

AJWS REPORTS

Spring 2008

**Hope on the
Frontlines
of Conflict**

**Darfur's Genocide Rages On
Kenya: After the Violence
Teaching Peace to Colombia's Youth
Are Your Mutual Funds Funding Genocide?**

AMERICAN
JEWISH
WORLD
SERVICE



Dear Friends:

Welcome to our new and improved AJWS Reports. This publication is like AJWS—a continually changing and innovative work in progress. In this issue we are introducing a new design, as well as several new features that reflect our

multi-dimensional approach to working against hunger, poverty, disease and conflict. In this and in future issues of AJWS Reports we will also focus on our growing community of engaged donors, volunteers and activists.

The energy and creativity of AJWS grantees never ceases to amaze me. I recently returned from an AJWS Study Tour to Uganda (please see page 5 for more information about upcoming opportunities to travel with us), where I had the opportunity to interact with AJWS grantees as well as several AJWS volunteers. The experience was nothing short of incredible, giving the Study Tour participants and me the unique privilege of meeting with community leaders on the front lines of the fight against HIV and AIDS. Courageous people throughout Uganda are responding in brilliant and inspired ways to influence the impact of the epidemic. You can read more about this amazing trip on page 14.

Many AJWS grants support funds in the world's most impoverished and conflict-ridden areas. Whether in Darfur or Colombia, or even Kenya, grassroots organizations and their communities are struggling with the physical and psychological effects of violence and conflict. In this issue we share the stories of how people, with AJWS support, are creating hope by organizing for social change from the bottom up. Join us.

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(Top and bottom) Ugandan children at AJWS grantee KCCC; AJWS Board member David Elcott with a Ugandan child. Photos by David Rotbard

(Middle) Dalit children at a primary school in Katariya. Photo by David Rodwin

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Cover A woman sits with her children during a health awareness campaign organized by the Global Health Foundation at the Mayo camp for Internally Displaced Persons in Khartoum. Photo by Zohar Benzemra/Reuters

AJWS Reports Spring 2008 was printed on paper that: contains 100% recycled content; contains 50% post-consumer recycled content material; processed chlorine free, Ancient Forest Friendly; and used Green-e. This issue saved 51 million BTUs of energy; required 22,050 fewer gallons of water; eliminated 7,410 lbs. of CO₂ from greenhouse gas production; and prevented 2,294 lbs. of solid waste from entering landfills. These estimates were made using the Environmental Defense Paper Calculator. For more information, please visit www.papercalculator.org. Certified and FSC Chain of Custody.

AJWS Time Capsule: Dig Honduras, 1995



Courtesy Alison Lewis

Alison Lewis (far right) in Honduras, 1995

AJWS Volunteer Summer takes high school and college students across the world for seven weeks of volunteer service and Jewish learning. Before it was Volunteer Summer or its previous title, International Jewish College Corps, it was Dig Honduras. In 1995, ten Jewish young adults traveled to

Honduras, where they spent 18 days building a potable water system in the remote town of La Pimienta.

Thirteen years later, *AJWS Reports* caught up with Alison Lewis (pictured), an alumna of Dig Honduras who now lives in San Francisco, to find out how her AJWS experience continues to inform her life and career.

“Dig Honduras was a springboard for my future work. I was always doing social justice work; after the program, I did a second volunteer project, working at a reserve in Honduras. From that point on, I became involved in a number of social justice projects. I was the job training director at the Haight-Ashbury Food Program for three and a half years. I’m also a singer, and I was in an a capella group called Vocolot. We sang in Hebrew, Arabic, English and Ladino, and we performed at places like Middle East

peace conferences, homeless vigils and women’s and world music festivals.

I then spent six months in Asia, where I helped at a convent for disabled children in India, taught English and traveled. I then went to the London School of Economics to get a Masters in Health Policy. After that, I was recruited by a corporate foundation to create a job training program for teens in low-income London.

Now, I’m pursuing my music career full-time. I currently work for DigiDesign, which makes the software and hardware used by recording artists. I’m performing in an ongoing musical, working on my first solo CD and doing various projects with jazz and pop artists.

I’m standing on the precipice of some big changes. Every day, I’m concerned with issues that are affecting certain populations, and I donate to certain charities. It would be interesting to talk to me in a year from now!”

— as told to Sara Hahn

Are Your Mutual Funds Funding Genocide?

Before you toss out that proxy ballot from your mutual fund, be aware that your vote could help save lives in Darfur.

The Security Exchange Commission recently denied Fidelity Investment’s request to exclude from its proxy statement a shareholder proposal on genocide-free investing. As a result, mutual fund investors can now help determine whether their money will be invested in companies that are bankrolling the murder, rape and displacement of millions of civilians by pouring money into Sudan’s economy.

