five million people to flee across borders or become displaced inside their countries. In 2005, combatants from armed groups as well as government

soldiers deliberately killed, raped, and abducted civilians and destroyed or looted their property in repeated attacks, particularly in eastern Congo. In January and June 2005, security forces killed dozens of men, women, and children protesting electoral delays in Kinshasa, Mbuyi Mayi, Goma and other towns. In May 2005, the national security service arrested over one hundred people, primarily from southern Katanga, supposedly suspected of planning a Katangan secession attempt. They detained some for months without charge. In hundreds of cases throughout the country, police and other agents of security services arbitrarily detained and tortured citizens with the intent of extorting payment from them. Authorities arrested and closed the operations of journalists who criticized those in power. **In March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that it has issued its first arrest warrant in its investigation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and that the suspect was in custody en route to The Hague.**

4. North Korea

The regime of leader Kim Jong Il, the subject of an intense personality cult, is among the most repressive in the world. North Korea (The Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, DPRK) in 2005 made little progress in human rights, continuing its practice of arbitrary arrests, pervasive use of torture, and lack of due process and fair trials. There is no organized political opposition, labor activism, or independent civil society. There is no freedom of information or freedom of religion. Basic services, such as access to health care, education and even food are provided according to a classification scheme based on the governments assessment of an individual's and his/her family's political loyalty. No legal counsel is provided or allowed to criminal suspects, and many of them are tortured or mistreated during the interrogation process. All prisoners are subjected to forced labor and face cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment; many die in prison because of mistreatment, malnutrition, and lack of medical care. Torture appears to be endemic. Under North Korea's penal code, premeditated murder and so-called anti-state crimes such as treason, sedition, and acts of terrorism are punishable by death. During the food crisis in the 1990s, North Korea began executing people accused of crimes related to economic difficulties, such as stealing grain from agricultural cooperatives. Numerous eyewitness accounts by North Korean escapees have detailed how executions are carried out publicly, often at crowded marketplaces, and in the presence of children. **Recent decisions by the North Korean government to suspend the operation of the World Food Program, ban the private sale of grain, and fully reinstate the discredited Public Distribution System could lead to renewed hunger for North Korea's already poor and destitute people.**

5. Saudi Arabia

Human rights violations are pervasive in Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy. Despite international and domestic pressure to implement reforms, improvements have been halting and inadequate. Saudi law does not protect many basic rights. The government does not allow political parties, and places strict limits on freedom of expression. Arbitrary detention, mistreatment and torture of detainees, restrictions on freedom of movement, and lack of official accountability remain serious concerns. The kingdom carried out some seventy-three executions as of late September 2005, more than double the thirty-two executions in the whole of 2004. Saudi women continue to face serious obstacles to their participation in the economy, politics, media, and society. Many foreign workers face exploitative working conditions; migrant women working as domestics often are subjected to round-the-clock confinement by their employers, making them vulnerable to sexual abuse and other mistreatment. The government continued to harass independent Saudi Arabian

human rights defenders and stifle their efforts to establish independent rights monitoring groups.

Three prisoners transferred to Saudi Arabia from Guantanamo are still being held without trial in Riyadh's al-Ha'ir prison. Salih al-Awshan, Mish` al al-Harbi, and Khalid al-`Unaizi, who arrived on July 20, 2005, were placed in solitary confinement for more than five months. The authorities have not brought charges or initiated legal proceedings against them, nor allowed them to appoint defense lawyers, in violation of Saudi and international law. Officials conduct "a few interrogations, every once in a while," a relative said. The authorities allow only close family members to visit the detainees once a month.

At a recent economic forum in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, officials wowed foreign visitors with glitzy displays of a "changed" kingdom. Minister of Information Iyad al-Madani surprised everyone when he urged Saudi women to apply for driving licenses; the forum sponsor, the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry, sent shock waves through the country by electing two Saudi women to its board. Later, a display at the Riyadh International Book Fair included a Bible for the first time.

