

## **Thousands Rally in Support of American Aid to Darfur**

**By HOLLI CHMELA**

**May 1, 2006**

**New York Times**

WASHINGTON, April 30 — In front of thousands of people rallying on Sunday on the Mall, religious leaders, politicians and celebrities urged the American people and the Bush administration to do more to help end the ethnic and political conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan.

The rally here was one of nearly 20 events across the country sponsored by the Save Darfur Coalition, an alliance of more than 160 organizations.

The Washington event attracted dozens of speakers, including Senator Barack Obama, Democrat of Illinois; [Elie Wiesel](#), the Holocaust survivor and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize; the Rev. [Al Sharpton](#); the actor George Clooney; Joey Cheek, the Olympic speed skater; and Big & Rich, the country music group.

Since violence erupted in 2003, it is estimated that more than 200,000 people have died in Darfur, more than two million have been displaced and countless others are suffering from hunger and disease.

In 2004, the House of Representatives approved a declaration of genocide for Darfur, and since then the House and Senate have urged stronger peacekeeping missions and approved billions of dollars in aid to Sudan and the Darfur region of the East African nation.

That is not enough, demonstrators and speakers said.

Dominic Oduho, 32, came to the United States as a refugee from southern Sudan six years ago. He now lives in Dallas in a community with about 200 Sudanese, but he hopes to rejoin his parents in Sudan.

With tears in his eyes, Mr. Oduho said: "I'm personally moved by the way the American people are supporting us; the faces here, there are almost more white people than black people. This message is not a message that will remain here."

Many in the crowd said the Save Darfur rally was the first of any kind they had attended. For others, it was their first in decades.

Esther Muencz, 64, and her husband, Tamas, 65, both Holocaust survivors, left Cleveland at 4:15 a.m. to travel here by bus with members of their synagogue.

"I was one of the hidden children, taken in by a gentile family in Poland," Mrs. Muencz said. "If somebody would have done this when they murdered six million of us, maybe some would have been saved."

Elizabeth King, 43, drove from Maplewood, N.J., with her husband and daughter Sophie, who is 7.

"My husband and I got home late last night and thought about how hard the long drive down here today would be," Mrs. King said. "But you feel different when you're a parent. You feel more of an obligation to teach your children and follow through."

Last year, Sophie and her friends set up a lemonade stand and raised \$30 for victims of Hurricane Katrina. She said she wanted to do the same for the people of Darfur. "It made me sad that all the people are getting hurt in Africa," she said.

Another demonstrator, Suzanne Thompson of New Hampshire, made signs using her grandchildren's markers and Sudanese children's artwork that she printed from the Internet.

"I haven't spoken out for a while — I'm embarrassed to say the last time was Vietnam — but this seemed very important," Ms. Thompson said. "It's important as a mother, a grandmother and a former schoolteacher, to speak out for other human beings. If we speak out, our country will hear us and the world will hear us."

Stephen Kiir, 30, another demonstrator from the Sudanese community in Dallas, said: "When I came here today, I thought it would be Sudanese alone. I thought we were the only people suffering in the world, but there are other people suffering even more than us."

Mr. Kiir continued, "It's good that young people are here to see this, because they are the ones who can tell other people what is going on. We will see the result of it."