

October 2006

# Virtue In Action

College Students Work to Stop Genocide in Darfur

VIRTUE IN ACTION

FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

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Arab militiamen, known as Janjaweed and said to be responsible for much of the ethnic cleansing and herd raiding in Darfur, check on their cattle in West Darfur, Sudan, June 15, 2005. (AP Photo/Mandatory Credit: Ron Haviv/VII)

## College Students Work to Stop Genocide in Darfur

**A**s we learn about horrible events in the world we often ask, “Why hasn’t somebody done something about this?” We’d like to do something ourselves, but these events are often taking place in distant locations, and we feel that we can do little to affect the situation. Life is full of good intentions but often lacking in effective responses to large scale injustices. The human rights **atrocities** in Darfur, a remote region in the African country of Sudan, provide another example.

People are filled with feelings of empathy and compassion for the hundreds of thousands victims killed and the millions driven from their homes. Within the **United Nations**, leaders of the free world are working to develop an effective response but so far have been unable to agree on a solution with other nations such as Russia and China. A group of college students isn’t waiting for a multinational response. They have acted by launching a divestment campaign in the hopes that financial pressure may positively impact the crisis.

### **Darfur Background**

Since gaining its independence from Britain in 1952, different groups have struggled for power in Sudanese government. Civil wars have raged for decades between the Arab-dominated government in the North and Christians living in the South. More recently in Sudan’s western tribal region of Darfur, opponents of the government formed **militias** and in 2003 began a rebellion. Their goal was to obtain a larger role in the Sudanese government and to receive a greater share of the money earned by the selling of natural resources from their area. The militias launched attacks on military bases and kidnapped government officials. In response, the government began arming an unofficial militia of their own called the Janjaweed to stop the rebellion. However, instead of focusing on the rebel militia, the Janjaweed and Sudan’s airforce are launching massive attacks and bombing raids on the civilian population of Darfur.

Although it is difficult to measure the extent of the devastation in Darfur, most estimates place the death toll at more than 200,000. Thousands of towns and villages

have been destroyed forcing an estimated 2 million people to become **refugees**, without a home and searching for food and shelter. The attacks of the Janjaweed have been horrific. Water wells have been poisoned, crops burned, men castrated, women raped, and children brutally murdered as the Janjaweed has tried to **eradicate** any opposition to the government by wiping out the population from which rebel militias might recruit. Of the estimated 200,000 people killed, approximately two-thirds of the death toll has resulted from the malnutrition and disease of those who have been left homeless. You can read an eyewitness account of the atrocities and view a series of pictures taken by a former international observer, Brian Steidle, by going to his web site listed in this lesson's extended activities.

Those who make it to the refugee camps are still living with violence and extreme poverty. There isn't enough fuel to cook the little food available, so families must search for firewood in the areas surrounding the camps. The men and women can't go outside of the camps as they would face certain death and rape by the Janjaweed roaming the surrounding areas. So the children must go, but sadly they are often attacked and raped.

Darfur has become so dangerous that some experienced aid groups such as Doctors Without Borders have had to pull out, leaving hundreds of thousands of refugees without any international assistance. Reporters are also deterred by the extreme danger from entering many areas of Darfur, so the full extent of the crisis is unknown.

### **The Global Community Fails to Mount an Effective Response**

While much of the global community has denounced the killing in Darfur, they cannot agree on how to address the problem. Since 2004, a group of African nations known as the African Union has sent peacekeeping troops to the region to enforce a **cease fire** that had been reached earlier that year. Unfortunately, they have been able to do little to stop the bloodshed due to their small size, inadequate resources, and a limited **mandate** that prevents African Union peacekeepers from being able to get directly involved with the conflict

The situation in Darfur has been given more international attention recently as the African Union's deadline for pulling out of the region has approached. Demonstrations have been held in major cities throughout the world with citizens urging the United Nation's Security Council to send a **contingent** of peacekeeping troops and more humanitarian aid. President Bush and some international leaders have voiced their support for such actions. However, other

nations such as China and Russia which have the power to veto Security Council resolutions, have said they would only support a UN peacekeeping force if the Sudanese government agreed to its deployment. So far the Sudanese government refuses to let U.N. peacekeepers enter the country and continues to launch attacks against the civilian population.

