

Testimony by Jill Savitt, Director, "Olympic Dream for Darfur" Campaign

Presented to the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC

"Darfur and the Olympics: A Call for International Action"

June 7, 2007

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Chairman Tierney and other distinguished Members of this Subcommittee: Thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to participate.

My name is Jill Savitt. I direct Dream for Darfur and the "Bring the Olympic Dream to Darfur" Campaign.

You hold this hearing because you know well the depth of the brutality in Darfur -- the death, the dying, the rapes, the displacement, the cruelty and humiliation. While the United States and others have taken steps, and the United Nations has said Darfur is a priority, we have just entered the fifth year of atrocities with no end in sight.

The question you ask today is the right one: what effective steps might be taken to end the carnage. There is consensus within our community that the government of China holds a -- if not the -- key to security in Darfur. China has significant economic and political relationships with Sudan. It sells arms to the government of Sudan. China underwrites the genocidal regime in Khartoum by buying massive amounts of its oil -- and investing in the Khartoum-dominated economy. China has also protected Sudan diplomatically, most significantly by conferring veto power upon the Khartoum regime over UN efforts to deploy the robust force outlined in Security Council Resolution 1706.

I would like to associate myself with the written testimony of Professor Eric Reeves of Smith College, a leading Sudan expert and advisor to my organization. Professor Reeves' testimony makes a compelling case for the depth of China's investment in Darfur's genocide, how thoroughly China has protected Sudan diplomatically, and why China has unrivaled leverage to address the crisis. I urge you to read his report.

With this in mind, one answer to your question of today is China -- pressuring China with every means possible to do the right thing in the Sudan. It is fortuitous that China is the host nation of the upcoming Olympics, and China's role as host provides a meaningful opportunity for the international community to exert pressure.

The “One World/One Dream” theme of the Beijing Olympics will seem perversely ironic next summer if images of the dead and dying in Darfur are juxtaposed with the Games, hosted by a country facilitating the suffering.

Our organization, working with the broader Darfur advocacy community, seeks to use the Olympics as leverage to persuade China to act, suasion that will take a number of different forms, most prominently a symbolic Olympic Torch Relay beginning in August, one year from the opening ceremonies of the Games. We will travel through countries historically associated with genocide and mass slaughter. We will light our first torch as close to Darfur as we can get, and then we will go – at least -- to Rwanda, Armenia, Bosnia, Germany and Cambodia. We want to remind China what happens when the world looks away. We will end in China, if we are allowed, and there we will focus in part on commemorating the Rape of Nanjing – and China’s own history as a victim of mass slaughter.

We will be joined in our Relay by high-profile people around the world – athletes, celebrities, writers, refugees, policy makers, global citizens who care about Darfur.

In each city we will hold major events, and allow citizens to express to China their deep wish for peace in Darfur. We will also hold a torch relay in the United States this fall – in solidarity with the global relay. Finally, the people we are mobilizing, are already reaching out with emails, letters, and rallies to Chinese Embassies, the International Olympic Committee, the National Olympics Committees, and Olympic Corporate Sponsors – urging them all to intercede with China. Our message is simple. “China, Please: Bring the Olympic Dream to Darfur.”

I want to be clear that we do not and will not under any circumstances countenance a boycott of the Olympics. We believe in the Olympic ideal – the global aspiration for a world where countries do battle in the sporting arena, where the Games are the only place we send young men and women to show us their physical prowess and patriotism.

If you pursue this course, you will hear China ask for patience. China will say it is already doing its part for Darfur. Since we started our effort, China appointed a Darfur envoy who toured refugee camps, sent 275 engineers to the region, and urged Khartoum to be flexible. These are all welcome gestures, certainly. But they are nowhere near sufficient. China will also say that the Games should not be politicized. We agree. Genocide is not political. It violates every principle of humanity and should be addressed without political considerations.

Members of this distinguished Committee, you ask what is to be done. I urge you to do whatever is in your power to compel our government, other governments, Olympic sponsors, the IOC, and the UN to convince China to cause Khartoum to consent to troops.

Use carrots. Use sticks, use both. Use every tool at your disposal until one outcome is reached: adequate and verifiable security for civilians in Darfur.

I urge you to be resolute in demanding that China take proactive steps to show its genuine commitment to Darfur if Sudan refuses to budge. China can revoke its offer to forgive roughly \$80 million of Sudan's debt. China can rescind the offer of an interest-free loan of \$12 million or so for a new Presidential Palace for Omar al Bashir. China can alter its trade with Sudan.

This House of Representatives has already taken several constructive steps in reaching out to China. 108 of your members signed a strongly-worded letter to President Hu of China. This week, the House passed a stinging resolution on China, Darfur and the Olympics. Today you hold this important hearing.

Please do not stop. Because we are racing the clock. The ruthless and survivalist regime in Khartoum is prepared to do all that is necessary to ensure the success of its genocidal counter-insurgency. If we do not act now, a robust civilian protection force for Darfur will very soon be moot. Because there will be far far fewer people left in Darfur to protect.

Please help insist that China exert its global leadership – immediately – and bring the Olympic Dream to Darfur.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today, and thank you again for holding this hearing.