

## Only Public Opinion Can Stop the Killing in Sudan

The international community has thus far failed to act sufficiently to end violence in Sudan's Darfur region, despite the United States' declaration that genocide has occurred during the two-year conflict there. It is clear that public outcry in response to the violence has been neither loud nor long enough to spur real action in Darfur. While the U.N. and U.S. argue over semantics, such as how to define the killing and whether those accused of war crimes should stand before the International Criminal Court, they are failing those Sudanese whose lives depend on immediate intervention. Their ability to stall on this matter is a reflection of the lack of attention paid to international affairs in classrooms, news sources and at dinner tables around the nation. If the American public were adequately aware and outraged by the atrocities committed in Darfur, their demands for action would provide political clout to those in our government and around the world desperately working to address the issue.

Notwithstanding a peace deal between the Sudanese government and southern rebels, harassment, rape and murder continue at a gruesome pace. Some independent estimates put the death toll as a result of the conflict at more than 300,000. According to journalists, aid workers, and African Union representatives sent to monitor the conflict, these acts are being perpetrated mostly by the Sudanese government and the janjaweed militias it sponsors. A U.N. World Health Organization report estimates that in the six-month period between March and October 2004 alone, 70,000 died of disease and malnutrition as a result of the conflict. In a report released at the end of March, the British House of Commons international development committee estimated the death toll at 300,000. Another 10,000 continue to perish each month.

While many have urgently tried to raise awareness of these facts, the issue has not achieved enough widespread concern to trump social security, overhauling bankruptcy laws or tort reform as a priority of U.S. politicians. The disinterest shown by the U.S. media and political establishment towards the hundreds of Sudanese dying each day seems particularly callous in light of their recent frenzy over the fate of a single American, Terry Schiavo. When polled, most people consider human rights to be an important issue, but in the voting booth remain detached from world events they feel don't directly affect them. In a recent editorial in the New York Times, Nicholas Kristof proffered this statement by Martin Luther King Jr. which describes how the world is failing Darfur: "Man's inhumanity to man is not only perpetrated by the vitriolic actions of those who are bad. It is also perpetrated by the vitiating inaction of those who are good."

Simply put, until our media and the public place a higher value on awareness of international affairs, atrocities like those in Darfur will continue to occur. Creating this awareness will have to begin in our schools. The conspicuous absence of current events in U.S. classrooms is producing youth who fail to understand themselves as part of a larger world community. Our youth must be given the skills and knowledge to remain socially and professionally competitive in our rapidly changing world. Concurrently, youth can be empowered to engage in efforts for