

The Tragedy of Darfur

The Amherst Unitarian Universalist Newsletter
January 2008.

The current Darfur conflict is, at present, one of the worst catastrophes in the world. For years, the land-tilling ethnic groups have been oppressed by the national government.

The ethnic tribes also suffered from drought, desertification and over-population.

In February of 2003, two rebel groups, the Sudanese Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement, challenged the government.

The government called on the Janjaweed fighters from North Sudan to join the Sudanese militia. The government attacks on the civilian tribe members over the years have been called "ethnic cleansing."

Estimates by the United Nations say that the conflict, over the years, has resulted in 450,000 deaths from violence and disease. In addition, it is estimated that 2.5 million people have been displaced. Many have taken refuge in Sudan's neighboring nation, Chad.

The United Nations and many nations strongly criticized the Sudanese government, which denies all accusations. In 2006, the UN tried to send 17,3000 Peace Keepers into Sudan, but the Sudanese government said that they would treat the Peace Keepers as foreign invaders.

The U.S. has imposed sanctions on Sudan, with no apparent effect. The UN and western nations are now trying to persuade China, a close ally of Sudan, to use its influence to end the conflict.

The UN and the NGOs have done remarkable work in support of the refugees. They have 13,000 aid workers in 100 refugee camps, mostly in Chad.

The UUSA Social Justice Committee is encouraging the congregation to participate in the movement to help the Sudanese people. The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (the UU social concerns committee) has formed a UU Darfur Network, which we might join. Or, we could work with one of the local groups, such as the Western Mass. Darfur Coalition. Possible activities include writing letters (as we have done), holding fundraisers, and publicizing the Darfur tragedy.