On March 19, shareholders for a number of Fidelity funds cast proxy votes on the first-ever genocide-free investing resolution. An unexpected 27% of shareholders in Fidelity’s Capital and Income Fund and 28% of the shareholders in Fidelity’s Select Healthcare Portfolio

voted in favor of genocide-free investing. Ten of the other 12 funds voting on the issue did not achieve a quorum. According to Investors Against Genocide, the percentages represent significant progress. Since they include institutional shareholders, the final percentages understate the level of individual support for the resolutions. In addition, the results exclude the vast numbers of shareholders who were unaware of the resolutions due to the shortened time frame of the vote.

In addition to Fidelity, financial institutions such as Franklin Templeton, American Funds and Vanguard are investing vast amounts of money in companies, such as PetroChina, that are considered the worst offenders. Additional Fidelity funds, as well as funds offered by other companies, will be putting similar resolutions on their proxy cards in the days and weeks ahead. You can find a list of additional funds

operated by Fidelity and other investment companies that have received proposals at www.investorsagainstgenocide.googlepages.com/shareholderhelp.

The Genocide Intervention Network’s Sudan Divestment Task Force, an AJWS partner in the Save Darfur Coalition, has conducted extensive research and compiled a list of all of the worst offending corporations operating in Sudan, which you can find at www.ajws.org/divest. These companies have strong business relationships with the Sudanese government, impart little benefit to the country’s underprivileged people and have demonstrated no substantial corporate governance policy regarding the Darfur situation. If your mutual funds, family savings or pension plans are invested in any of these companies and have not considered a resolution, e-mail info@InvestorsAgainstGenocide.org for a sample proposal. — Joshua Berkman



Meet a Donor

Lois and Richard Gunther are long-time supporters of AJWS and of numerous causes around the world. The couple, who have been married for over 60 years, support causes as diverse as human rights in Israel, a space exhibit at the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles and Jewish leadership initiatives across the country. Together, they direct their giving through the Lois & Richard Gunther Family Foundation. The Gunthers live in Los Angeles and have three children and three grandchildren.

AJWS Reports: What is special to you about AJWS' work?

Lois Gunther: I think the present generation thinks globally; I don't think that was true in my generation. Now the world has become a much smaller place, and young people are more aware and alert. I think that the kind of young people who want to participate with AJWS look beyond their own world. We try to fund new and innovative projects. We think the work AJWS does is wonderful, primarily because we see AJWS getting young Jews involved on a significant level that will impact them for the rest of their lives.

Richard Gunther: I see a movement across the country of young Jews who are looking for a spiritual outlet, looking for the opportunity to perform service, to make a difference in the world and their lives. I think that AJWS is a leader in giving young people that opportunity.

How does AJWS' mission appeal to your own Jewish values?

Lois: Social justice is a very big priority of ours, and the things we are most attracted

to involve social justice: helping people, helping economies or helping people understand that justice is a big component of what Jews are taught.

Tell us about your involvement with AJWS.

Lois: We were involved with AJWS before [AJWS President] Ruth Messenger came on board. We supported it before, but what Ruth has done has been incredible. When we decided to give a major donation to AJWS, we did not earmark it at all. That really was because we totally trusted Ruth and trusted that AJWS would use it where it was needed the most.

Richard: Ruth is an inspirational lady. Her vision of the future of the American Jewish community parallels ours, so it is an easy decision to join Ruth in her noble work.

What would you like others to know about AJWS?

Richard: Selecting AJWS comes from the heart, and we believe in what you do. The aim of AJWS is *tikkun olam*, and that's where our Jewish commitment lies.

— Sara Hahn

Travel with AJWS to

INDIA



Member of AJWS project partner KSSM

Visit New Delhi, Mumbai and the eastern state of Orissa for an unforgettable and rare exchange with communities on the margins of Indian society. Meet community activists and leaders supported by AJWS who are providing hope and promoting change across gender, caste and educational lines. Tour Moghul monuments in New Delhi, shop in Mumbai and admire the Sun Temple in Orissa. The AJWS Study Tour will provide unique insight into India's history, culture and politics through conversations with the country's leading politicians, journalists, academics and elected officials. This promises to be an extraordinary journey!

November 10 to 19, 2008*

Scholar in Residence:

Rabbi Steven Z. Leder, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles

Cost: \$8,500

Optional travel: Northern India's Golden Triangle

Date: November 20 to 23, 2008; **Cost:** TBD

Upcoming Trips:

*Ghana, February 2 to 8, 2009**

*South Africa, July 13 to 23, 2009**

For more information about AJWS Study Tours, please contact Rena Dascal at 212.792.2829, rdascal@ajws.org or visit www.ajws.org/studytours.

*Dates do not include travel days to and from the U.S. and may alter slightly. Preference is given to first-time travelers.



Darfur's Genocide Rages On

As the conflict enters its sixth year, the Sudanese government and its *Janjaweed* militia are ratchetting up the violence to unbearable levels.

by Darren Ressler



When asked to describe recent events in Darfur, a UN mediator bluntly called it “a mess.” In February and March the Sudanese government and the *Janjaweed* embarked on a bloody offensive intended to wipe out rebel groups in areas north of El-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. Even though the rebels were long gone, the militia targeted the towns of Sirba, Abu Surug and Silea. Not only did the renewed violence result in the rape and murder of innocent civilians and the displacement of thousands, the attack was notable because it utilized many of the government’s brutal scorched earth tactics, which hadn’t been used since the start of the conflict.

