

Light One Candle Hanukkah and Darfur

**By Rabbi Sally Finestone
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It is December, the month of darkness and cold. But it is also the month of Hanukkah, when we light candles to dispel that darkness, and to warm our lives with celebration.

The light of the Hanukkah candles reminds us of the historic victory of the Maccabees over cruel oppressors long ago. But they also remind us of our ongoing need to speak out against cruel oppression whenever it may occur. The light of the candles is a symbol for the light we must shed on the darkness that exists in our world.

For many years, we thought of the Jews in the former Soviet Union as we lit our Hanukkah candles, and worked to help win their freedom. During other times, our thoughts and actions were with Jews living in lands throughout Africa and the Middle East, as we tried to ease their persecution and suffering. And even earlier, our candles were lit to symbolize the hopes we had for civil rights in this country.

This year, it is the people of Darfur that we must have in our hearts as we try to illuminate the darkness of our world.

For several years, a war of genocide has been waged against the African tribes of southern Sudan by Muslim militia, known as the Janjaweed, whose murderous actions are sanctioned and supported by the government. Over 200,000 people have been murdered, hundreds of villages have burned to the ground, and thousands and thousands of women and children have been raped, maimed, and tortured. As I write this, the situation only worsens, as life-giving aid for the hundreds of thousands of refugees in Darfur and Chad has been blocked.

We cannot remain silent; we must speak out. We must light that one candle, and work to dispel the darkness in Darfur.

Write to your congressman, your senator, and the President, and urge the following:

1. Support the House of Representatives version of the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act (HR 3127), in both the House and the Senate.
2. Ensure that Congress retains the \$173 million dollars it has promised for peacekeeping in Darfur.
3. Place a travel ban and assets freeze on individuals responsible for the genocide.
4. Define clear benchmarks to be reached before the US lifts existing sanctions on Sudan.
5. Call for US and NATO assistance to the African Union in getting needed relief supplies to the refugees.
6. Advocate for resolution in the UN's Security Council to expand the AU forces and impose sanctions on Sudan.

7. Make a donation to the American Jewish World Service for relief efforts in Darfur.

In addition, there is something else we can all do together, right here in our community, right now, during our month of Hanukkah.

On Sunday, December 3rd, there will be a concert at Shir Tikva (141 Boston Post Road, Route 20, Wayland) from 3:00 to 5:30 pm, sponsored by many organizations, including Or Atid. All proceeds from the concert will go to funds for relief and advocacy for the people of Darfur. There will be great music, great dance, and opportunities for increased advocacy. Even if you cannot attend, I urge you to consider making a donation to the event.

And I urge you to learn more about the situation in Darfur, and about the many ways each and every one of us can help. Just go to:

www.ajws.org
or
www.savedarfur.org

Light that one candle, and help save a life.

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