### **Students Take the Initiative**

While world leaders have been unable to come up with an effective strategy in Darfur, a group of college students have taken it upon themselves to pressure the Sudanese government to stop the killing. Motivated by a strong sense of **empathy** and **compassion**, they see the tragedy through the eyes of the victims and are responding with a strong desire to do something about it.

In 2005, Daniel Millenson, a 19-year-old student at Brandeis University, decided to take action and created the Sudan Divestment Task Force, a national program designed to convince university endowment funds and state government investment funds to sell investments in companies that generate profits for the government of Sudan. The goal of divestment is to put economic pressure on a government to encourage them to reconsider a specific policy.

**Divestment** "is a smart kind of activism that recognizes the role universities, and really money, can play," said Adam Gentleson, a student involved with the movement.

For a divestment strategy to succeed, its organizers must become knowledgeable on the underlying issues, research which companies should be targeted for disinvestment, understanding that some of these companies often also provide needed services and jobs, and finally create a campaign to convince investment officers that disinvestment is an effective response. The team of students behind the Sudan Disinvestment Task Force has done all of this, and their story is a powerful example of **generosity** as they have freely given of their time and talents to help others in need.

And their generosity has paid off as they have convinced a number of states and colleges to sell their investments in companies identified by the task force. Those agreeing to institute the divestment strategy include the state investment funds of New Jersey, Illinois, Oregon, Maine, and Connecticut, and the colleges of Harvard, USC, the University of California system, and Wisconsin.

The student leaders have demonstrated **wisdom** in determining how to approach the decision makers of large investment funds. Unlike the controversy and violence

historically associated with activism on college campuses, the students have presented their arguments in a professional and respectful manner. “They wanted to work with us. They were patient,” said Craig Carnaroli, executive vice president at the University of Pennsylvania, “I remember students in my day... [but] this group, they came to meet with me in ties.”

**The Negatives of Disinvestment**

In looking at any proposed strategy to address a problem, it is important to look at the potential negative implications. Some argue that by putting economic pressure on companies to leave Sudan, we may lessen the ability of outside interests to constructively engage the government and positively influence their decisions. Critics of disinvestment also point out that foreign firms often provide needed services and jobs to the peoples of nations targeted by disinvestment movements. Siemens, an electronics and engineering firm based in Germany, is one of the companies targeted by the disinvestment campaign. Siemens argues that in Sudan its projects “directly impact civilians, including medical, power and communications.” These are important considerations to account for when considering a policy designed to help the Sudanese people.

The Sudan Divestment Task Force, however, claims that they have developed a set of criteria to target only those companies that “contribute to [Sudanese] government revenue, impart minimal benefit to the country’s underprivileged, and have demonstrated no substantial corporate governance policy regarding the Darfur situation.” By taking these factors into consideration, these students hope to avoid penalizing companies that are actively working to improve the situation in Darfur.

**Lessons We Can Learn**

When learning about horrific events from the past—the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, the genocide in Rwanda—we often tell ourselves that we would do something if ever presented with a similar tragedy. Today, we are seeing genocide unfold once again in Darfur. But while members of the world community continue to debate about how to address the situation, college students have implemented a response with the hope of adding pressure to the government of Sudan to reconsider its policies.

Regardless of where one stands on the issue of disinvestment, we can all learn some important lessons from these students. First, when working for change we must be well-informed about the issue at hand. Second, we must use this knowledge to devise an effective strategy and find others who are united in our purpose. And, perhaps most importantly, no matter how large a problem is, we *can* make a difference.

**Vocabulary**

**Atrocity**-an appalling act, situation, or object, especially an act of unusual or illegal cruelty inflicted by an armed force on civilians or prisoners.

**Cease Fire**-a stoppage of fighting; a truce.

**Compassion**-feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help.

**Contingent**-a quota of troops furnished.

**Criteria**-a standard, rule, or test upon which a judgment or decision can be based.

**Divestment**- the sale of business holdings or part of a company.

**Empathy**-entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person’s situation.

**Eradicate**-to remove or utterly destroy.

**Generosity**-the trait of being willing to give to others such as your

money, time and talents.