In villages of 25,000 people, wells were poisoned, stores were looted, roofs were ripped from the tops of schools and generators powering water pumps were intentionally shot up. The government’s forces pounded several towns with gunfire from attack helicopters and aerial bombardments. Convoys of converted armed pick-up trucks, called “technicals” and driven by the *Janjaweed*, then entered the towns and fired their automatic weapons at anything that moved. “I have never been so afraid,” said one woman who hid in a hut and prayed it would not be set on fire.

The attacks have left vulnerable survivors without food, water and shelter in the wake of mass devastation. Many of those seeking refuge at Internally Displaced

(Left) Darfuri women walk through the ruins of Sirba village, ransacked during a government offensive to retake the area from Darfur rebels, near West Darfur's capital el-Geneina, February 21, 2008.

Persons (IDP) camps are too afraid to make the journey because the roads are so dangerous. And so they remain in a precarious limbo, never knowing when the next attack will take place or from where their next meal will come.

● “What we’re seeing in Darfur now is a level of ethnically targeted violence that hasn’t been approached since the terrifying days of 2004.”

Many believe that the escalation in violence is part of a carefully orchestrated scheme devised by Sudan’s President Omar Al-Bashir and the government in Khartoum. Knowing that many of the Darfur-based Justice Equality Movement (JEM) fighters went to Chad in February to defend President Idriss Déby’s fledgling government when it was attacked by Sudanese forces, Al-Bashir’s government fast-tracked their plans to stomp out the opposition. Meanwhile, UNAMID, the hybrid UN/African Union force charged with bringing peace to the area, has only deployed 9,000 of its eventual force of 26,000—which will comprise the largest contingent of peacekeepers in the world—in Darfur since the beginning of the year. UNAMID has been continually hamstrung by arguments about the makeup of the peacekeeping force—a successful stall tactic by Al-Bashir’s regime.

Take Action for Darfur

As the situation in Darfur worsens, AJWS is urging the North American Jewish community to help us continue fighting for those who are suffering amid a genocide and a humanitarian crisis that are out of control. Please take the following actions:

- **Take personal responsibility:** The global financial market is a complex maze, so make sure your investments aren’t inadvertently aiding companies that do business in Sudan. (See “Are Your Mutual Funds Funding Genocide?” on page 4 for more information, and take action here: <http://action.ajws.org/campaign/genocidfreeinvesting>.)
- **Capitalize on the global focus on the 2008 Olympic Games and call on China to reduce support for Sudan:** Sudan’s oil industry exports millions of barrels a year to resource-hungry China. Its profits fuel the counter-insurgency and enable Sudan to buy weapons from China. Since the XXIX Summer Olympics will be held in Beijing, President Bush should be pressured to have his administration elevate Darfur to a position of real prominence in our bilateral relationship with China. You can learn more and take action here: <http://action.ajws.org/campaign/olympics>.
- **Insist on more action from the United Nations:** U.N. Security Council members should be pressured to introduce a resolution to strengthen the arms embargo against Sudan.
- **Donate to the AJWS Sudan Relief and Advocacy Fund:** Recognizing that humanitarian aid is crucial but will not stop the genocide, AJWS is also engaged in a domestic education and advocacy campaign to put pressure on United States and world leaders to end the crisis. To date, AJWS has raised more than \$5.5 million for humanitarian aid, education and advocacy. Please visit <https://donate.ajws.org/03/sudan> to make your contribution.
- **Urge President Bush to enforce the full spirit of the Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act (SADA):** Signed into law on December 31, 2007, the bill prohibits federal government contracts with companies invested in Sudan’s booming oil, mineral and weapons sectors and provides safe haven for states that have enacted their own Sudan divestment policies. You can send President Bush a message by visiting http://action.ajws.org/campaign/enforce_divestment.

“What we’re seeing in Darfur now is a level of ethnically targeted violence that hasn’t been approached since the terrifying days of 2004,” says Eric Reeves, a Sudan expert and professor at Smith College. Reeves recently published *A Long Day’s Dying* (The Key Publishing House) about the genocide and writes regularly about the crisis. “Darfur is on the brink, and its people need not only life-sustaining humanitarian assistance,

but also much more security than they’re receiving now.”

