



*American Jewish Committee*  
*Los Angeles Chapter*

**July 23, 2006**

**Sherry A. Weinman Remarks for Congressman Schiff's  
Darfur Advocacy Event**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to address brothers and sisters of faith who are giving their precious time and efforts to address a tragedy far, far away, a genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan that has resulted in the deaths of more than 450,000 people. My name is Sherry Weinman. I am the President of the Los Angeles chapter of the American Jewish Committee.

The AJC is this country's oldest human relations organization. It was founded 100 years ago in order to urge influential American government officials at that time to stop another distant tragedy whose tactics seem similar to the events that bring us here today: The pogroms of Russia from 1903 to 1906 were an orchestrated orgy of anti-Semitic violence organized with the cooperation of local Russian government officials against the Jews of Russia and staged in more than 300 towns and cities, leaving almost a thousand people dead and many thousands wounded.

Over time, the members of the committee realized their moral standing in the world depended upon their advocating for the human rights of all peoples, not only the Jewish people.

This was not just an expedient strategy; it expressed and continues to express a cherished value of our organization

and of the Jewish people, based on the Rabbinic teachings of one of our greatest sages, Rabbi Hillel. Rabbi Hillel wrote in the first century before the Common Era: "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?"

There is urgency to that last question that inspires our work at AJC, though it does not mean that we act hastily. We deliberate strategy thoughtfully – in community. When we identify an issue, we read position papers, hear from experts, commission studies, in order to get at the root of a problem.

In fact, being a member of AJC is more than a little like doing graduate work in our areas of focus --urban and legislative affairs, international, interfaith and inter-group relations. So we're prepared when we meet face-to-face in dialogue or advocacy with leading religious figures, Congress and Cabinet members, local elected's, diplomats, influential journalists, educators at universities and think tanks, and more.

Because we are the AMERICAN Jewish Committee, we advocate on policies that strengthen our country -- from immigration reform to quality public education; from oil independence to separation of church and state.

Because we are the American JEWISH Committee, we advocate for Israel's right to exist in peace and we challenge anti-Semitism everywhere, in all of its forms, in the belief that a world that tolerates hate for one group is a danger for all freedom loving people.

Our Los Angeles Chapter is one of 32 around the U.S. and 5 international offices. Our mission is to strengthen the basic principles of pluralism and democratic values worldwide.

We are here today because our organization, like your churches, will not stand idly by while genocide unfolds in a distant place. We commend Congressman Schiff for organizing today's "Camp Darfur" and for his many other

humanitarian efforts to stop the genocide, which you'll hear more soon. I also commend the clergy and members of the First Presbyterian Church who are hosting us, and all of the clergy and members of all the churches participating in "Camp Darfur".

In addition to the letters that you will be writing soon in your workshops, I urge you to do two more things:

The first is to participate tomorrow in a nationwide call-in for a Special Envoy to Darfur. The American Jewish Committee is urging President Bush to appoint a highly regarded and high-profile representative who will coordinate U.S. Policy on Darfur and exert sustained diplomatic pressure on all parties to abide by their commitments. Here is the number to contact the President... please write it down: 202-456-1111. (repeat) I'll repeat it in a moment.

But first let me tell you why this is so important. Until just last month, the U.S. had a tireless advocate for the victims of Darfur in Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, who helped broker the fragile May 5 peace agreement between the Sudanese government and the largest Darfur rebel group. However, Zoellick has recently resigned his post to move into the private sector, so it is more important than ever that President Bush appoint a Special Presidential Envoy for Sudan. You can help make this happen by calling the President, who cares deeply about this crisis and needs to hear that you care, too: Again, the number is 202-456-1111. You can also call your members of Congress.

Last, but far from least, I direct your attention to a brochure on the leaflet tables regarding solar cookers. As most of you know, over 2 Million Darfurians have fled their homes to escape systematic slaughter and are now living in refugee camps in Western Darfur and in neighboring Chad.

But the Jan-ja-weed have followed them to the camps and patrol the camp borders, waiting to kill or attack any man or woman who leaves the protection of the camp. The solution is food aid plus solar-powered stoves, which we are asking you to buy today. It's exactly what it sounds like – a small stove that runs on solar power. With it, the people of the refugee camps can eat without foraging for firewood and thereby avoid the Jan-ja-weed.

Each family needs two stoves to live. Two stoves cost \$25.00. We ask each of you to help a Darfurian family eat in safety by contributing at least \$25.00. Again, the brochures are on the leaflet table. The effort is sponsored by Jewish World Watch of Los Angeles and our group is doing all we can to support this vital program.

The book of Deuteronomy, verse 10, teaches the Jewish people that “God upholds the cause of the orphan and widow, and befriends the stranger, providing them with food and clothing. You must also befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Our obligations to others beyond our own community are clear. Thank you for being here and for inviting me to address you.