

June 2007 Article for Kol HaLev Happenings
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Just over a year ago, about 40 Kol HaLev members, ranging in age from seven to seventy, gathered in the parking lot of Fairmount Temple late on a Saturday night along with people from other communities around Northeast Ohio and we piled onto a bus that would carry us on the six hour ride to Washington D.C. in order to participate in a rally the next day; a rally whose purpose was to call attention to the horrific conditions being endured by the Sudanese refugees in Darfur and to call upon the government of the United States, especially President Bush, to take a stronger stance against what President Bush himself had already termed genocide in June of 2005. I believe that everyone from our community who made that pilgrimage, and even many who weren’t able to travel, but who were there in spirit, felt that our presence there was an important act of spiritual and political consciousness. This feeling was strengthened by the timing of the rally, coming as it did on the heels of Passover and Yom HaShoah.

Already on the bus ride back from the rally, there were discussions about how we as individuals and as a community could continue to be meaningfully involved in working towards a resolution of such a huge, complex and seemingly intractable nightmare that was and is the situation in Darfur. Since then, our KHL Tikkun Olam committee has done its best to keep us abreast of the evolving dynamics that encompass diplomatic, military, economic and human rights dimensions. And while there have been some moments of hopeful forward movement, there have also been many of the proverbial “two steps back” variety.

At this point in the year, even as many of us are gearing up for a range of summer exploits, I am inviting and encouraging our entire membership to join me in rededicating ourselves to making our voices heard on this issue, of reminding our elected representatives that we have not become complacent towards or indifferent to the suffering of the Sudanese refugees. We are called to this engagement both by the horror and oppression of our own people’s historical odyssey and by the vision of a transformed world at the heart of our tradition’s teaching and practice.

There are more resources than ever before, especially on the internet, that make it incredibly quick and easy to keep tabs on developments in the Darfur crisis and to register our concern with important decision makers in our country as we are made aware of critical debates taking place by any one of the many organizations involved on this issue. There are also some new initiatives that have emerged just within the past year in which we might choose to become involved, such as a state by state effort to divest pension funds from any companies that have an affiliation with the Sudanese government with Ohio being one of the most recent states to take up this question.

I urge all of us to register at one or more of the following websites that are engaged in helping to end the genocide which continues as we “speak.” Doing so will allow you to receive direct updates on the situation by email as well as “action alerts” which facilitate our ability to support this international project of putting an end to a great evil that is taking place on “our watch.” May we each find a way to participate and lend strength to this very worthy endeavor.

Rabbi Steve

www.savedarfur.org for updates and a range of political action steps

www.sudandivestment.org for information about various divestment initiatives

www.ushmm.org/googleearth. Sponsored by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, you can find satellite views of Darfur, eyewitness testimony, and ways to take action.

www.darfurscores.org for information on how each representative in the U.S. Congress is voting on these issues and how to best lobby them to take action.

www.sudanreeves.org for one professor's teachings about China's role in the Darfur situation.