In the same way the Sudanese government found opportunity to further its dastardly cause, an opportunity to make progress now exists for those who stand on the side of the Darfuri people. This window of opportunity is only open for a short while. Let’s not see it slammed shut on those who need our support. ●



After the Violence

After two months of ethnic clashes, Kenya's leaders finally signed a peace accord. Voices on the ground speak about coming to terms with the violence they witnessed and how the country is moving toward reconciliation. by Sara Hahn

When violence erupted in Kenya following the outcome of its presidential election on December 27, headlines of murder, rape and ethnic clashes emerged in a country once regarded as one of Africa's most stable nations. "I cannot get the right words to describe the situation, but it's miserable and pathetic," says Ken Abanja of Kisumu Medical Education Trust (K-MET). Clashes broke out after the presidential election, which many believed to be rigged, and waves of ethnic violence ensued. Now, with a peace accord being implemented and the hostilities lessening, Kenya is turning a corner, but the scars of the violence will take a long time to heal.

As a result of the post-election chaos, over 1,500 people have been killed and more than 300,000 displaced, amid allegations of state-sanctioned violence. The tumult pitted supporters of incumbent President Kibaki, who belongs to the Kikuyu ethnic group, against supporters of rival Raila Odinga, who belongs to the Luo tribe. It exposed profound ethnic tensions—many of which are rooted in

grievances about land and property that date back to colonial times—in a country that is regarded as one of Africa's most stable democracies and economies.

"Kenya has taken peace for granted," says Esther Mwaura-Muiru, Founder and National Coordinator of GROOTS Kenya. "Unfortunately, we took it so much for granted, even when the signs were very clear, that we did not act. Now, we are paying for it."

"The crisis happened within a very short span. We weren't prepared for the way things unraveled," says Abanja, Nutrition Coordinator of K-MET. "Sources of livelihoods were burned or destroyed, which reduced low-resource communities living below a dollar a day to even more suffering. Now, there are people in Kenya who have lost everything and are on the brink of starvation."

"Women were beaten up, raped and their houses torched by angry mobs," says Everlyne Nairesiae, Program Coordinator of GROOTS Kenya. "Property was looted, business premises were demolished or burned down completely. Some [people]



were forced out of their homes and were forced to live in IDP camps. People ran for their lives."

The violence particularly affected Kenya's most vulnerable populations. Women were targeted with gender-based violence, especially rape. People living with HIV/AIDS were unable to access necessary medications. Thousands of people became homeless and flooded

(Left) The train tracks at Kibera, a district of Nairobi and the second largest slum in Africa. Kibera was the site of ethnic violence after the presidential election.

into the camps of northern Uganda; hundreds of thousands of others were internally displaced in Kenya.

"The violence disproportionately affected very poor people. Now they are struggling very, very hard to improve their own lives and the lives of their families," says Mwaura-Muiru. "My hope lies with these people. That's why we must join them, support them, work along with them as they work to improve their situation, so that they can keep their dreams intact." In response to the needs of Kenya's most poor and marginalized, AJWS has responded with emergency relief grants to aid these vulnerable communities.

Friends of Christ Revival Ministries (FOC-REV) works in northern Uganda, providing support to the Busia refugee camp. When the clashes in Kenya began, "the refugees crossed over to Uganda," says John Francis Oketcho, Director of FOC-REV. "We automatically had to respond to the refugee question. FOC-REV is not in Kenya and was not affected [by the violence], but the impact was felt in our refugee camps, and it overwhelmed our ability to provide support." Over 2,000 Kenyans came to Busia after the violence began. With an AJWS emergency relief grant, FOC-REV assisted the new refugees by providing medical treatment and care, food supplies and cooking stoves, health education, psycho-social counseling and guidance.

Kisumu Medical Education Trust (K-MET) is a grassroots organization that provides reproductive health services to underserved communities in western Kenya. When the violence struck, "People living with HIV/AIDS were displaced, without much food or other vital resources to sustain them, leading to starvation," says Abanja. "Government health facilities were overstrained and unable to offer medical services, so people living with HIV/AIDS could not get anti-

retroviral or anti-tuberculosis drugs." In response, K-MET used AJWS emergency relief funding to provide nutrition support, medical treatment and food resources to the communities it serves.

GROOTS Kenya is a network of Kenyan community organizations that address women's rights, resources and livelihoods. Because GROOTS is composed of many organizations representing many different ethnic groups, GROOTS saw many of its members



