

Why Save Darfur Didn't Save Darfur:  
United to End Genocide is Making All the Same Mistakes  
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In 2003, Humanity United (HU) called a national conference of people its staff identified as potential activists for an anti-genocide movement. Notably missing were any members of the Republican party, most of the heads of member organizations of the International Campaign to End Genocide and any leaders of the International Association of Genocide Scholars. At the conference, Humanity United announced that Pierre and Pam Omidiyar, HU's funders, intended to donate \$100 million over the next seven years to support activism against genocide, human trafficking, and a few other causes. They also announced that unsolicited applications for grants would not be accepted. Most of the money they pledged has now been spent.

In early 2003, after an attack by rebels on a Sudanese Air Force base in Al Fasher, the Sudanese government began a genocidal counter-insurgency war against the Fur, Massalit, Zaghawa and other black African groups in Darfur. Genocide Watch was the first organization to declare a Genocide Watch for the situation in June, 2003.

In the summer of 2004, David Bernstein, Jerry Fowler, John Prendergast, Ruth Messinger, Gloria White-Hammond, and a few other activists founded the Save Darfur Coalition, and a number of organizations quickly joined it. (Genocide Watch was among the first to join in 2004, but was not even listed as a member on the Save Darfur website until 2008, and was excluded from all leadership meetings.) The Coalition staff were paid from funds donated by Humanity United and other fundraising via the Center for American Progress, the liberal think tank organization headed by John Podesta, and funded by George Soros. The Center for American Progress later played a prominent role in Barack Obama's campaign for President.

In 2004, Save Darfur's 180 member organizations adopted a Unity Statement that included the following goals regarding people in Darfur:

- Ending the violence against civilians;
- Facilitating adequate and unhindered humanitarian aid;
- Establishing conditions for the safe and voluntary return of displaced people to their homes;
- Promoting the long-term sustainable development of Darfur; and
- Holding the perpetrators accountable.

From its start, the Save Darfur Coalition was weakened by several role conflicts:

1. Save Darfur set out to organize a grass-roots political movement against the genocide in Darfur but it acted as a coalition in name only. In fact, Save Darfur was directed exclusively by a small elite staff and board from offices in Washington, DC. Increasingly, statements by the "coalition" were actually made after short consultations among only eight of its members: Save Darfur (meaning its central staff and Board of Directors), Enough, Investors Against Genocide (a project of Save Darfur, Massachusetts), the Genocide Intervention Network and StopGenocideNow, all directly funded by Humanity United, by Humanity United itself, which now has a large staff, and by Physicians for Human Rights USA,

American Jewish World Service, and Human Rights Watch. The statements are then issued on behalf of all 180 members of the Save Darfur Coalition, though few have received them or read them before they are issued.

Grassroots initiatives were never treated as central to the movement, and were even discouraged. Two projects organized from California by Rev. Tim Nonn, for example, a Mock Trial of Omar al-Bashir in November 2006 at the Church Center for the UN with Wole Soyinka as Chief Judge, was not endorsed by Save Darfur; and Nonn's Tents of Hope project that placed hundreds of painted tents from every state on the Washington, DC Mall in September 2008 was reluctantly accepted by Save Darfur only when it was clear that Nonn's project would proceed even without Save Darfur's approval. Save Darfur finally gave Tents of Hope a tiny grant of \$10,000.

2. Huge amounts of money were donated to Save Darfur, both directly by HU and through direct fund-raising. The success of Save Darfur at fundraising is indicated on its IRS 990 forms. Gross receipts were \$16 million in 2005, \$49.3 million in 2006, \$7.6 million in 2007, \$4.8 million in 2008, and \$5 million in 2009. Net assets of Save Darfur in September 2009 were \$2.7 million. Total receipts from 2004 through 2009 were over \$82.7 million.

The money was spent:

- to pay high staff salaries (Jerry Fowler's salary as President in 2008 was \$185,455; in 2007, the top five salaried employees ranged from \$138,000 to \$87,656; in 2006, salaries totaled over \$1 million and the top five officers earned from \$130,000 to \$68,000); United to End Genocide, the successor to Save Darfur and GI-Net has continued to pay these high salaries to its top staff members.
- pay professional fundraisers: \$1 million in 2007 and \$1.3 million in 2008);
- pay professional advertising firms, including a remarkable \$34.9 million in 2006, which included payment for numerous full-page ads in the New York Times and Washington Post, paid for by a private donor;
- organize postcard and call-in campaigns to members of the US Congress.

