

Inside Darfur

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Jews have a special relationship with genocide – a haunting and deep attachment to the horrors of victimization. How has that experience influenced Jewish involvement in the anti-genocide movement? And what are the other factors at play as Jewish communities rally in record numbers against the Sudanese government's genocide in Darfur? The following pages explore Jewish responses to genocide and Israeli reactions to Darfuri refugees seeking asylum. We explore the nature and outcome of that activism and how we—as Jews—can draw on our history, our moral intelligence, and ethical teachings to fight a genocide that has unfolded before our eyes. I'd like to thank Or Rose, a member of the *Sh'ma* Advisory Board, for his guidance in framing the questions that animate this discussion, as well as the American Jewish World Service and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, who have generously provided sponsorship for this issue.

**Twenty-First-Century Genocide:
 The Imperative of a Jewish Response**

Ruth Messinger

After Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, South Sudan, and now Darfur, our lives could make a mockery of the sentiment often heard in the Jewish world, “never again.” Darfur is Rwanda in slow motion. For those of us who wondered what we were doing when 800,000 were slaughtered in 100 days, we now have a chance to respond. Today, we are in the midst of another genocide — the first to be labeled as such while it was occurring — and this one into its fifth year.

After the U.S. government named Darfur a genocide in 2004 but did nothing, a grassroots movement emerged with strong roots in the Jewish and other faith communities as well as in secular organizations. The Jewish community has responded across denominational lines — in synagogues and schools, at Holocaust memorials and interfaith services, in b'nai mitzvah celebrations, and at camps.

Jews are involved for many reasons but primarily because the violence in Darfur is genocide, and Jews know very well the dangers that occur when the international community remains silent in the face of genocide. There are undoubtedly some Jews involved because the Sudanese government and its Janjaweed militia are fundamentalist Muslims, intent on Arabizing a wide swath of Central Africa. Others may be involved because action on behalf of the Darfuri seems more clear-cut than making sense of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and figuring out what to do in the Middle East.

But most Jews are responding because they want to speak out against such horrors. As the anti-genocide movement continues to grow, the American Jewish World Service has disseminated materials, supported local activities, raised funds, and made it easy for people to act via its website — to write their elected officials, to urge pension-fund divestment from the Sudan-China oil trade, to attend D.C.



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