Addie Guttag

Children at AJWS grantee KORDP, Kenya

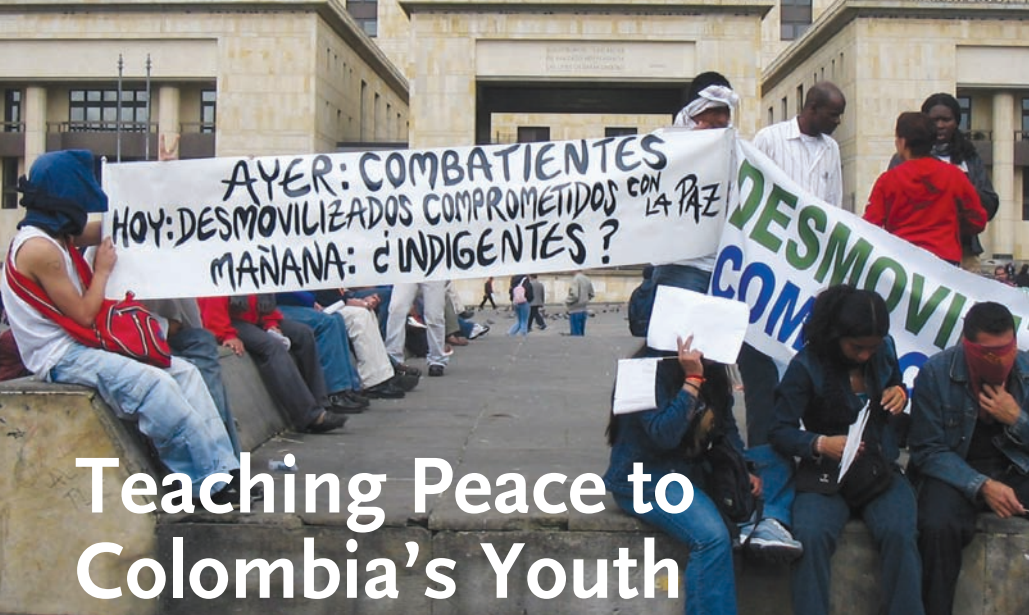
caught in the violence of the ethnic clashes. With support from AJWS, GROOTS assisted those affected with food, clothing and blankets. GROOTS is also creating a platform of "local to local dialogue" for peace building and reconciliation, in order to determine long-term solutions to ethnic animosity.

The recent peace deal between rival leaders in Kenya allows for power-sharing, with Kibaki retaining the position of President and Odinga stepping into the newly-formed position of Prime Minister. As the government reorganizes itself, Kenyans are hopeful that better times are ahead.

Can Kenya return to life as usual? Abanja of K-MET thinks so. "The signing of the peace deal has brought immense relief to the communities. Despite the crisis, most of the affected community members have been trying very hard to pick up the broken piece of their lives and move on to make ends meet." Oketcho of FOC-REV is not as certain. "The violence is over at the higher level of administration, but at the grassroots level, there needs to be reconciliation and support in order for people to be able to go back to their daily lives." Nairisae of GROOTS Kenya is also concerned. "This psychological damage will take a long to heal and may lead to psychological problems and possibly revenge in the future."

This is why rehabilitation is a critical aspect of recovery. AJWS is continuing to support communities as they move from "disaster to development," focusing on post-violence recovery and peace-building strategies. "Short-term mitigation is not the solution," says Abanja. "We have to look at things long-term, and how things might unfold in the future. Without intervention and rehabilitation, it may again lead to revenge and violence."

Through the hard work of reconciliation and the resiliency of the human spirit, Kenyans are now moving forward. And the lessons learned in Kenya's conflict may be a source of inspiration for other nations, too. "If the peace holds, this should be a lesson for other countries in Africa and all over the world," says Mwaura-Muiru. "Kenya was so close to the brink of full-fledged war, but we showed that you can find balance and agreement. This should be a lesson to others, that people don't have to go to war to solve political differences. If countries like Somalia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo see that Kenya can do it, maybe they can do it, too. Maybe it can prevent millions of people from dying." 🌍



Teaching Peace to Colombia's Youth

The use of child soldiers has been one of the scourges of Colombia's decades-old civil war, which has pitted the government, leftist rebel groups, drug traffickers and right-wing militias against one another. Bogotá-based AJWS grantee Foro Joven is working to help former child soldiers regain the childhood that's been stolen from them. **by Darren Ressler**

Colombia is rarely on American media's radar, but its statistics nonetheless speak volumes. South America's fourth-largest country has suffered through four decades of internal conflict. The result is the second largest displaced population in the world (Sudan is first), affecting nearly three million people and amassing a death toll that's topped 40,000 since the 1990s. Another 500,000 people have fled the country altogether. Colombia is the third largest recipient of U.S. military aid and receives \$5 billion from America to combat what many regard as the unstoppable production of cocaine, which is controlled by the drug cartels that operate with impunity. Increased military aid puts pressure on the Colombian government and armed forces to show progress in the war on drugs which furthers the erosion of human rights. The origin of the conflict is complicated and multi-dimensional, but the reality is that almost half of Colombians live on less than \$2 a day as a result of the mayhem.

Colombia's children are particularly vulnerable and often exploited. Both

sides use child combatants in their military operations, despite international laws that deem the practice illegal. An estimated 8,000 children are still fighting all over the country, most of whom enlist under duress or coercion to become agents of war. Children are taught to kill and are often assigned dangerous missions. Young girls are sometimes asked to seduce enemy officers in order to gain intelligence.

Violence is everywhere in Colombia. As a result, children are desensitized at an impressionable age by the skirmishes they witness between the government and the left- and right-wing militias. Poverty, lack of access to education and peer pressure lead many young people to see the purveyors of violence as heroes, and they often emulate their behavior. Clearly, every Colombian child has been robbed of his or her youth in some regard.

