

4/18/2007 Calling for Justice in Darfur

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Mr. Speaker, we see from time to time, way too often from my perspective, a divisive, partisan discussion, debate, and oftentimes nearly fisticuffs on this House floor. But, Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to speak about an issue that each of us, every one of us, can agree upon, where there is no partisan or political consideration. And that, Mr. Speaker, is what is transpiring, has transpired over the last several years in Darfur.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there have been 2 million citizens of Sudan who today no longer live in their homes or their villages, and we know that there have been 450,000 people killed in Sudan. It is something that demands our attention. It is something that we as a Congress, we as a country and we as a world must come together to bring the death and destruction, the inhumanity, the hunger, the violence to an end.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity several weeks ago to join the Honorable Steny Hoyer, the distinguished majority leader of the House of Representatives, in a visit to Darfur. And there, of course, we had the opportunity to meet with government officials, but we also had the opportunity to see for ourselves the conditions that human beings are living in today. And while I hope our meetings with government officials were useful, I know the view I saw, the scenes that were brought to my attention, the people I met transcend any meeting I could have with a government official to discuss what is going on but was an opportunity for me to have my life changed as a human being to see that we all have a cause to see that life prevails and justice endures.

Upon my return, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I took the opportunity to visit the Holocaust Museum. This week is the week of remembrance of the Holocaust, and while there, I saw the quote from Isaiah, Isaiah 43:10, that says: "You are my witness." Mr. Speaker, that speaks to me and should speak to all of us. We are the witness of the holocaust today. And many Members of Congress, much more so than I and for longer periods of time than I have paid attention to this issue, have been trying to rise to the occasion and bring awareness to the world. And I commend my colleagues who have been outspoken on this issue for a long time, and I join them tonight.

And today I was back to the Holocaust Museum, where President Bush spoke. And, yes, it was a remembrance of the death and destruction that the Jewish community, the people of the Jewish faith suffered, but it also brought home the importance of addressing genocide and death today. And I commend our President for his demands that the Sudanese government allow an African Union/U.N. peacekeeping force, that they reach out to the rebel leaders, that they end their support for the violent Janjaweed militia and they permit humanitarian aid to pass. And President Bush outlined some steps that we as a country are willing to take and requests that we can make to the United Nations.

Congress has designated this week as the "Days of Remembrance" in order to commemorate those victims of the Holocaust. While at that Holocaust Museum, I learned much about the reach of the Holocaust and saw images of death and dehumanization. And as I reflected upon the Jews past and considered the future of African tribes in Darfur, I have to ask a question: Are we going to wait until the proportions of death are similar to the Holocaust before we take action?

The exhibit that moved me the most, Mr. Speaker, was the list of 10,000 individuals who took action during the Holocaust. They have been identified by the Israelis as "the Righteous Among the Nations," those who risked their lives to save innocent Jews during Nazi rule.

When the conflict in Darfur has ended, everyone will feel sorrow for the unnecessary loss of life. But will our Nation be among those, will we as individuals be among those who feel shame for inaction or pride for standing up for justice in Darfur?