

Charlie Clements Testimony for MA State Divestment Legislation
March 29, 2007

My name is Charlie Clements, President and CEO of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, an international social justice organization based here in Boston, Massachusetts. Eighteen months ago, I traveled to Chad where I visited refugee camps and spoke with a few of the millions of Darfurian refugees and internally displaced persons who are hanging onto life by their fingernails. Since then, I had the privilege to walk away from those camps and return to my life here in Massachusetts. Meanwhile, those same camps have been attacked by the Janjaweed militias. For the Darfurians, there is no escape.

Hearing the stories of the survivors who suffered from rape, torture and the murder of their family members, the one thing that gave these women, men and children hope was that people halfway across the world – people such as us in Massachusetts – cared about what was happening to them. Before I left, I promised to do everything in my power to work for peace and protection in Darfur.

And with that promise in mind, Unitarian Universalists throughout the United States are raising their voices for Darfur. Massachusetts, the birthplace of Unitarianism, has the greatest number of Unitarian Universalist congregations in the country – twice as many as any other state in the U.S. In Wellesley, in Lexington, in Concord, in N.Andover, in Springfield, in Boston, Unitarian Universalists are increasing the drumbeat and demanding peace in Darfur.

But to advocate for peace in Darfur while continuing to invest in foreign companies that are supporting the Sudanese government's genocide of the Darfurian people, would be morally wrong. We stand by this policy through our own socially-responsible investments and our shareholder advocacy to encourage socially-responsible behavior by companies.

We are now asking the Massachusetts legislature to do the same. This legislation is not blanket divestment, but rather, is carefully targeted at only those companies that are massively enriching the Sudanese government through oil revenue. The Sudanese government uses 70-80% of its oil revenue to purchase military arms – arms that are being used to terrorize the Darfurian people. The companies that are named in Senate Bill 1474 have refused to take measures to mitigate this use of their profits, not even drawing the line at genocide. Massachusetts has the opportunity to join the majority of U.S. states – 7 which have already passed legislation and 19 others with divestment campaigns underway – to make a stand against using taxpayer money to fund this immoral genocide.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee was founded by individuals who risked their lives to travel to Europe to rescue people from the hands of the Nazis. In line with Unitarian Universalist principles, our founders took these grave risks, regardless of the fact that the Holocaust was happening in distant places to people of distant nations and of different religions. In that same faith, I ask you to let Massachusetts take a stand against the genocide of the Darfurian people.

The people of Massachusetts do not want their money to be used to purchase weapons that maim, kill and terrify innocent people. The people of Massachusetts come from a heritage of religious tolerance and safety for those who are escaping persecution. This is what Unitarians did to rescue Jews and others who were persecuted during the Holocaust, and this is what we stand for as we witness the persecution of the Darfurian people. In no way will the people of Massachusetts consent to having a hand in this genocide.