As the turbulent storm of Colombia's chaos continues to wreak havoc on its citizens, a grassroots movement dedicated to reinserting child fighters back into society is taking root. AJWS grantee Foro Joven (Youth Forum) is

(Left) AJWS project partner Foro Joven hosts an outreach event

at the forefront, promoting the social and economic rights of children and youth. Formed in 2004 by a group of demobilized teenagers from different armed groups, the NGO's mission evolved after the organizers reflected on their lives and established the goal of helping young people who want to return to civilian life.

"We are betting that our work leads to a more just, peaceful society where there is the capacity of consensus and the capacity for dissent," says co-director Gordy Suarez. She adds that Foro Joven's vision for Colombia is to "construct a new social order without exclusion and marginalization."

Since the government doesn't have an effective integration policy, Foro Joven's approach is to utilize peer-to-peer group counseling to begin the resocialization process. Former soldiers help children come to terms with their military past, while setting goals for the future. Along the way, they attend psychosocial healing and livelihoods programs through art workshops, mentoring and vocational training. So far, they've been able to help scores of children reinsert themselves back into civic life.

Foro Joven is also working on the political level by lobbying the Colombian government on behalf of those who aren't being heard. "Nothing is more subversive than knowledge," Suarez says. The youth group has also developed a government budget monitoring program which tracks government allocation and spending of funds. This information is used by international organizations that also promote fiscal transparency.

When asked about what inspires Foro Joven to continue their work, Suarez references acclaimed Nicaraguan poet Daisy Zamora, who once wrote that life is written in final draft form by everyone, every day. If anything, it reminds us that the notion of redemption is especially important for young people at a crucial juncture in their lives. ●●●

Girl Power

Drought, HIV/AIDS, unemployment and inflation fuel Zimbabwe's decades-long humanitarian crisis, one that's been particularly hard on young girls and women.
by Darren Ressler

Zimbabwe's bountiful agriculture industry once fed all of Africa. But now the country once known as the continent's breadbasket can't even feed itself. More than a third of its citizens receive food aid because there isn't enough food to go around, and the World Health Organization estimates that the lifespan of the average Zimbabwean is just 36 years. With the collapse of the farming industry caused by years of drought and ongoing disputes over land, Zimbabwe has fallen into an unprecedented conflict period not seen since the country gained its independence in 1980.

"A country like Zimbabwe is very difficult for people to really understand," says Betty Makoni, director and founder of Chitungwiza-based AJWS grantee Girl Child Network. "There are no bullets being fired like in Uganda or Sudan, so our case is quite complicated. It's a war of the intelligence."

The societal ills that plague Zimbabwe include a rampant HIV/AIDS outbreak, skyrocketing inflation (at roughly 100,000%), a staggering 80% unemployment rate and years of drought. In the process, women have become susceptible to rape and domestic violence. According to the *Zimbabwe Guardian*, over 40,000 women are raped every year. In 2006, 3,112 minors were raped and many acts of violence go unreported.

That's where Girl Child Network steps in to fill the void. Founded in 1999 by Makoni, then a second grade teacher,



Young women of Girl Child Network conduct a protest

GCN's mission is to support young girls in their schools, communities and homes. The network has blossomed and consists of 690 girls' clubs (which are run by girls and volunteers), three girls' empowerment villages for rape survivors and over 35,000 members around the country. GCN provides safe spaces while advocating for children's rights, the prevention of sexual abuse and enforcement of current laws to protect women and children.

Based in a suburb of one million people, Makoni started GCN after the deaths of many that were close to her. "I lost 28 sisters and cousins in a row one year," she relates. "That's when I realized that I [was] alone." Watching the situation in Zimbabwe worsen only inspires Makoni and her team to continue their work. After all, each week 3,000 people die from HIV/AIDS (more than half are women). "There is the systematic murdering of people," she believes. "We are not physically fighting, but people are dying in silence."

GCN is doing the work that Zimbabwe's government is not. The combination of Makoni's leadership and outspoken belief in empowering the country's women (who comprise 52% of the population) amid an intolerant government caused her to be arrested twice last year on suspicion of forming her own political party. "When you attack the patriarchy at a time when there is political polarity, you are touching everything," she says.

"When I started the Girl Child

Network, I envisioned that one day, after supporting the empowerment of young girls, they would occupy the most strategic positions because there's no way we can teach an old dog new tricks," Makoni continues. "You cannot have political reconciliation without women. The gender dimension to the political situation is actually imperative at this stage."

As Zimbabwe struggles, GCN's girls' empowerment villages, funded by AJWS grants, are making a difference. In fact, Makoni reports that truancy among girls in her district has fallen from 20% to 10%. "It's a one-stop shop where girls come to receive counseling, acquire economic skills and understand their rights. A number of girls have been empowered."

Makoni is happy to report on GCN's many other success stories. "There are so many that I am particularly proud of," she beams. "One of the girls we have supported has become the first rural girl to attain an engineering degree thanks to AJWS funds. Another is now a regional director in West Africa after she managed to access an education thanks to Girl Child Network. One girl six months ago was walking in the rich streets of New York after coming from a slum area. That transformation of an individual from a victim into a survivor and into a leader is one of our many success stories." ●

For more information, please visit www.ajws.org/iwd2008.