None of Save Darfur's budget was used to directly assist victims of the genocide in Darfur. For example, in 2008, out of total expenditures of \$9.3 million, total grants by Save Darfur to recipients in Sub-Saharan Africa for various services totaled only \$84,050, and even that money did not go for aid to the victims. (A tiny number of Save Darfur's grantees have included small projects in Darfur as part of their programs, but they are not detailed in Save Darfur's reports, and the average grants to coalition members were under \$5000.)

3. Save Darfur leaders were never willing to work with Bush Administration officials as the primary foreign policy makers during the Darfur genocide. Although several members of the coalition, including Genocide Watch, repeatedly reminded Save Darfur's leaders from the beginning that foreign policy in the USA made by the Executive Branch – especially by the President, National Security Council, State Department, and Defense Department, Save Darfur concentrated its efforts on lobbying members of Congress. The coalition was proud of rallying bipartisan Congressional condemnation of the Sudanese regime. But Congress

was never willing to advocate by resolution or law US military intervention to stop the genocide. Its resolutions were toothless – never advocating intervention.

Congress has a secondary role in foreign policy making in the US. Its greatest impact is on appropriations. Save Darfur, Enough, and GI-Net claim that their congressional lobbying increased relief assistance to the IDP and refugee camps, but their claims have a *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* logic. Money for Darfur IDP's and refugees was appropriated through the normal channels of the State Department's well-funded Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which receives an annual appropriation without any pressure from outside groups. There is little evidence that appropriations for Darfur IDPs and refugees were increased through efforts of the Save Darfur Coalition. In fact, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs during the Bush administration, Dr. Jendaye Frazier, has said that Save Darfur and Enough's constant criticism of Bush administration policies, despite the President and Secretary of State's direct condemnation of Sudanese government's crimes as "genocide," frustrated several of her initiatives for a more active, interventionist policy.

4. Throughout the Darfur genocide, the US and Canada were pre-occupied with two major wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These nations were therefore unlikely to commit American or Canadian troops to intervention in Darfur, and the Bush administration's emphasis on the "War on Terror" even led to attempts to cooperate with the intelligence services of Sudan.

Yet the Save Darfur Coalition's 180 member organizations come almost exclusively from the United States and Canada, with a few from the UK. The result has been that Save Darfur has been unable to put political pressure on leaders in the European Union, or other states in the UN to support intervention to stop the genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur. France, for example, was in a much better position than the US to take strong action because France is not tied down in the Iraq and Afghan wars, and because of France's historic influence in Africa, military bases in Chad, and demonstrated willingness to intervene in states like Côte d'Ivoire, where French interests are at stake. But Save Darfur had no organization in France, and failed to enlist the support of the French government.

Similarly, Save Darfur was unable to exert any pressure on Sudan's main supporter, China, in spite of a widely publicized, but ultimately fruitless "Genocide Olympics" campaign led by actress Mia Farrow and publicist Jill Savitt, also partially funded by HU, and a few trips to talk with Chinese officials.

5. Probably the single most effective blow against the Sudanese regime was referral of the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. The Save Darfur Coalition had nothing to do with that referral. Instead, Genocide Watch, working with policy makers inside the US government, particularly the legal adviser to the US Ambassador to the UN in New York (who was a classmate and friend of the President of Genocide Watch) resulted in a UN Security Council resolution referring the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. The UNSC Resolution immunized citizens of countries that were not parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC. The resolution passed with abstentions by China,

Russia, and the US, the first (and only) resolution by the UN Security Council referring a situation in a country not a State-Party to the ICC Statute to the ICC.

The effect of the ICC referral was the indictment of President Omar al-Bashir, Ali Kushyb, leader of the Janjaweed militias, and Ahmed Haroun, the Sudanese minister in charge of “humanitarian assistance,” for crimes against humanity and genocide. The Sudanese government greeted the indictments and arrest warrants by expelling thirteen NGO relief groups, further evidence of the genocidal intent of the regime. But Omar al-Bashir became *persona non grata* in Uganda, South Africa, and some other countries, and ordered a reduction of the atrocities in Darfur. Emboldened by his “victory” in recent fraudulent “elections”, now replicated in South Kordofan, however, al-Bashir is stepping up his campaign of “ethnic cleansing” in Jebel Mara. Al-Bashir and his new Governor in South Kordofan, the ICC-indicted war criminal Ahmed Haroun, have now also begun genocidal massacres in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile States.

