



## STATE OF ILLINOIS

On May 5, the Sudanese government and the leader of the largest rebel group in Darfur signed a peace agreement in Nigeria. Much skepticism surrounds this peace accord, however, because two other rebel factions have refused to sign the agreement saying it fails to adequately address the key issues of power sharing and the disarmament of the janjaweed militias. Unfortunately, in the midst of this inaction and uncertainty, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in Sudan's conflict-ravaged Darfur region continue to be threatened and terrorized by murder, rape, starvation and disease.

Given this grave scenario and the latest developments, I am proud to say that on June 27, 2005, the people of Illinois struck an invisible but formidable blow against the tyrants in Sudan who are committing genocide and terrorism. On that date, Governor Rod Blagojevich signed into law the Act to End Atrocities and Terrorism in the Sudan, which I had the honor of sponsoring in the Illinois Senate. Through this first-in-the-nation legislation, the people of Illinois struck one of many blows against a regime that – every day – tortures and kills hundreds of our sisters and brothers.

For more than twenty years Africa's longest running civil war raged in Sudan. That conflict, which pitted a largely Arab and Muslim government against black animist and Christians resulted in the deaths of 1.5 million people. In that conflict widespread human rights abuses, largely perpetuated by the Sudanese government, included the killing of non-combatants, slavery, torture and rape.

When rebels and government forces agreed on a peace agreement in 2004 many observers hoped that bloodshed and repression would end in Sudan. At the same time, however, Darfur exploded with violence. Arab militias, supported by the Khartoum government, engaged in punitive actions against civilians in Darfur. According to published accounts, nearly 2 million citizens have fled their homes for refugee camps. And although there is no accepted figure of the number of people killed in the Darfur conflict, estimates range between 50,000 and 400,000.

Genocide. That's how former Secretary of State Colin Powell characterized the actions of the Sudanese Government. In a world filled with hyperbole and exaggeration, the word genocide has meaning. One word mocks our solemn vows and pledges to prevent atrocities. One word challenges complacency and calls people of faith, good will, and conscience to action.

In targeting pension funds, Illinois was the first state in the nation to take action against Sudan's wanton acts of cruelty, torture, and genocide. It wouldn't have happened without a statewide network of support. The Black caucus, conservatives, human rights advocates, the Latino caucus, secularists, Christians and Jews joined ranks in the Illinois General Assembly to pass this landmark legislation. The Act strikes a blow for what is moral, right, and humane by cutting off the flow of Illinois pension dollars. This is the model that we used to end apartheid in South Africa, and it will have the same impact in Sudan.

In the years past, the federal government took action to restrict the flow of U.S. money into Sudan. Unfortunately, federal law does not stop U.S. money from flowing into Sudan when the money is invested in publicly-traded and private-equity companies that are offshore. And as we investigated this loophole in federal law, we discovered that our own public-pension systems had invested billions of dollars in companies that are active in Sudan. So we drafted legislation to close this loophole, with some guidance from our Congressional colleagues and our own public-pension systems.

Essentially, Illinois' Sudan Divestment law places tough restrictions on publicly-traded multinationals and private-equity firms, forcing them to stay away from Sudan if they want our pension dollars. In this Act, the people of Illinois make this proclamation: if you conduct business in Sudan, we won't invest in your company.

The Act affects the potential investment of billions of dollars in publicly-traded and private-equity companies around the globe. And it already is having a big impact. Other states, such as New Jersey, Connecticut, and Louisiana, are imitating it. Particularly through the organization of student activists, private and public universities like Harvard, Stanford, and University of California are following suit. Respected Wall Street firms, such as Northern Trust and Barclays, and reputable research firms, such as Conflict Securities Advisory Group and KLD, are creating Sudan-free portfolios.

It's a rare thing indeed when so many public officials unite in a common cause. And it's a good thing indeed when we speak in unison against the reign of terror in Sudan. Unfortunately, however, certain multinationals are now threatening legal action against Sudan divestment. The multinationals suggest that the cost of divesting from Sudan is too great.

"Too great for whom?" Is the cost of divesting too great for the 10,000 people who will be killed this month in Sudan? Is it too great for the thousands of people in Illinois and other states who, through their elected officials, have spoken out in anger and disgust? Is it too great for the thousands of students and universities who have led the charge to divest from Sudan? When numbers are faces, when profits are bloody, when counting houses have no ledger for life, the cost of ending genocide is priceless.

State Senator Jacqueline Y. Collins  
(D-16<sup>th</sup> District)