The author (top left) at a Dalit primary school in Katariya

Jews and Dalits

An AJWS World Partners Fellow working with Dalits in India wonders if we've been equally vigilant when it comes to empathy for victims of the type of discrimination Jews faced pre-Holocaust. by David Rodwin

Yogesh, who is 23 and one year younger than I am, was telling me what he remembered about primary school, back before he dropped out in second grade at the age of eight. "I didn't like it," he said, his face growing a bit taut as my translator put his words into English. "The teachers made me and my friends sit in the back of the classroom because we were Dalits [untouchables] and the upper-caste students always sat in the front. If I was thirsty I had to walk one and a half kilometers home, because the water pot was only for the upper castes. The teachers told the other kids not to touch us, because we would pollute them."

My interview with Yogesh went on for about 40 minutes. When it was over I shook his hand, thanked him, and then sat down to try and absorb everything he had told me.

As an AJWS World Partners Fellow, I have been working at a vocational training center for Dalits since September 2007. If you're anything like I was about a year ago, you've never even heard the word Dalit, though you might have heard something about India's caste system.

So who are the Dalits, and what do they have to do with the Jews?

Hindu religion and culture maintains that contact with dead animals or waste makes one ritually impure. As a result, some thousands of years ago, a certain



community, deemed “untouchables,” was assigned to the objectionable tasks, such as disposing of animal carcasses, tanning leather and cleaning human excreta. Engagement in this work led to additional discrimination against those who performed it, culminating in the practice of “untouchability.” Untouchability can be defined as the treatment of those who do such work—and everyone in the caste associated with it, regardless of whether or not they engage in the work—as a source of pollution, contact with whom requires ritual cleansing.

As in Yogesh’s case, untouchability is used to make clear the difference between “us” and “them”—and to enforce that difference in cruel, inhumane ways. Those who come from untouchable castes are routinely denied temple access, given tea in broken cups reserved for them, forbidden from using the village well, humiliated, beaten and raped with near impunity. Today, untouchables generally prefer to be called Dalit, which translates as “oppressed”; it’s not hard to see where the name comes from.

On field visits away from the vocational training center, I’ve had the opportunity to see the heart of India—its villages, where about 70% of Indians still live. On one visit, I heard children, no more than eight or nine years old, say that they are not allowed to sit in the village square because the non-Dalits believe that untouchable castes pollute it with their presence. One girl said that she didn’t like going to school because non-Dalit children and teachers insulted her with caste-based names and slurs. In another village, I met a young man, now in the 10th grade, who led a successful protest against teacher-enforced segregation of Dalit children during lunchtime at school.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who first got me thinking about the connection between Jews and Dalits. A few months ago, as I was reading his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, I came across the following words:

“Some of the classes which render us the greatest social service, but which we Hindus have chosen to regard as ‘untouchables,’ are relegated to remote quarters of a town or a village ... In Christian Europe the Jews were once ‘untouchables,’ and the quarters that were assigned to them had the offensive name of ‘ghettos.’”

● If Gandhi could see the similarity between the ghettos in which Dalits are forced to live and the ghettos in which Jewish communities were kept, where does that leave us?

At first the connection seemed a bit of a stretch, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed to work. In Christian Europe, Jews were often forced to live separate from the rest of their city or town. Gandhi pointed out that Dalits met (and in fact continue to meet) the same fate, with their localities on the outskirts of nearly every Indian village.

Jews, as history’s perpetual “internal other,” oppressed for millennia, are perhaps in a better position than any other group worldwide to empathize and express solidarity with the Dalits, who have occupied the lowest position

in their society for 3,000 years. Dalits are also an internal other, spread throughout South Asia, numbering some 260 million people—170 million in India alone—and yet treated as pariahs (the word “pariah” itself comes from the name of a Dalit sub-caste). Our whole concept of a minority has to be shifted when dealing with a population of this scale, as does the degree of our outrage with their oppression. If Gandhi could see the similarity between the ghettos in which Dalits are forced to live and the ghettos in which Jewish communities were kept, where does that leave us?

As a result of the Holocaust, many Jews today feel impelled to act against other genocides, such as the one currently taking place in Darfur. It should be a source of pride that Jews are at the forefront of the Save Darfur movement, turning “Never Again” into real action. I wonder, though, if we have been equally vigilant when it comes to empathy for victims of the type of discrimination Jews faced pre-Holocaust?

Those not yet liberated from circumstances similar to what we faced only a few generations ago need and deserve our voice. ●

David Rodwin, a 2005 graduate of Johns Hopkins University, is currently an AJWS World Partners Fellow working at a vocational training center for Dalits in Ahmedabad, India.