**Genocide**-systematic and intentional acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

**Mandate**- a command or authorization for a person or group to act in a particular way on a public issue.

**Militia**-an army composed of ordinary citizens rather than professional soldiers in a regular army.

**Refugee**-a person who flees for refuge or safety, especially to a foreign country, in time of political upheaval, war, etc.

**United Nations**-an international organization composed of most of the countries of the world, founded in 1945, to promote peace, security, and economic development.

**Wisdom**-the ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding or common sense and insight.

[WWW.VIRTUEINACTION.ORG](http://WWW.VIRTUEINACTION.ORG)

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# Virtue In Action

## College Students Work to Stop Genocide in Darfur

### VIRTUE IN ACTION

### FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP THROUGH CHARACTER EDUCATION

#### Virtues Highlighted

Empathy, Compassion, Generosity, Responsibility, Knowledge, and Wisdom

#### Lesson Goals

- Educate students as to the mass human rights abuses enacted against the tribal peoples in Darfur.
- Provide a general background and understanding of the issues underlying the conflict in Darfur.
- Develop understanding of the virtues of empathy, compassion, generosity, responsibility, knowledge, and wisdom.
- Provide a model of how students can make a difference in impacting an issue if they incorporate these virtues within an organized and united strategy.
- Build awareness in students of the reality that most policy initiatives, even well intentioned, can have secondary impacts that often pose negative consequences that need to be evaluated.
- Encourage students to become more aware of human rights issues and to encourage them to work to address abuses of human rights

#### Discussion Question Options

1. Chris DeWolfe, the CEO of My Space recently said, "The crisis in Darfur is a global concern and as a global community we have a responsibility to take action...MySpace's reach gives us an extraordinary opportunity to spread the word and empower individuals to help address the horrors in Darfur."

The CEO of My Space views his company as a global organization with a global responsibility. Do you think we should view ourselves individually as global citizens with a responsibility, a duty, to work to alleviate suffering around the world that may be far removed from our local community?

If yes, what are some ways we can help address the human rights crisis in Darfur?

2. What are the keys to the students' success in convincing some large investment funds to follow their recommended disinvestment strategy?
3. How have the students used technology in the endeavor to help the people of Darfur?

We hope to catalyze a discussion of the power of technology in learning about the suffering of others around the world, and how the students used to technology to advance their cause:

- Internet enabled the students to learn about the underlying problems in Darfur
- Students expanded awareness of Darfur at other colleges by partnering with well-established student websites including CampusProgress.org and StandNow.org
- Created Powerpoint presentations

and enabled students at other universities to customize them for presentations at their own universities.

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a disinvestment strategy in trying to impact a government's policies?

5. Under what circumstances, if any, do you think nations as an international community should intervene to end a brutal dictatorship, or genocide? Or alternatively, when should they not intervene.

Is the US and the rest of the world capable of intervening effectively militarily given already established commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and elsewhere?

6. If the international community can't agree on a unified approach, should the US and a smaller number of other countries attempt to intervene outside of the UN?

7. Other than the Sudanese government, to what extent, if any, should other individuals or groups bear the blame for the atrocities taking place in Darfur: the U.N., the U.S. Government, other African nations, China, Russia, ourselves?

8. Before this lesson, what did you know about the crisis in Darfur? If you didn't know about the crisis, why not? Are there aspects of the crisis that you would like to learn more about?

9. Are you familiar with any similar cases

of mass human rights abuses that have taken place in Africa or anywhere else in the world?

10. What do we do in our school and community to try and work for social justice? Could we do more? How?

11. What are the similarities between the genocide in Darfur and the Jewish Holocaust? What are the differences?

12. Why are many Americans apathetic about horrific events that taking place around the world such as those in Darfur? What could be done to change these attitudes?

### Journal Writing Options

1. Ghandi is often quoted as saying, "If you want peace, work for justice." Write about how this quote relates to the students leading the Sudan Divestment Task Force? What does this quote mean in your own life?

