

China urged to help in Sudan

By Molly Ritvo

The Dream for Darfur Olympic Torch Relay, which aims to urge China to end the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis in Darfur before the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, made its way to Massachusetts on Sunday. The relay will travel to more than 21 states across the U.S., but Massachusetts was a special destination for the relay, according to Jirair Ratevosian, co-chair of the Massachusetts Dream for Darfur Campaign.

“Massachusetts has shown tremendous support for helping to end the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan,” Ratevosian said. “So many communities within Massachusetts have gathered together separately and now we stand united.”

The relay, which also traveled internationally to countries with histories of genocide and mass atrocities, is focusing on China because of its unique relationship with Sudan. China is Sudan’s chief diplomatic sponsor, major weapons provider, and largest foreign trade investor and trader.

“China is in a powerful position hosting the 2008 Summer Olympics,” added Ratevosian. “We hope that they will come out and use their political power in a beneficial way.”

Susan Morgan, spokeswoman for the Massachusetts Dream for Darfur estimated that several hundred high energy spectators filled Government Center Plaza at the event, which featured genocide survivors from the local Armenian, Bosnian, Cambodian, Jewish, Rwandan, and Sudanese communities. The event opened – in Olympic style – with a torch lighting ceremony in honor of the people of Darfur.

Newtonville resident Rosian Zerner, 71, escaped the Kovno Ghetto in Lithuania when she was six years old after her parents dug a hole under the camp’s barbed wire fence and pushed her through it.

“This event is an incredible way for everyone from different pasts and presents to come together,” said Zerner, who spoke at the event. “I am honored to pass on the torch, literally, to other genocide survivors as we stand in our thoughts and wishes and remembrance of a past and in the hopes of creating a better future.”

Ratevosian said the sad tone of the relay was appropriate.

“I assumed that some people would be shocked, disturbed, and hopefully inspired to do something,” he said. “The theme of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing is ‘One World, One Dream,’ but China is failing to help bring this dream to Darfur. Here in Massachusetts, we



Genocide survivors stand around the Darfur Relay Torch

asked China to please do all it can to help end the Darfur genocide.”

Merzudin Ibric, a 21-year-old Bosnian refugee, first came to Revere Beach nine years ago. Now on full scholarship at Wheaton College, Ibric shared some of his experiences at the event.

“In Bosnia, horrific things happened. Death was everywhere,” said Ibric. “I remember constantly wanting someone to help us. We are now in a position where we can stop the atrocities in Sudan. We now need to let the Darfuri people know that we are listening to them and helping out and praying for their lives.”

Earlier in the day, communities throughout Massachusetts, including Cambridge and Winchester, held their own local torch relays and torch events.

“We want to offer people the tools, power, and knowledge to help end the crisis in Sudan and keep the pressure on China,” said Ratevosian, who added that the Sudanese government is currently undergoing “Arabization” – a process in which Arabs are brought to live in the vacant homes of the genocide victims.

“This really is ethnic cleansing,” he said. “Those that survive the genocide with have no home to return to.”

As for the genocide survivors who gathered in Boston on Sunday, their lives have gone on, and perhaps – with China’s help – survivors from Darfur will soon join them.

“I am alive. Hitler failed,” said Zerner. “I am honored and humbled to stand representing the Jewish genocide victims and to pray that genocides never happen again. Let’s make sure that others have this chance as well.”