

Walking the Talk

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A year ago, a group of Swarthmore students decided to take on an unusual extracurricular activity: stopping genocide.

Mark Hanis, one of the students, is Jewish and all four of his grandparents survived the Holocaust. He was troubled by the way generations of Americans acquiesced in one genocide after another - only to apologize afterward and pledge "Never Again."

So Mr. Hanis and fellow students started to raise money to help provide security to stop the slaughter in Darfur. In particular, they wanted to help pay for African Union peacekeepers.

Their Genocide Intervention Fund has now raised \$250,000 and is about to hand over the first installment to the leaders of the African Union. The money may be used to pay for female African police officers to protect Darfur women from being raped.

The Genocide Intervention Fund now has an all-star cast, including the backing of former White House officials, generals, and celebrities like Mia Farrow and Don Cheadle. Its spokeswoman, a Rwandan genocide survivor who is now a Swarthmore sophomore, introduced Bill Clinton at a student conference. It has opened a Washington office and is lobbying for the bipartisan Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, which calls for sanctions on [Sudan](#) and a no-fly zone.

"We do lobby days, where we arrange for people to come to Washington to meet their Congressional offices and say, 'I've put \$20 down to protect the people of Darfur. What are you doing?' " said Mr. Hanis, who graduated recently.

So far more than 100 colleges have raised money for the fund (www.genocideinterventionfund.org), and universities have become the center of the movement to stop the slaughter. A group started at Georgetown, Stand (Students Taking Action Now: Darfur), has chapters nationwide and across [Canada](#), and Harvard led a divestment effort by having its endowment sell stock in companies that support the Sudanese government.

In the long term, the organizers hope to encourage more education about genocide in American schools - [California](#) and a few other states have passed laws that public schools must include education about genocide - and to bolster an early warning system so that the world will respond to atrocities more promptly.

"We're getting smarter at this," Mr. Hanis said. "We're building a permanent political constituency against genocide." He paused and added soberly: "Of course, there are lives lost every day."

So while President Bush is proving wimpish on genocide, the response of many ordinary Americans like Mr. Hanis has been inspiring. Aside from students, the leaders in the effort include Jewish and Armenian groups (the word genocide has special resonance for both) and religious groups.

In Dallas, Temple Emanu-El started Dolls for Darfur, which has made thousands of tiny paper dolls representing the victims of Darfur. It has sent them to senators and is preparing "advocacy kits" to help people lobby for a sterner American response to the genocide (see dollsfordarfur.org).

Then there are the big-hearted folks at Ginghamburg Church, a large Methodist church in Tipp City, [Ohio](#). After the pastor, Mike Slaughter, read about atrocities in Darfur, he decided to ask the congregation to spend only half as much on Christmas presents last year as they planned, and to donate the rest to victims in Darfur.

The result, along with other fund-raising efforts, was \$327,000 in donations; the congregation is planning the same campaign this Christmas. The money is being used to keep children alive and safe in South Darfur.

"We recognize that this is only a pittance in the face of the entire crisis in Darfur," says Karen Smith, director of operations for the church. "However, if we can successfully engage other churches across the U.S. in this call so that they issue the same challenge to their constituents, the impact could truly be God-sized."

During the Holocaust, when Franklin Roosevelt was as uninterested in genocide as George W. Bush is today, Arthur Koestler referred to those who demanded action as "the screamers." Today, Mr. Hanis, Ms. Smith and others like them are "the screamers," and if it weren't for them the death toll in Darfur would be even higher. Countless thousands of survivors sitting in refugee camps owe their lives to screams coming from places like Swarthmore or Ginghamburg.

So out of the miasma of horror that is Darfur, something uplifting is taking place. Ordinary Americans are finding creative ways to respond to the slaughter, so that they personally inject meaning into those traditionally hollow words: Never Again.