

Hello... I am Nick Anderson, co-founder of *Dollars for Darfur*, the national high school challenge to stop genocide in Darfur. In the United States we are quite comfortable—a blessing in striking contrast to what is occurring in the Darfur region of the Sudan. In comparison to my home state of Massachusetts, the number of people in Darfur who have died so far is equivalent to two-thirds the city of Boston and the number left homeless is approximately a quarter of the state's population. Facts like these compelled me to act; I present to you today a bit of the history of our project.

In July 2006, co-founder Ana Slavin and I flew to Washington DC to meet with staff of the Save Darfur Coalition to encourage them to adopt *Dollars for Darfur* as one of their campaigns. We came with three main ideas:

- 1) First, we intended to set up a national high school challenge that would both promote awareness of the situation in Darfur and raise money to be donated to Save Darfur and key relief organizations.
- 2) Second, we proposed using social networking websites, like Facebook and MySpace, as a conduit to the *Dollars for Darfur* webpage (www.savedarfur.org/dollarsfordarfur). The webpage provided information to increase awareness of the atrocities occurring in Darfur and had a scoreboard page that managed the national fund raising challenge. It was a unique format for disseminating information, as Facebook and MySpace more frequently appear in the news for negative reasons. However, we knew that this awareness and fundraising strategy had the potential to reach a staggering number of high school students. Given the 22,000+ high schools registered with Facebook alone, we determined that if each school raised just \$50, the total would be over 1 million dollars. So, we set a goal of reaching 1000 schools and raising \$200,000. In the end, we reached over 2,500 high schools and raised \$306,000!
- 3) The third idea that we presented to the Save Darfur Coalition was to offer a prize of some sort to the schools that raised the most funds. This suggestion became a reality, and sitting in this room today are representatives from some of the top 10 high school fundraisers nationwide. We also extend our gratitude to the Save Darfur Coalition for creating a winner's event beyond our greatest expectations.

Ana and I started *Dollars for Darfur* because we wanted to bring attention to the horrific crimes against humanity occurring in the Sudan. We sought to harness the goodwill that we know is ubiquitous in students of our generation and provide them with a format to effect change. We aspired to define our generation as one that acted and made a difference. It was always our goal to motivate fellow high school students, but somewhere along the way, I realized that kids all across this country had deeply inspired me and opened my eyes to the power of individuals uniting to assert the indelible right to justice and liberty for all people of our global community.

In towns and cities across the country, students joined *Dollars for Darfur* and inspired fellow students and community members to help stop the suffering in Darfur. Did you know that just \$35 can provide two high-energy meals a day to 200 kids in the Sudan? Some students who participated in the challenge could scarcely afford the dollar they gave, while others easily gave hundreds. Yet, in his or her own way, each united around this important issue and sought to define our generation as one of strength and moral fortitude. Ana will now tell you some of their stories.

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I am Nick Anderson, co-founder of *Dollars for Darfur*, the national high school challenge to stop genocide in Darfur.

From a young age, I admired Nelson Mandela for his perseverance and unmatched political skills. He was able to revolutionize a country and bring it out of third-world poverty through his peaceful methods and masterful negotiation techniques. Last year, during my sophomore year in high school, I had the special opportunity to be part of a joint history and religion humanities class that traveled to South Africa. There, I went to Robben Island and visited Mandela's prison cell; it was impossible not to appreciate the sacrifice Mandela had made in his personal life for a political cause that would free a whole nation. What was most striking to me were the stories from the old prison guards about Mandela's dignity and honor. Returning home, I realized I wanted to create an organization that would help relieve the suffering that is occurring in so much of the African continent. At first, I thought I might do sometime to help the AIDS orphanage I'd spent time at or perhaps try to help the school kids in Johannesburg, who elected to go to "Saturday School" to educate and pull themselves out of poverty. However, news reports drew me to learn more about the conflict in Darfur.