### **Prognosis for the future of Darfur**

1. There is still no effective plan supported by the US or any other great powers to end the Darfur civil war, and to provide security for over two million IDP’s and refugees to safely return to their former homes. Save Darfur doesn’t have a plan with any reasonable chance of implementation, nor does Enough, or any of the other eight central organizations that now run the Save Darfur Coalition. Al-Bashir has told the IDP’s they should return home to their devastated villages, and a few have, but millions understandably remain untrusting of al-Bashir’s assurances of their security.
2. Since the 2011 referendum in South Sudan, when South Sudan voted to become independent, Sudan has demanded outrageous fees to ship South Sudanese oil to the Port Sudan, in Sudan. So South Sudan has stopped producing oil and Sudan has threatened war. Either there will be an agreement to continue sharing of oil revenues with the Khartoum government, or a new war will break out between South and North, and the misnamed Comprehensive Peace Agreement will fall apart. In either case the crisis in Sudan, South Sudan, and Darfur will continue.

### **Lessons to be learned from Save Darfur’s failure to Save Darfur**

1. The Save Darfur Coalition claims credit for organizing the largest anti-genocide movement to date, and now its successor, United to End Genocide makes the same claim. But United to End Genocide has dropped any pretext that it is a coalition. Former members of the Save Darfur Coalition have no role whatsoever in United to End Genocide, unless they are hand-picked to play a role by the Washington, DC elite that runs United to End Genocide. So most of the people and organizations in the US, Canada, and the UK who joined the Save Darfur Coalition have no role in United to End Genocide. Nevertheless, United to End Genocide continues to use Save Darfur’s e-mail list to solicit funds from them. All funds in the coffers of the Save Darfur Coalition and GI-Net were transferred to United to End Genocide without approval of the other members of the Save Darfur Coalition. And United to

End Genocide retains exclusive rights to the e-mail, and fund-raising lists developed by the Save Darfur Coalition, which it will not share with other coalition members.

2. These critiques of the Save Darfur Coalition and of United to End Genocide are not meant to diminish what the Coalition accomplished – awareness among the American and Canadian people of the genocide in Darfur.
3. Save Darfur and Enough has involved actors, sports stars, and other celebrities to an unprecedented degree. It has mobilized many members of Congress, and some of its supporters are now in the Obama administration. These are major accomplishments and should not be minimized.
4. Support for UN Security Council Resolutions, the African Union Peacekeeping Force, and other objectives of the Save Darfur Coalition in 2004 were naïve hopes. Save Darfur's preference for pacifism paralyzed its effectiveness. The current head of United to End Genocide is a dedicated pacifist, and there will be no changes in its policies.
5. Nothing would have stopped the Darfur genocide except the insertion of superior military force no later than mid-2004. France and NATO could have imposed a "passive" no-fly zone over Darfur (waiting to destroy Sudanese aircraft on the ground after they returned from their bombing missions), and put heavily armed infantry on the ground to stop the Janjaweed and Sudanese Army, in cooperation with African Union troops from Rwanda.

NATO warships could have blockaded Port Sudan's export of oil and import of refined petroleum, while permitting imports of food and other goods. But the US, the UK and NATO were pre-occupied by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, France lacked the will to take such aggressive action, and the African Union, Arab League, and even the UN General Assembly would have objected. Instead, UN Security Council Resolutions and an impotent African Union observer mission became substitutes for stopping the genocide. Wishful UN resolutions became covers for failure to take effective action.

6. The inability of the Save Darfur Coalition to organize outside the US, Canada, and the UK weakened its ability to affect the foreign policy of other countries.
7. The top-down, high-cost, elite-driven organizational structure of the Save Darfur Coalition significantly undermined its long-term effectiveness. It failed to become a self-sustaining movement. GI-Net has called for the creation of a "permanent anti-genocide constituency." United to End Genocide declares the same goal. But it does not know how to organize such a movement.

Organizing an anti-genocide movement will have to be a grass-roots effort like the organization of Amnesty International chapters. STAND (the student division of GI-Net) has been the most effective member of the Coalition in creating this constituency, but it is limited to student members, and therefore has no staying power.

8. Save Darfur calls itself an “interfaith” organization, and many of its members are faith groups. But it has made little use of this potentially enormous “permanent anti-genocide constituency.” Faith groups transcend national boundaries and connect with groups in countries at risk of genocide.

I remain hopeful that a “permanent anti-genocide constituency” can be organized, and that it can actually prevent and stop genocides and mass atrocities in this century. But it will take some major paradigm shifts in thinking about organization, about how to influence policy, and about the sort of institutions needed to end genocide.

Above all, such a movement must be organized from the ground up in countries at risk. The role of the US, Canada, and the EU in preventing genocide will always be limited by the impotence of the United Nations. Regional, national, and local organizations must take the lead in genocide education and prevention.

US, Canadian, and EU government and NGO’s can financially support such local efforts, but expensive US based organizations of liberal young white people can never be the basis for the global anti-genocide movement that will be necessary to end genocide in the twenty-first century.