

Never Again...Again

By Pauline Yearwood

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Following in the footsteps of a star-studded rally in Washington, D.C., calling for American intervention to stop the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, thousands of Chicagoans expressed their solidarity with the cause at a rally in Federal Plaza.

The brutality in Darfur has taken the form of rapes, arsons and vicious attacks on innocent people, committed by Sudanese soldiers and government-supported militia known as "janjaweed," who have undertaken a campaign tantamount to ethnic cleansing.

Since early 2003, it is estimated that as many as 400,000 people have died as a result of the violence in Darfur; 1.83 million have been internally displaced from their homes; and another 220,000 Sudanese seek refuge in Eastern Chad.

The rally was coordinated by the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. Jewish organizations that sponsored the rally included the Jewish Federation, American Jewish World Service Midwest, American Jewish Committee-Midwest, Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation, Anti-Defamation League-Midwest, Chicago Board of Rabbis, Chicago Rabbinical Council, Facing History & Ourselves, Hillels of Illinois, Illinois Holocaust Museum, Jewish Labor Committee, Union for Reform Judaism-Great Lakes Region.

In her address to the rally, **U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky** said, "Silence can help perpetuate travesties. Earlier this month, here in Chicago, the Newspaper Association of America undertook a critical look at the failure of the press to report on the horrors of the Holocaust as they unfolded. As a result, many Americans did not know the extent of the calamity.

"Six decades and a new century later, technology and mass media makes ignorance of such momentous events a matter of personal choice. Once we know, we are duty bound to act.

"The numbers are both chilling and numbing: 400,000 are dead, 2.5 million have been displaced from their homes, and 3.5 million are hungry. Compounding what is known, it is assumed that thousands of rapes remain unreported: victims are too scared or ashamed to seek help in a culture where rape brings social disgrace, ostracism and even expulsion from one's own family.

"Upon assuming office, President Bush poignantly wrote in the margins of a briefing memo on the Rwandan genocide, "Not on my watch."

"Unfortunately, it is happening in Darfur now, on his and all of our "watches." What will our response be? What will the victims and our children's judgment of us be?

"Now is the time to act."

In his remarks, Rabbi Asher Lopatin of Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel, said, "The Jewish people has just finished celebrating the holiday of Passover. This is the time of counting the Omer: We count every day for forty nine days - from when the Israelites gained freedom from Egypt until the Jewish people accepted the Torah on Mount Sinai.

"Every day we count one more way of being responsible free adults, one more way of doing more for the world, of being free to speak out and rally and protest and bang on the doors of consulates to make sure everyone hears that we want the genocide in Darfur end.

"This period between Passover and Shavuot, the holiday of receiving G- d's revelation, is a period of semi- mourning. That is because over the centuries, we have allowed the forty nine days to pass while countless people have been murdered: by the Romans, by the Crusaders, by the Nazis and in Armenia and Bosnia and Rawanda and now Darfur. Each day that we count the omer and there is killing going on, is a time for mourning; it represents our failure as free human beings to change the world and stop the killing. Each day of the omer, we mourn for hundreds and thousands of innocent men, women and children which the world has allowed to be murdered in Darfur.

"So I say to all of us: Don't let one more day of the omer pass without doing something to stop the killing. I say to President George Bush: Don't let one more day of the omer go by without speaking up, without protesting the killing. I say to the media, which has brought this genocide to the fore, don't let one more day of the omer go by without writing another article revealing the horrors of the genocide in Darfur.

"Stop the genocide-stop it now! Stop the genocide before one more day of the omer passes."