Under pressure from Washington after 9/11, and from his own people since terrorist attacks hit Saudi targets in 2003, King Abdullah has taken steps toward liberalization. Girls' and boys' education is now merged, an effort has been made to revise textbooks that endorsed intolerance, and elections (restricted to men) to municipal advisory boards have been held. But international pressure for democratization has waned following electoral gains by Islamists in Egypt, Iraq and Palestine, and in Saudi Arabia's limited municipal vote. Saudi Arabia likes to highlight rights that Islam affords women -- but it does not enforce them. Shariah law criminalizes egregious domestic abuse. Judges, however, turn away the few courageous women seeking redress against abusive husbands unless they are accompanied by a male guardian -- typically a father more concerned about the family's reputation than his daughter's safety.

6. Burma

Burma's authoritarian military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), continues to operate a strict police state and drastically restricts basic rights and freedoms. It has suppressed the democratic movement represented by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, under detention since May 30, 2003, and has used internationally outlawed tactics in ongoing conflicts with ethnic minority groups. Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them from ethnic minority groups, continue to live precariously as internally displaced people. More than two million have fled to neighboring countries, in particular Thailand, where they face difficult circumstances as asylum seekers or illegal immigrants. The removal of Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt in October 2004 reinforced hard-line elements within the SPDC and resulted in increasing hostility directed at democracy movements, ethnic minority groups, and international agencies. **Burmese army attacks on ethnic Karen civilians have displaced more than 10,000 villagers since November. Civilians seeking refuge in Thailand have been placed at grave risk by landmines planted by the Burmese army along the border. Burmese troops have looted and burned homes and planted anti-personnel landmines in**

civilian areas to terrorize the local population. In some cases, villagers have reportedly been ordered by battalion commanders to leave their homes or face summary execution. Fleeing villagers have reported witnessing soldiers commit extrajudicial killings and torture. They have also reported that men, women and children have been forcibly conscripted to work either as army porters or as unpaid laborers.

7. Zimbabwe

The continuing erosion of human rights in Zimbabwe was highlighted in 2005 by Operation Murambatsvina, the government's program of mass evictions and demolitions which began in May, and, which, according to the United Nations, deprived 700,000 men, women and children of their homes, their livelihoods, or both throughout the country. The evictions and demolitions occurred against a background of general dissatisfaction in many of Zimbabwe's urban areas over the political and economic situation in the country. The country is currently spiraling into a huge economic and political crisis. The government continues to introduce repressive laws that suppress criticism of its political and economic policies. In August, parliament passed the Constitutional Amendment Act, which gives the government the right to expropriate land and property without the possibility of judicial appeal, and to withdraw passports from those it deems a threat to national security.

8. Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's disastrous human rights record worsened in 2005 after a government massacre of demonstrators in Andijan in May. The government has a history of violating the rights to freedom of religion, expression, association, and assembly, and such abuses only increased after the May massacre. Uzbekistan has no independent judiciary, and torture is widespread in both pre-trial and post-conviction facilities. The government continues its practice of controlling, intimidating, and arbitrarily suspending or interfering with the work of civil society groups, the media, human rights activists, and opposition political parties. In particular, repression against independent journalists, human rights defenders, and opposition members increased in 2005. Government declarations of human rights reform, such as an announcement that the government will abolish the death penalty and the president's declaration of support for habeas corpus, had no practical impact. **One year after Uzbek government troops gunned down hundreds of unarmed protesters in the city of Andijan, no one has been held accountable for this crime. In April, an Uzbek court based its verdict almost exclusively on confessions that defendants alleged were obtained under torture when it convicted them of participation in an illegal religious group.**