I read and saw reports about 400,000 Darfurians killed by the Janjaweed, the Sudanese government-backed militia who are dedicated to ethnic cleansing by murder, starvation, and rape. Over two million others have been left homeless—each of their homes burned to the ground and the wells polluted with dead animals or human waste to insure that they cannot be used again. In spite of the fact that the United Nations Security Council authorized a strong peacekeeping force for Darfur, the Janjaweed remain active. I also learned that political situation in Darfur is complicated: Sudan's dictator Omar Al-Bashir hosted Osama bin Laden for 5 years, and Al-Bashir has provided the US with credible information on Al Qaeda, making it hard for President Bush to publicly speak out against him. Furthermore, China's oil interests in the Sudan are making the government and towns like Khartoum very wealthy—luxury high rises can be seen being built. The current US government does not want to upset relations with China. Meanwhile, hundreds of Darfurians continue to die and suffer each day.

So, with my schoolmate Ana Slavin, I started *Dollars for Darfur*—the national high school challenge to stop genocide in Darfur. In July 2006, Ana and I flew to DC to meet with staff of the Save Darfur Coalition to encourage them to adopt *Dollars for Darfur* as one of their campaigns. There are three key features to the structure of *Dollars for Darfur*:

- 1) First, we set up a national high school challenge that would promote both awareness of the situation in Darfur and raise money to be donated to Save Darfur and key relief organizations.
- 2) Second, we used the social networking websites Facebook and MySpace as a way for kids to connect with other students at their own school, as well as across the country, to raise much needed money to stop the genocide. We felt that Facebook and MySpace would be the

fastest, most efficient way to spread the word about the *Dollars for Darfur* challenge and would demonstrate the potential of a positive, philanthropic use of social networking websites.

We had done our homework, however, and knew that the fundraising strategy had the potential to reach a staggering number of high school students. Our webpages and project information read:

“Okay, so here’s the Challenge: There are 22,000 high schools registered with Facebook. With the help of MySpace networking, if each school raised just \$50 the total would be over 1 million dollars! Better yet: There are about 15.5 million public and private high school students. If only an eighth of these students gave just one dollar, we could raise nearly 2 million dollars! Our Goal: is to raise at least \$200,000 for Darfur.”

We asked students who came to the *Dollars for Darfur* Facebook and MySpace pages to find just one friend to join the challenge, stating that in this way, we would quickly develop a national network—over 7,000 joined the *Dollars for Darfur* Facebook and MySpace pages and over 2000 schools joined the challenge.

Facebook and MySpace also served as a conduit to the *Dollars for Darfur* webpage (www.savedarfur.org/dollarsfordarfur) on the Save Darfur Coalition’s website, which managed the national challenge. The webpage provided information to increase awareness of the atrocities occurring in Darfur. It had posters, flyers, and a PowerPoint (PPT) presentation with scripted dialogued that we had prepared (please see <http://www.savedarfur.org/page/content/dfd/resources/> for all supporting documents); these documents gave a voice to our vision. Save Darfur Coalition created an organizer’s tool kit and press release form that students anywhere in the country could use (see supporting documents). On the “Scoreboard” page, students could register their school to join the challenge and donate on line. The Save Darfur logo of a tree was the image used to visually note what percentage of the pledged amount had been reached. All funds raised went directly to Save Darfur, who in turn, it was made clear, would distribute half of the *Dollars for Darfur* donations to two aid organizations.

Additionally, our Facebook and MySpace pages gave us a forum to let kids know what was happening in the news on *Dollars for Darfur* (see supporting documents).

More importantly, the Facebook and MySpace pages provided a place for poignant debate and discussion on the crisis.

We let students know that on a showing of 60 Minutes, Dr. Ashis Brahma, a refugee camp doctor, describes the situation there saying: “This is bad. They go to the villages, and they burn one village after the other, . . . then when the people come out they catch the women and gang bang, they rape them not one guy, no 10, 15; then they carve up the men and throw them in the drinking water to make sure that this place will never ever be used again.”

