

'Call Darfur a Genocide' Say Coalition Protestors

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By Emmanuelle Joassaint

Washington, DC - Hundreds of protestors rallied Thursday in front of the White House, calling on the United States and the UN Security Council to officially call the crisis in Darfur, western Sudan, a genocide.

There must be immediate multilateral action against the Sudanese government's support of the Janjaweed's genocide, Salih Booker, the executive director of Africa Action, said. He called on the international community to call Darfur a genocide before it is too late.

"Secretary of State Colin Powell and United Nation's Secretary General Kofi Annan have danced at the edge of calling this a genocide," he said. "Dancing over the extent of these crimes must end. UN member nations should mount an aggressive humanitarian operation and possibly a military one if these militias are not stopped."

The rally precedes Powell's meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Friday, where they are expected to deliver Africa Action's petition of 25,000 signatures to call the crisis in Darfur a genocide and act accordingly.

The rally attendees included civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Illinois), Rep. Donald C. Payne (D-New Jersey), the American Antislavery Group, the Institute for Religion and Peace, the National Advocacy Center, and several religious organizations and D.C. elementary schools. Organizers estimated that as many as a thousand people took part.

At a midway point, the audience participated in a "die-in" by lying on the ground in Lafayette

Park to symbolize people who have been killed. Schakowsky said it represented U.S. solidarity with those who have perished. The speakers led the audience in a chant of "Genocide, Genocide, Genocide," and asked participants to attend a daily protest in front of the Sudanese embassy in Washington, D.C.

Margaret Williams, an elderly D.C. resident who has been protesting at the Sudanese embassy for the past three weeks, says she will keep on protesting until "People stop starving and dying. Let the troops go in. Let the food go in. Call it genocide." She said she would continue protesting the Sudanese government until action is taken.

Nathan Smith, a Washington, D.C. resident, brought a sign that said, "How Many 'Never Agains' Does it Take to Stop a Genocide?"

"Ten years ago the world stood by trying to decide whether 'acts of genocide' constituted genocide, as just under a million people were killed in one hundred days," he said, referencing the 1994 Rwandan genocide. "It was a truly disgusting incident that I am ashamed to have lived through. If we live through something similar, I don't know how the international community and the leaders that represent them can live with themselves."

Rep. Schakowsky echoed the sentiment and demanded that Congress act immediately. "If we fail to act than the blame is on our shoulders for every death," she said. "I stand here today not only as a member of the House of Representatives but as a Jew and as a grandmother. We say 'Never Again', but we know that again and again since World War II there have been genocides, and now it is happening again."

Among the rally's attendees was Wali Abualghaith, a representative of the National Democratic Alliance (NDC), the largest political opposition of the President al-Bashir's National Islamic Front. Echoing the call for immediate intervention, he demanded that al-Bashir leave office immediately.

"The killings in Sudan have been systematically supported by the government," Abualghaith said. "The NDC wants all people in Sudan to live in harmony with one another and encourage freedom of the press."

For the past two weeks, members of the CBC and others have been arrested for blocking the entrance at the Sudanese embassy. Salih Booker said the daily protests are expected to continue and invited the audience to attend the protests every day at noon.