

# Leading human rights activist at BC

**By: Amanda Del Baso**

**Posted: 10/25/07**

The situation in Darfur, according to the United Nations, is considered to be the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today. As a result of vicious attacks by governmentally commissioned Janjaweed militias, more than two million Sudanese people have been displaced and countless more have been murdered. Sudanese villages have been burned to the ground and the survivors of these attacks have been forced to flee to refugee camps in adjacent areas such as Chad.

On Wednesday evening, the Center for Human Rights and International Justice held a lecture by John Prendergast titled "Ending the Crises in Darfur and Northern Uganda."

Prendergast is a leading human rights activist who was the director of African affairs at the National Security Council during the Clinton administration. Prendergast is also co-author of Not on Our Watch and co-chair of the ENOUGH Project, which aims to broaden understanding and advocates solutions for the crises in Sudan, Uganda, and the Congo.

Prendergast has been directly involved in many peace processes throughout Africa, and has worked for the state department, human rights organizations, and think tanks such as the International Crises Group.

As professor David Hollenbach noted in his introduction, "Our speaker tonight has profound knowledge of the crises in Sudan and Uganda, and in other regions of Africa. He is deeply engaged in practical work to overcome these crises."

Prendergast began his lecture by telling a story about a Sudanese woman whose village was attacked by the Janjaweed militia. He explained that a woman named Amina was forced to watch two of her four children die as they ran for their lives after the initial bombing and attack. Prendergast compelled his audience to become part of the solution in Darfur, now that the international public has become aware of the genocide that is taking place.

"Now that we all know, we are gathered tonight to do something," he said. Prendergast also explained what is happening in Darfur. "His ability to inform us of the detail in a clear, dynamic manner is impressive," said Mary Claire Abowd, A&S '08.

Prendergast stated that as a result of historically strained relations between the government and nomadic tribes in the area, a rebellion for increased rights and resources in 2003 was met with extreme repression by the Sudanese government. Recognizing that independent militias such as the Janjaweed would be a more effective force of repression

in the villages, the Sudanese government commissioned the Janjaweed to attack villages and end the rebellion.

Since then, more than 1,500 villages have been burned to the ground. Prendergast explained that the Sudanese government employed the Janjaweed to ruthlessly attack villages so that the support base for the rebellion would be eliminated.

Also, the government aims to divide non-Arabs and Arabs so that these groups will fight against each other instead of the national government. Prendergast stated that, "This is a genocidal policy, aimed at dividing Darfur, to keep the government in power by any means necessary."

Prendergast then described international response to this genocide. "We haven't used the kind of pressure that we could be using," he said. Prendergast advocated for sustained pressure and diplomacy as an effective response to this problem.

He cited three basic policies for crises response: peacemaking, protection, and punishment. Prendergast reported that the United States recently authorized 25,000 troops to be used as a protection force in Darfur.

Although he recognizes that U.S. foreign involvement has been detrimental in the past, he sees the commissioning of these troops as a step in the right direction; they will be used to prevent human rights violations from occurring, such as the raping of women.

There has to be a cost to genocide," Prendergast said when talking about punishment. He also mentioned sanctions, judicial prosecution by the International Criminal Court, and divestment as three effective forms of punishment.

In discussing the obstacles to ending the genocide in Darfur, Prendergast stressed that Africa is often misrepresented as a region whose people are murderous and corrupt.

He cited several movies, such as Blood Diamond and The Last King of Scotland, which either exaggerate the truth or do not clarify that these events have happened far in the past. He regretted that U.S. involvement in Iraq has deterred attention from the crises in Darfur. Also, Osama Bin Laden incubated al Qaida in Sudan for seven years. This fact has made many countries reluctant to help resolve the genocide.

Finally, energy security concerns, especially in China, which invests the largest amount of money in Sudanese oil, prevent international intervention.

Prendergast concluded his lecture by telling his audience "five things that you can do to help in 15 minutes or less per week." First, people must join the movement. He cited the Save Darfur Coalition as a possible way to do this.

Next, people must contact their elected officials. Third, people must call the White House switchboard. Lastly, people must also write to their local networks and be a part of

divestment efforts. Prendergast emphasized that "everything, including the media, operates on the principle of supply and demand."

Therefore, if people demand for a solution in Darfur, more attention will be given to this issue. "Things always get worse before they get better," Prendergast said. He ended his lecture by saying, "if we can collectively make the wheel squeak loudly enough, we can end the first genocide of the 21st century."

---

© Copyright 2007 The Heights