Dr. Ashis Brahma continues: "And you're telling me the people in America don't know this—or don't want to know this? Maybe it's too much to know; but that's what's happening right now, and it's happening all over again." Dr. Brahma adds. "I'm sorry to say, I'm going to sit here with you in two years time, and I'm gonna tell you the same sad story. So, we ask you, do we not know—or do we not want to know?"

Six million Jews were killed during the Holocaust and over four hundred thousand people of Darfur have been murdered so far. We asked high school students all across the country to consider: Are we just going to sit back and let another Holocaust occur? They responded with conviction.

- 3) The third feature of the *Dollars for Darfur* structure was that there be a prize of some sort. Teenagers are competitive, almost by nature. We toyed with speakers and musical groups; Save Darfur wanted it to be a surprise. A trip to DC for the top 10 high schools became the "prize." Our sincere gratitude to the Save Darfur Coalition for creating an event beyond our wildest expectation.

We asked the Save Darfur Coalition to take us on as a campaign, as the political component is essential if any real change is to happen in the Sudan. However, just as important to us is the commitment to get aid to the people in the refugee camps in Darfur and along the border in Chad. As our PPT explains, just \$35 can bring two high-energy meals a day to 200 children and \$50 can vaccinate 50 people against meningitis, measles, polio, or other deadly epidemics. Yet, the Janjaweed is so dangerous that organizations like, Oxfam, Doctors without Borders, CARE, or International Rescue Committee cannot always get the food and medical supplies to the people of Darfur who so desperately need them. One aid organization that we had designated as a recipient for a donation declined the donation, citing concerns about the safety of their workers in Darfur. The Executive Director of this organization wrote me the following in an email after I had met him at a fundraising event: "Our independence and perception thereof is one of the key assets that we have in trying to gain access and minimizing security risks for our staff, both of which are tenuous in Darfur."

Currently, I am working with two aid organizations that are actively working to make the necessary arrangements for me to travel to refugee camps in Chad or Darfur this summer. It is very difficult to get anyone into the Darfur region, so this is a tremendous investment on the part of these organizations, for which I am very grateful. My primary goal is to return to the US and spread awareness to high school and college students through public speaking and writing commitments. However, one of these organizations already wrote me the following: "Also [I] heard back from our East African Rep and it sounds like [name of organization] is definitely interested in working with you at some level, but your association with Save Darfur may throw things off a bit. [Name of organization] has to be VERY careful about the position it takes and the way it talks about Darfur with congress/media/anyone because we have people working on the ground there whose lives are at risk if it offends anyone. We can't put [name of organization] lives at risk." While I understand that there is an age-old conflict between political advocacy and aid work, it is a shame that I would have to choose between the two. It is my feeling that a voice directed at young adults is a great tool in effecting change in Darfur, as we are the generation that will be left with resolving the legacy of this disaster.

Ana and I started *Dollars for Darfur* because we wanted to bring attention to the horrific crimes against humanity occurring in the Sudan. We wanted to harness the goodwill that we knew existed in this generation, give fellow students a format in which to express themselves, and begin defining ourselves as the generation that made a difference. It was always our goal to inspire fellow high school students, but somewhere along the way, I realized that kids all across this country had inspired me, had opened my eyes to the power that people can assert in an effort to good.

In villages, towns, and cities across the country, high school students (including those in the room with us here today) joined *Dollars for Darfur*, lit the candle of knowledge, and inspired their fellow students to help stop the genocide and suffering in Darfur. Some students who participated in the challenge could scarcely afford the dollar they gave, while others easily gave hundreds. Yet, in his or her own way, each united around this important issue and sought to define our generation as one of strength and moral fortitude. Ana will now tell you some of their stories.

In the end, we reached over 2,000 high schools and raised \$306,000. With more time and sponsored support, I feel that we could triple that amount.