

# Darfur: Do you have one night to care?

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**Posted: 11/8/07**

More than 2.5 million people have been displaced. Thousands of women have been raped, beaten, and left for dead.

These are just a few of the facts that were shared Tuesday night in Tohill Theater as members of the Rowan community gathered with open hearts and minds to educate themselves about the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan.

"I don't know anything about Darfur," admitted freshman Selwyn James. "That's why I wanted to come here, because this could be something that I can trace my history back to. It's always good to learn something new."

Kathryn Rich, a law and justice major, ushered guests to their seats. However, her sole purpose in attending wasn't just to work.

"The fact that I can go around campus and say 'Darfur,' and people will say, 'What's that,' just motivated me to go out there and learn about it myself and then help other people to learn about it, too."

Appropriately titled "Darfur: Do You Have One Night to Care," the event featured opening remarks from Dr. Ali Ali-Dinar, president of Philadelphia's Darfur Alert Coalition, and a screening of "The Devil Came on Horseback," a documentary by Annie Sundberg and Ricki Stern.

The film was seen through the eyes of former U.S. Marine Brian Steidle, who in 2004 traveled through Sudan and Chad taking pictures as a military observer for the African Union. The audience fell silent while viewing the disturbing images of the charred and hacked bodies of victims and villages that were destroyed and reduced to ashen rubble.

"We are scattered like seeds!" a Darfuri woman cried into the camera. "We have nothing. If I say I am a teacher, can you believe me?"

In February 2003, a conflict erupted between a primarily Arab militia group called the Janjaweed and black rebel groups. The Janjaweed, whose name is Arabic for "man or devil on a horse," was backed by the Sudanese government and has since orchestrated mass killings of Darfur's black population.

"It (Darfur) used to be a safe place, a prosperous place," said Dr. Ali-Dinar before the screening. "It used to be a place where people used to live in harmony."

Dr. Ali-Dinar's speech was both educational and personal. As a Darfur native and the grandson of the region's last king, Ali-Dinar's expertise was evident when he delivered a brief history of Sudan and the conflicts that have ensued. He described the genocide as "a sad situation," and called for a push on the U.S. to do the job that the Sudanese government has neglected.

"If this is an ethnic conflict," he said, "the (Sudanese) government has a responsibility to protect its citizens. But the government isn't doing that. It's our civil responsibility, our global responsibility," he continued, "to do

something for people we could never meet. They are looking to us."

The event had several supporters, including The College of Communication, the Radio/TV/Film department and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. It made its way to Rowan at the request of writing arts instructor Tara Timberman, whose passion for social change has a presence on and off campus. Two years ago, she invited the filmmakers of "Invisible Children" to screen and discuss their film about child soldiers in Uganda.

"These types of events can bridge the gap between faculty, students and administrators," she said. "Part of a true liberal arts education involves doing community outreach work, raising our social awareness, awareness about international events and taking some form of action, rather than just learning about them in the classroom."

Filmmaker Annie Sundberg was overcome with emotion while addressing the packed crowd during a brief post-screening chat. She provided some additional statistics from Darfur and later discussed her labor of love.

"We're in a culture that sees before we read," she said. "I really believe in the power of film more than the power of network news to move audiences and show people what's really going on."

Freshman Dan Wythoff learned of the genocide while he was in high school, but attended the screening with a desire to know more.

"People can't really do anything unless they know what's going on," he said. "I just want information because that's what we need in order to start making changes, so I want to know the facts and what's going on and know what I can do about it."

Writing arts instructor Martin Itzkowitz, who is currently teaching a genocide-themed honors course, found the event relevant to the curriculum.

"I'm glad this did come up because it's going to give the students a visual account of what's going on there beyond what they get on the page," he said.

Throughout Darfur, the Janjaweed continues its reign of terror. Refugees, known as Internally Displaced People, have been placed in camps that are serviced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide them with food and other needs. According to the Save Darfur Coalition website, however, greater U.S. intervention, more effective peacekeeping forces, and a renewed peace process are still needed to have a stronger impact.

*Source: The Whit, Rowan University Independent Student Weekly*