David Rodwin



(Left) Eric Joss with children of THETA. Photo by David Rotbard



(Right) Siblings in a rural village served by THETA. Photo by Ruth W. Messinger

AJWS Donors in the Field

“Traveling as tourists in Africa, we could be voyeurs. Instead, because we are traveling with AJWS, we are partners in the solutions and not just viewers of the suffering.” So says David Elcott, a participant in the AJWS Study Tour to Uganda and AJWS Board member who hails from White Plains, NY. In February, a group of AJWS supporters, led by AJWS President Ruth W. Messinger, traveled across this east African country. The contingent spent 10 days meeting the leaders of grassroots organizations that are working tirelessly to bring positive change to their communities.

AJWS Study Tours provide the rare opportunity to travel off the beaten path and experience daily life for the vast majority of the world's population, while witnessing the visionary and inspiring

work of social changemakers. Participants meet with leading experts, journalists and political leaders to learn about a country's history, culture and politics.

The Study Tour experience is described by many as life changing, going beyond the headlines and bringing names and faces to the statistics. Participants return from Study Tours with a profound connection to people living on the other side of the world and a stronger commitment to *tikkun olam* and the mission of AJWS.

“The organizations we met with were led by inspiring activists, making extraordinary change in the most difficult circumstances . . . Everything we experienced made me reflect on my own life of privilege and what it means and requires to live that life,” says Sara Moore Litt, an AJWS Board member and

Study Tour participant.

The Study Tour to Uganda revealed the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the poorest, most marginalized communities of Africa. In Uganda alone, one million people live with the virus. Participants visited AJWS project partners and individuals who are working on the cutting edge of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

“If we had doubts at the beginning of the day, the inspiration provided by the AJWS grantees was uplifting,” says Elcott. “If [Ugandans], who face these conditions day in and day out, remain passionate and dedicated, then we who are privileged surely can stand with them. And we do.” — Sara Hahn

For more information about AJWS Study Tours, please visit www.ajws.org/studytours.



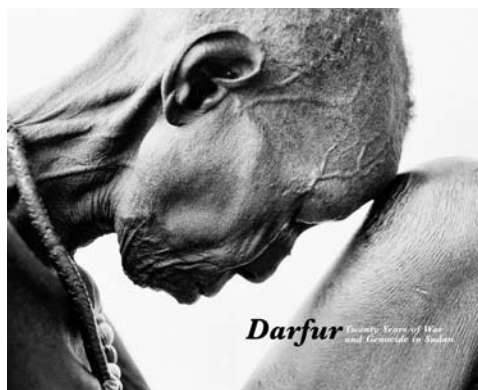
(Left) Daniel Dunn with child in village served by FDNC. Photo by Ruth W. Messinger



(Center) FDNC greeting committee in a rural village. Photo by Ruth W. Messinger

(Right) Joni Pratt with children at KCCC. Photo by David Rotbard

Book Review



Darfur: Twenty Years of Genocide

Edited by Leora Kahn

(PowerHouse Books, 80 pages, \$29.95)

Published through an alliance between Proof: Media for Social Justice, Amnesty International and the Holocaust Museum of Houston, the paperback edition of *Darfur: Twenty Years of Genocide* is as visually gripping and historically important as its hardcover counterpart. This book is edited by veteran photography editor Leora Kahn, who culls a plethora of striking images

from notable photo agencies. An effective timeline at the front of the book recaps the genesis of the bloody conflict, from the discovery of oil in southern Sudan in 1978, through the clashes between the army and militias in 2004 and its continuing crisis.

Kahn has done a Herculean job of telling the story of Darfur with images. Many of the pictures she has selected in the section dubbed “The People” are particularly moving. Colin Finlay’s black and white images of malnourished babies and children, elderly people suffering in agony on the dirt ground and bleak signs of pestilence in refugee camps will leave you speechless and angry.

Perhaps the most compelling set is “Military,” a compendium of photos of *Janjaweed* and Sudanese soldiers. Clutching automatic weapons and dressed in military fatigues, head wraps and sunglasses, these imposing killing



Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures

machines eschew any sort of humanity. In a fleeting moment, Lynsey Addario captured a moving Sudanese armored vehicle. Two of the seven bandits weren’t wearing their disguises and you have the rare opportunity to look into the eyes of someone who’s no doubt committed atrocities. No matter how long you stare, you’re brought back to the same question: Why?

Interspersed with the engaging images are essays from a varied lot of contributors, including *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, actress/activist Mia Farrow and actor Ryan Gosling. *Newsweek* writer Jonathan Alter wonders (almost rhetorically) if America’s assistance in the region would’ve been different if it weren’t for the Iraq war. “Only a decade removed from Rwanda, and all of the promises of ‘never again’ have been forgotten,” Alter observes. “Iraq has sucked up all of the oxygen in the global community... Imagine a world where the Iraq war had never happened. Would the United States be doing more to bring about peace and justice in Darfur? Almost certainly yes.”

If you get past the irony that this lavish book was printed in China, you’ll gain more insight into a story that needs to be told again and again until this conflict is resolved. ●●

— Darren Ressler



Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures



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