

Members of the Committee,

My name is Eric Cohen. I am a long time resident of Lexington, Massachusetts, the co-chair of the Massachusetts Coalition to Save Darfur, and the chair of the Fidelity Out Of Sudan campaign.

In September 2005, U.N. members unanimously accepted the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity, pledging to take action through the Security Council when national authorities fail. The UN and the US have failed to take decisive action to fulfill the responsibility to protect the people of Darfur, where at least 400,000 people are dead, 2.5 million more have been displaced, and millions more are at risk, because of the deliberate action of the Government of Sudan against its own citizens. While the western world clamors for protection for civilians in Darfur, China is blocking effective action in the UN Security Council.

Still, America and Americans have done a lot to raise awareness, to keep a close watch on the Darfur, and to feed millions. Without the broad based, vocal movement to save Darfur, I shudder to imagine what the result would already be in Darfur. Khartoum is wary of the west, dismayed by the global movement to save Darfur, fearful of the International Criminal Court and worried about the potential for economic action, such as sanctions and divestment.

The movement to save Darfur, already large, has continued to grow. Hundreds of thousands of Americans and many thousands of citizens across our state have become activists for Darfur, and many more follow these activists. In Massachusetts, more than 3500 people and 49 faith-based and secular groups have chosen to affiliate with the Massachusetts Coalition, and we know that these numbers are only a small portion of the grass-roots constituency that has emerged and is thriving. We come from every section of the state and cover a wide array of Massachusetts' political and social spectrum.

We are horrified by the ongoing genocide and mass atrocities in Darfur. We've been to rallies in City Hall Plaza, vigils in Copley Square, large and small speaker events around the state, contributed to humanitarian aid, and written to the President, Congressman, Senators, and the Secretary General of the United Nations. We've posted green Darfur banners and planted Save Darfur lawn signs, as anyone who drives through Needham can attest. We hold local events with speakers and videos, too numerous and widespread for me to keep up with. We wear Save Darfur bracelets. Mothers and children have held stroll-a-thons in Brookline to raise money for Darfur. Congregations of faith hold speaker or video and discussion events to educate, inspire, and act. Congregations band together for large Darfur events, such as the eight congregations in Wayland that held an interfaith afternoon of African music and advocacy for Darfur. Towns hold events for hundreds, such as Wellesley, with Darfur speakers, musicians, and students leaders. Newton declared a Darfur Awareness Day. Williamstown held a Soup For Darfur, dinner and speaker. Amherst's town meeting passed a resolution in support of Darfur. Beginning with Framingham, the League of Women Voters has begun to run informational panels on Darfur. Newburyport artists joined with advocates to raise money and awareness for Darfur. Colleges have filled large halls and small for Darfur speakers. Students organize fundraising fasts for Darfur. One U Mass Lowell senior did a much publicized run from Boston to New York to raise awareness and funds for Darfur. High school and middle school students have been active, too. Dennis-Yarmouth Regional High School canceled their prom and donated money to humanitarian relief, instead. Many other schools have held special informational assemblies. Some, like Reading Memorial High School, arrange an evening event including a Darfur movie, student and Darfur speakers, and Rwandan musicians, or, like Lexington High School, incorporated information videos, posters and handouts into high school jams for Darfur. Massachusetts is a veritable hotbed of activist citizens working for Darfur.

Though the genocide and mass atrocities in Darfur continue, and our hopes for a protective force have so far been disappointed, we seek to do everything within our power to help save Darfur.

There is more that we can do, and it involves personal action and money. We can ensure that our tax dollars and savings are not invested in companies that are directly or indirectly helping the government of Sudan perpetuate genocide.

Sadly, you do not have the power on your own, to arrange for a protective force to be stationed in Darfur and Chad to protect the millions of civilians in IDP and refugee camps. But the Massachusetts legislature can do something, fully within its power, to help save Darfur.

You can support targeted divestment from Sudan; you can vote to divest state pension funds from companies helping to fund the genocide. Over the last two years, dozens of colleges and universities, beginning with Harvard, plus seven states, most recently Vermont and California, have made the responsible decision to divest. Now, it is time for Massachusetts to join the list of leading states that divested from Sudan.

Senate Bill 1474, is a carefully constructed “targeted divestment” bill, framed to have maximal impact on the government of Sudan's behavior and do minimal harm to innocent Sudanese. Of the more than 400 companies operating in Sudan, only about two dozen are targeted for engagement and divestment, none of which are American companies.

Most of the targeted companies come from the oil industry, which is the main source of income for the government of Sudan. Further, HRW estimates that 70-80% of Sudan's oil-related revenue goes to arm and fund the military and the janjaweed militia. Of the two-dozen targeted companies, the four worst are two Chinese oil companies, PetroChina and Sinopec, an Indian oil company, ONGC, and a Malaysian oil company, Petronas.

Americans, when they learn these facts, understand and want to act; they do not want their tax dollars and their savings invested in companies that support genocide.

I believe that divestment pressure on Sudan, and particularly on the related Chinese oil companies, will help effect a change in the policies of Khartoum. It is possible to change Sudan's policies, as we saw from the 2005 peace agreement ending Khartoum's war against its people in South Sudan.

In any case, the moral imperative is clear. In the face of genocide, there are limits to business as usual. Looking back, who would support the idea of investing in firms that sought to make a profit by selling Zyklon-B gas to the Nazis or machetes for the genocide in Rwanda? Looking forward, who wants our tax dollars or personal savings invested in companies that help fund the genocide in Darfur?

There is no question that we know about this first genocide of the 21st century. It is ongoing, authoritatively documented, widely and publicly discussed, and formally recognized by Congress, two Secretaries of State, and the President of the United States.

In the face of genocide, each of us must resolve to do that which is in our power. Massachusetts is poised to take an important step forward. Please do what is in your power to help Darfur and support SB 1474.