9. Iran

The government routinely uses torture and ill-treatment in detention of dissidents, including prolonged solitary confinement. The judiciary, which is accountable to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, has been at the center of many serious human rights violations. Abuses are perpetrated by what Iranians call "parallel institutions": paramilitary groups and plainclothes intelligence agents violently attack peaceful protesters, and intelligence services run illegal secret prisons and interrogation centers. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, elected in June 2005, appointed a cabinet dominated by former members of the intelligence and security forces, some of whom are allegedly implicated in the most serious human rights violations since the Islamic Republic of Iran was established twenty-six years ago, such as the assassination of dissident intellectuals. Iran's ethnic and religious minorities are subject to

discrimination and, in some cases, persecution. The Baha'i community continues to be denied permission to worship or engage in communal affairs in a public manner. In April 2005, protests erupted in the southern province of Khuzistan, home to nearly two million Iranians of Arab descent, following publication of a letter allegedly written by Mohammad Ali Abtahi, an advisor to then-President Mohammad Khatami, which referred to government plans to implement policies that would reduce the proportion of ethnic Arabs in Khuzistan's population. After security forces opened fire to disperse demonstrators in Ahvaz, the confrontation turned violent and spread to other cities and towns in Khuzistan. The next day, Abtahi and other government officials called the letter a fake. During the clashes, security forces killed at least fifty protestors and detained hundreds more. **One of Iran's most prominent scholars, Ramin Jahanbegloo, is being held in Tehran's notorious Evin prison, where he is at risk of being tortured. In March Iranian police and plainclothes agents charged a peaceful assembly of women's rights activists in Tehran and beat hundreds of women and men who had gathered to commemorate International Women's Day.**

Iranian authorities on May 19 arrested a group of mainly Baha'i youths who were teaching English, math and other non-religious subjects to underprivileged children in Shiraz. The authorities also arrested several other non-Baha'i volunteers at the same time but released them the same day without requiring bail. One Baha'i, under the age of 15, was released without having to post bail.

None of the 54 Baha'is arrested has been charged with a crime. As of today, three remain in detention while the others were released only after their families posted exorbitant bail.

10. Egypt

In May, thousands of Egyptian security forces sealed off much of downtown Cairo and violently attacked protestors attempting to demonstrate in support of reformist judges who have been imprisoned. Beatings by plainclothes officers and thugs left dozens injured. According to defense lawyers, authorities arrested 255 persons in connection with the incidents. State Security prosecutors have ordered them all held for 15 days pending further investigation on charges of intent to assault property and people, obstructing the authorities' work, endangering public transport, disseminating propaganda and insulting the head of state and public employees. President Mubarak has remained silent in the face of the escalating police violence.

11. Cote d'Ivoire

Government forces in Côte d'Ivoire, their allied militias and New Forces rebels alike are committing serious abuses against civilians with impunity. These abuses and the impunity that fuels them raise serious concerns about the potential for violence in the run-up to the October elections. Since 2002, Côte d'Ivoire has been split between the government-controlled south and rebel-held north, with a buffer zone in between patrolled by United Nations peacekeepers and French forces. A succession of political agreements have failed to move beyond a "no peace, no war" stalemate. Elections scheduled for October 30, 2005, were canceled, and the United Nations agreed that President Laurent Gbagbo could remain in office for another year, providing that free and fair elections are held.

Elections are now scheduled to take place before October 31, 2006, under a road map established by the International Working Group on Côte d'Ivoire. In December, the U.N. Security Council urged the new prime minister, Charles Konan Banny, to implement this road map as soon as possible. However, Côte d'Ivoire heads into the pre-election period deeply divided, with political parties loosely organized along ethnic and religious lines. Security forces, in the north and south, often represent the interests of particular political parties.

Members of the government security forces continue to prey on civilians by extorting, robbing and, at times, beating those they are entrusted to protect. These abuses typically take place under the guise of routine security checks during which police and gendarmes inspect the identity papers of individuals they stop at road blocks, in markets or other public places. Nationals of neighboring states and Ivorians from the north of the country are particularly signaled out for abuse, on the basis of suspicions that they support the northern rebels. Individuals from these groups are targeted and frequently subjected to arbitrary arrests, beatings, torture and sometimes murder, particularly during episodes of heightened political tension.