

2009 World Citizen Essay Contest:
Freedom from Genocide in the Darfur Region

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The throes and pains of social injustice and racial discrimination have recurred throughout history as a shocking yet ever-present occurrence. For a world so advanced, the poverty rate is appalling; according to UNICEF, 26,500-30,000 children “die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and the conscience of the world” (Shah). This is unacceptable for any human being, but even more so for children, who are the future and potential of our world. An area where both of these global issues are prominent is the Darfur region in Sudan. As humanitarian Audrey Hepburn said about the grief she saw in Africa as UNICEF ambassador from 1988-1992, there is “one glaring truth: These are not natural disasters but man-made tragedies for which there is only one manmade solution – peace” (qtd in “Audrey Hepburn Quotes”). In order for the world to become more secure, democratic, and prosperous, for the benefit of not only the American people, but the world, we must not let these atrocities continue; we must advocate peace. While the situation in Darfur is dangerous and delicate, it is imperative that the United States plays its role as an influential nation in order to bring conscious attention and relief to this impending problem that is so often overlooked.

The violence and carnage currently occurring in the Darfur region of Sudan is based in racial vendettas and is accentuating the great poverty of the area. There are about 40-90 different ethnic groups of people who inhabit the Darfur region, all of whom are Muslim. Darfur’s history of siege begins in the mid-19th century, when the peaceful Keyra Fur Sultanate that had been established for about 200 years was defeated by the notorious slave trader Zubayr Rahma. Here starts a long history of racial and religious turmoil victimizing the Darfur people. In 1917, Darfur became part of Sudan. In comparison to Northern Sudan, the Darfur region has been neglected. In 1935, Darfur only had four schools, and no maternity clinic, and had no railways

or major roads outside the largest towns. This “benign neglect” of Darfur became a recurring motif with Sudan’s subsequent rulers.

When Sudan gained independence in 1956, the political power was granted to a few northern Arab elites. Conflict ensued in 1983 when the government repeatedly disregarded the established peace treaty between the North and South and tried to impose radical political Islam on the Darfur people. There was also a devastating famine in Darfur throughout the mid-1980s, which was ignored by the Sudanese government. In 1989, the National Islamic Front (NIF) and General Omar al-Bashir seized power of Sudan in a bloodless coup. The constitution was revoked and advocated the use of the jihad and ethnic militias to fight the non-Muslim south and the people of Darfur. The NIF targeted Darfur with the “Arabization” program because they are an African population. In 2003, after several rebel attacks against the Sudanese army by Darfur’s Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the government trained and initiated the use of the Janjaweed, an ethnic militia who were and still are today sent to kill, rape, and evoke terror in the lives of the people of Darfur (“Darfur – A History”). The poverty, neglect, and racist treatment of the Darfur people are completely unacceptable, and the social injustice being advocated by the Sudanese government is an unfair reaction to the rebels. This is genocide, and must be stopped. The world cannot sit back and ignore this, especially not the United States. We said “never again,” and it is our nation’s duty to advocate democracy and freedom.

The US Congress declared the violence in the Darfur region to be genocide in July of 2004, and the US House of Representatives urged the Bush administration to consider “multilateral or even unilateral intervention” (qtd in “US House”). Still, no action has been taken. As Kansas Republican Senator Sam Brownback said, “While the world debates, people

die in Darfur . . . We actually could save some lives instead of lamenting afterward that we should have done something” (qtd in “US House”). Under President George W Bush US foreign policy shifted to engagement from isolationism, due to the US “war on terror.” A peace agreement was signed between the Sudanese government and the People’s Liberation Movement/Army, ending war. However, this “comprehensive” deal completely ignored Darfur and partly catalyzed the conflict that caused the Janjaweed to ruthlessly attack Darfur civilians (“Darfur – A History”). This is careless, unethical behavior on the part of the US, and we must take action to promote our ideals of democracy and freedom in this victimized region. Their own government is turning against them, and the people of Darfur clearly need and deserve help. I propose to create a program that will not only provide aid and prepare for the possible need of military protection in the Darfur region, but also educate the people of the United States and the world about the importance of the dire situation at hand. As a country we will ask for help in our goal from the world powers of the United Nations and NATO, but will walk the line alone if need be.

The United States stands for freedom, equality, and democracy. Although involving our military should only be a last resort, it is our duty to intervene when it is clear that freedoms are being compromised. By combating racial discrimination and genocide in the Darfur region, our country will be standing for the ideals that the US was founded on. As US Secretary of State it is indispensable that I stand up for these rights not only as a preservation of our country’s ideals but as an important world issue that can only be corrected through action. As Albert Camus said, “Freedom is not a reward or a decoration...It's a...long distance race, quite solitary and very exhausting” (“Freedom”). The United States is ready to run that race, however exhausting it may be, to stand for freedom.

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Essay Word Count: 1,000

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