

Stop The Genocide: Take A Stand For The People Of Darfur

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For the special Torah reading on this Yom Kippur morning we read how the Hebrews stand before God to recommit themselves to the covenant. Of all the possible Torah readings, why was this narrative chosen for the Day of Atonement?

Just like our ancestors, so do we stand today before God to recommit ourselves to the covenant. Yom Kippur is our day of profound conscience par excellence. We devote all this day to listening to the voice of conscience within. On Yom Kippur, each of us must take a stand. A stand of conscience: what do you stand for? What do you stand against?

After the Holocaust, the world vowed “never again.” On that sacred promise to protect people from mass murder, we have failed miserably. In the 20th century, more than 40 million people have perished from genocide. These include the genocide of 1.5 million Armenians, 1915-1918. In 1939-1945, the genocide of 6 million Jews. The genocide of 2 million Cambodians, 1975-1979. In 1987-1988, the genocide of 180,000 Iraqi Kurds. The genocide of Bosnian Muslims, 1992-1995, including 8,000 men and boys at Srebrenica. In 1994, the genocide of 800,000 Tutsi Rwandans in 100 days. 100 days!

Now, the first genocide of the 21st century is taking place in Darfur, where mass murder and ethnic cleansing have been permitted to go on for four horrific years. One of my classmates, Rabbi David Stern, wrote of the refugee camps he visited in Chad, “Darfur is bleeding. People are dying. Atrocities take place on a daily basis.”

Darfur has been called “Rwanda in slow motion.” Between 200,000-400,000 Darfuris have been killed. The violence has forced 2.5 million Darfuris to flee for their lives. These “IDPs” or internally displaced people are constantly vulnerable to attack, disease, and starvation. Taking into account an additional 300,000 Darfuris living in 12 un-administered refugee camps, some 3 million people are dependent upon international humanitarian aid for their daily survival.

As usual, the world powers are shamefully silent or ineffective. The United States, the European Union, and the United Nations have failed to take sufficient action to stop this killing. With major energy and economic interests in Sudan, China and Russia have obstructed most efforts to stop the violence. Indeed, China is Sudan’s chief diplomatic sponsor, its largest foreign investor and trade partner, and major arms provider.

Sixty-eight years ago, the Nazis wanted to make the world *judenrein* – empty of Jews. Sixty-eight years later, the objective of the Sudanese government and its Janjaweed militia is to eliminate or expel the African, non-Arab population of Darfur.

Just as ancient Assyria forcibly expelled the Hebrews from the land of Israel, and repopulated the land with Assyrians, so now the Sudanese government is resettling Arab peoples from Niger, Mali, and Chad on the land owned by Darfuri refugees.

The Janjaweed and Sudanese government forces operate with awful brutality. First the Sudanese Air Force attacks from the skies. Then the Janjaweed arrive to massacre and mutilate men and boys, to molest women and girls, to destroy food and water supplies, to plunder whatever there is to plunder, to steal humanitarian aid, and to burn the village to the ground.

In his many columns for the New York Times, journalist Nicholas Kristof has eloquently described the horrors of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Kristoff tells us the story of twenty-year-old Halima Adelkarim. Caught twice by the Janjaweed and molested both times, her attacker yelled, “You blacks are not human. We can do anything we want to you. You cannot live here.”

Journalist Susan Saulny interviewed Fawzia Suliman, a 24-year-old Darfuri woman, seeking asylum in the United States. Looking at old family pictures with Ms. Saulny, Ms. Suliman pointed to one person after the other: mother-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, cousin, and so on. About each person Fawzia said: “Dead. Dead. Dead. All dead...I cry every day about how my family died.”

We, the Jewish people, are all too acquainted with genocide and ethnic cleansing. Having been the victims of both, who possesses greater moral authority to speak up on behalf of the people of Darfur? Now is the time for us to take a stand. For only if we take a stand will innocent lives be saved.

We must not accept this mass murder.

We must stop this genocide. We must make real the words: Never again.

At this time, I would like to acknowledge the presence in our congregation this Yom Kippur morning of Mr. Mahadi Baharadin. Mr. Baharadin is a human rights activist and a member of the Darfurian Leader Network in the United States.

Mr. Baharadin, we welcome you to Temple Sinai and we thank you for joining us in prayer this morning. I want you to know that we deeply care about what is happening to your people in Darfur. Please know that you are not alone!

With the blessing of the Summit Interfaith Council, Reverend Emily Boggis of the Unitarian Church, Chaplain Eileen Cox of Overlook Hospital and I have created the Summit Darfur Genocide Rescue Committee. Our objective is to raise awareness about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. To assist Darfurian refugees with resettlement in the United States. To raise funds for humanitarian aid. To send clothes and school supplies to the refugee camps. To engage in

political advocacy and to encourage divestment from those companies that conduct business as usual with Sudan.

The Summit Interfaith Council is now in the process of reaching out to every civic organization, every house of worship, and every public and private school in our fair city, to participate in one of many possible humanitarian projects for Darfur. Please participate. Please get involved.

Your Temple Sinai is undertaking several projects. One of them is the sale of solar cookers that enable Darfuri women and girls to remain relatively safe within their villages and camps. Please take the informational flyer when you leave the Sanctuary this morning.

I am proud to say that Temple Sinai has more members on the Summit Darfur Genocide Rescue Committee than any other house of worship in town. I would like to recognize them. They are: Ben Cohen, Deborah Lynch, Cathy Kenefick, Mark Densen, Sheri Fine, Norrie Kurtz, Rick Nitzberg, and Ben Wolkowitz.

The Summit Interfaith Clergy Council dedicates this year's pre-Thanksgiving interfaith service to Darfur. Please save the date of Sunday, November 18, 5pm, for the prayer service and program. Rather than a time to celebrate the blessings we have received, let this Thanksgiving become a time to celebrate the blessings we have the power to give to the people of Darfur.

I conclude with a prayer written by Rabbi Naomi Levy. It is entitled "A prayer for overcoming indifference."

"I watch the news, God. I observe it all from a comfortable distance. I see people suffering, and I don't lift a finger to help them I condemn injustice but I do nothing to fight against it. I am pained by the faces of starving children, but I am not moved enough to try to save them. I step over homeless people in the street, I walk past outstretched hands, I avert my eyes, I close my heart. Forgive me, God...Wake me up, God; ignite my passion, fill me with outrage. Remind me that I am responsible for your world. Don't allow me to stand idly by. Inspire me to act. Teach me to believe that I can repair some corner of this world..."

My friends, we must stop this genocide. We must make real the words: Never again.

On this solemn day of conscience we stand before God. Each of us must decide in our heart of hearts what we stand for and what we stand against.

Let us take a stand for the people of Darfur.