

A Call For Genocide Education

BY: Christopher J. Fries

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Five years ago, the Sudanese government began its genocidal campaign in Darfur, the country's western region. Systematic killings, burnings, and rapes have left 300,000 dead and 2.5 million displaced with little or no access to humanitarian aid. Yet, the world continues to remain indifferent. Recently, the International Criminal Court took unparalleled action to bring justice and peace to Darfur by charging Sudanese president and genocidaire Omar al-Bashir with genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

In Vermont, most of us continue to distance ourselves from the ongoing crisis, lacking the knowledge and inspiration necessary to take action. However, there are several encouraging exceptions—primarily student activism and state advocacy work. At the University of Vermont, the student organization Students Taking Action Now: Darfur (STAND) is making it their responsibility to act as conscious members of the international community. STAND is a student-lead anti-genocide coalition working and advocating for legislative action against the genocide in Darfur in an effort to effect permanent change in the world's attitude towards genocide.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, STAND will lead the Vermont Teach Against Genocide (VT-TAG) campaign. The goal of the TAG campaign is to pass legislation calling for genocide and human rights education to be mandated in public schools. TAG is a national campaign conducted on a state-by-state basis. California, New Jersey, New York and Illinois have all passed genocide education mandates, while Connecticut, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Kentucky, Kansas, and Vermont currently have active, on-going campaigns. Although the Vermont Academic Standards already include traces of human rights and genocide education, it is simply inadequate considering the recurrent pattern of genocidal regimes throughout the world and the scale on which they have been conducted.

Genocide education is rightfully becoming a more prevalent topic in schools nationwide. It is our duty to assure that *all* students have a firm understanding of the concept of genocide, and are able to fully understand its widespread implications. It is imperative information that is necessary to become aware global citizens, holding on to that which matters most: humanity.

Christopher J. Fries is the campaign coordinator for VT-TAG. For more information, visit <http://www.vt.teachagainstgenocide.org>.

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