



**BTM: Journal of Save Darfur National Conference and Tents of Hope
DC, November 7-9, 2008**

Day 1, Friday:

I'm learning that getting around DC will require more walking, metros and cabs than I've experienced in my life.

We spent the morning with the rest of our team walking from one spot to the next.

First we stopped by the Enough Project office to say hello and try to ask more questions about the Congo Tour. Unfortunately, most people we needed to speak to were out of the office, but it was still great to check them out.

Next stop was the Genocide Intervention office which was very cool. It was great to see Sam Bell and Adam Sterling again, and finally meet many others that we've become familiar with via email.

We left there to scout out the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel location which we would need to find later that evening. After finding it, we stopped over by the lawn to check out Tents of Hope which was still trying to set up. Realizing that each location required much travel time, we had to find our way over to the Sudanese Embassy for the rally/vigil and arrest warrant. This turned out to be a great event and seeing the STAND kids marching over from down the street was a great sight to see. (I have video)

The opening of the Save Darfur Conference took place that evening with a panel discussion from 6-8 pm. We listened to Jerry Fowler, President of Save Darfur, discuss topics with Dr. Gary Bass, Associate Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton. It was honest and informative.

A few bits I was able to jot down:

- Gary Bass referenced a conversation had by one of his students in which he made the statement (paraphrased) that it seemed to him that genocide ended in one of two ways, either outside forces come in and put an end to it, or the genocidaires win, and they kill the people off.
- Biggest thing in Washington is setting the agenda & making the phones ring. Unfortunately we need to knock something else off his (President elect) agenda in order to make ours a priority.

Day 2, Saturday:

Started with opening remarks at the Save Darfur Conference with Sam Bell (Genocide Intervention), Jerry Fowler (Save Darfur Coalition), Nick Gaw (STAND) and John Prendergast (ENOUGH Project).

A few notes:

- 300,000 more have been displaced in Darfur just this year.
- 2.5 million displaced has risen to 2.7 million
- Only 65% is accessible to humanitarian assistance
- April 26, 2009, SDC has reserved space on the mall for a 100 day progress check of our new president.
- (paraphrasing)... It's remarkable that political will has been generated by a movement of Americans for Africa.

Next stop were the workshops. I regret that I was not able to make most of the workshops I wanted to because I was also trying to coordinate making the workshops over at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation which was quite a trek away.

I did make it to one workshop about grassroots and PR.

After I got over to the church I was able to hand out some cards for our Letters of Hope campaign to the kids there, and then attended the workshops.

The First workshop was Violence Against Women and Girls in Refugee Camps

Notes:

- 80% of people in the camps are women and children

Dangers:

- We need to reduce the need for firewood (provide alternative fuels)
- Reduce the need to leave camp for medical treatment
- We need to help them generate income in the camps & provide firewood patrol.

2nd workshop was done by the I-Act team at Stop Genocide Now.

We talked about the history of genocides and we were faced with questions such as 'Would you hide a Tutsi in your home?' during the Rwandan genocide.

They also passed around Tent patches to view. One side had been painted by kids in California and the other side was painted by Darfuri children in Chad. The CA side was bright and happy... hand prints, sunshine, simple things. The Chad side was black and red and only showed battles and violence and people being killed. This is every day stuff for these kids. It's reality and it's shocking. It made me wonder if we (as a country/government) are merely going to wait to issue the next apology for yet another genocide that we didn't do enough about. I suppose that would be easier to wait it out until it's been finished off and then apologize for not reacting quick enough.

On the other hand, as KTJ mentioned, we are working to stop a genocide WHILE it's still happening which is an unprecedented move.

They also reminded us that the UN is obligated to follow a document they signed after the Rwandan Genocide: **The Responsibility to Protect**. A few of these core principles include:

"Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect."

"The responsibility to prevent: to address both the root causes and direct causes of internal conflict and other man-made crises putting populations at risk.

The responsibility to react: to respond to situations of compelling human need with appropriate measures, which may include coercive measures like sanctions and international prosecution, and in extreme cases military intervention.

The responsibility to rebuild: to provide, particularly after a military intervention, full assistance with recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation, addressing the causes of the harm the intervention was designed to halt or avert."

All they have to do is fulfill what they've said they would do.

We finished off the day by going back over to Tents of Hope and it was amazing to see all the tents up. Somehow ours got lost in the mix, but we eventually found the box and put the tent up among the rest. People kept stopping by and asking what it was all about, and it was nice to see them smile when we told them about it. The Tents of Hope Team and the Darfur Peace and Development Team pulled off a successful, revolutionary event.

Day 3, Sunday:

We began back at the hotel for the conference. The SDC team offered time for self-organized sessions and I was thrilled to be able to present our Letters of Hope initiative to everyone. We are especially trying to reach teachers that can present the idea to their students and give them the chance to send their messages. We moved on into informal discussions and time for some Darfur refugees to speak. They quickly made the focus clear on why we do what we do. One of them



talked about how he now lives with his mother and brother in the states and his mother sleeps during the day because she is still afraid of being attacked at night. So during the night she lets her sons sleep so she can watch over them, and then she rests during daylight. Imagine the gravity of how traumatized she must be to now be in a safe place and still worry about being attacked.

We wrapped up and left for lunch and I was happy to have some time with our dear friend Mohamed from Damanga. He is truly an amazing person and a phenomenal speaker and I recommend him to everyone having an event on humanitarian issues. He is constantly traveling for speaking engagements and I quickly noticed that he is one very popular guy! ☺ (see damanga.org)

The afternoon finished with more time at the Tent event, and they had a great concert and speakers to entertain us for the afternoon. At the end of the day we took down our tent and our hearts felt full that this would soon reach the hands of the Sudanese children and they would see all of the bright and happy messages we had made for them. I believe that it really will provide them with hope when they see the volume of the effort put in to reach them. I would assume that this would calm their concerns of feeling forgotten, which makes everything so worth it. I truly hope it does.

In a society where being an '*activist*' often means working extremely hard and fighting the daily battles of searching for proof of progress or wondering if it is getting us anywhere and trying not to give in to the burnout, it was greatly refreshing, healing and supportive to be among other like-minded people that were also there fighting on the same team and having presidents and leaders of the organizations we work to support there, reminding us that YES, we ARE making a difference, and hearing from the Darfuri refugees themselves saying THANK YOU, you are making a difference.... it is the refill I needed and it helps to keep us going. It felt like all the troops were called in for some encouragement, some affirmation and new marching orders before being sent back out for the new year of battle. There IS progress being made. I can personally say that it honestly does feel hard to see that sometimes and it was so important for me to be reminded and assured of this and to know that we can continue to fight for humanity and peace. I have to give props to SDC that did a great job with the conference and I appreciate that they put this together on their own without asking us to pay to attend, so they could support us in our efforts of trying to support them.

I was impressed that people came in for this from all over the states and Canada even. It was so great to finally meet people that I've gotten to know via email, and can finally put a face to the name. It makes the camaraderie even stronger. I was honestly overwhelmed leading up to these events, but I can see that it came at just the right time and was what I needed to move forward. I will continue to do whatever I can to make a difference and I will BELIEVE that the new year will bring change and hopefully healing across our world.

We are one people, regardless of race, religion, tribe, economic bracket & country lines. We come together because we need to point out that humanity really should come before politics, and because it does not matter if the tragedy is not happening to us, we should still stand up for others. Let us not forget that we are not immune to tragedy coming upon us as well and we'd hope that the world would likewise stand for our justice.