2. Think about some of the problems that you have noticed in your school and community. What are some ways you could turn your feelings of empathy and compassion into an effective plan for action.

### Extended Learning Projects

1. Senator Paul Simon, who died in 2003, said after the Rwandan genocide, "If every member of the House and Senate had received 100 letters from people back home saying we have to do something about Rwanda, when the crisis was first developing, then I think the response would have been different." Write a letter to your House Representative and Senators sharing your feelings and recommendations about the role you think the United States should play in Sudan.

<http://clerk.house.gov/members/index.html>

Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives

[http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

Senators of the 109th Congress

2. Go to the web site of former African Union observer Brian Steidle, <http://www.usmmm.org/conscience/alert/darfur/steidle/>, and ask students to read his account of the atrocities in Darfur and to view the pictures.

• Ask students to discuss whether seeing the pictures and reading his

accounts helps them to better realize the extent of the

suffering in Darfur.

• Discuss or show other famous pictures such as those from Iwo Jima, the Abu Ghraib prison abuses, 9/11, the Birmingham Civil Rights protests, the My Lai Massacre. Why do photographs tend to rally the emotions of the American public in ways that the written word cannot?

3. Conduct an awareness campaign to educate your school and community about the situation in Darfur. Create posters, handouts, PowerPoint presentations and videos pulling in information from the web sites below and other sources. Formulate and implement an action plan to get your community involved such as writing emails to our elected representatives and / or donating money to relief organizations working in Darfur.

4. Organize the class into teams with the responsibility of researching and making a presentation of known instances of mass human rights abuses including Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, the Holocaust, China, and the Soviet Union. Each presentation should include a map, description of the event, basis for the abuses (race, religion, political affiliation, etc.), and the global response, if any.

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/>

5. Watch Hotel Rwanda (2004) as a class and conduct a class discussion after viewing the movie. Some possible questions that could be considered are: "How did the main character in the movie (Paul) live out the virtues of empathy, compassion, knowledge, and wisdom to help others?" "Why was the UN ineffective at stopping the violence in Rwanda?" "Why didn't the western world do more to stop the violence in Rwanda?" "*What are the similarities and differences between the genocides in Sudan and Darfur?*"

6. Watch the public service announcements that have been aired on MTV's college network, mtvU. Do you feel the messages did an adequate job of promoting student activism? Did they supply a concrete plan of action? How might these messages have been improved?

[http://www.mtvu.com/on\\_mtvu/activism/sudan.jhtml](http://www.mtvu.com/on_mtvu/activism/sudan.jhtml)

mtvU-Activism: Sudan-What is happening in Darfur?

7. Ask students to research the efforts of college students opposed to the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Compare and contrast the Sudan Divestment strategy with this approach. What are the positives and negatives of each?

### **Internet Resources**

<http://www.sudandivestment.org/home.asp>  
Sudan Disinvestment Task Force

<http://www.standnow.org/>  
Student's Taking Action Now: Darfur

<http://www.savedarfur.org/content>  
Save Darfur.Org – online petition to President bush and the U.N.

<http://www.darfurgenocide.org/>  
Darfur: A Genocide We Can Stop

<http://www.myspace.com/rockfordarfur>  
MySpace Rock for Darfur Campaign, and the Host Your own Darfur Dialogue Package

<http://www.usmmm.org/conscience/alert/darfur/steidle/>,  
Brian Steidle site

### **Darfur Relief Organizations**

- United Nations World Food Program: provides the bulk of the food that is distributed to the displaced people of Darfur.
- Darfur Peace and Development: provides the displaced people with education and other basic needs. We are working with them on the Sponsor-A-Camp Initiative.
- UNICEF: establishes schools in the refugee camps to educate the children.
- Catholic Relief Services: provides not only essential needs but also promotes education and social empowerment.
- Islamic Relief: runs the Kerinding II camp with over 6,000 displaced persons.
- American Jewish World Service:
- Oxfam [https://donate.oxfamamerica.org/02/oxfamamerica\\_sudan](https://donate.oxfamamerica.org/02/oxfamamerica_sudan)

## **Virtue In Action**

*Connecting Virtues to Our World*

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