Public Hearing Testimony Speaker: Timothy Oslovich

Date: 2/29/08 Bill Number: 5595

Testimony Supporting An Act Concerning Genocide Education
House Bill 5595

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Connecticut Coalition to Save Darfur

Good morning, Chairman Senator Gaffey, Chairman Representative Fleishmann and members of the Committee. My name is Tim Oslovich. I am a pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Vernon, Connecticut, and I currently serve as the Chairperson of the Connecticut Coalition to Save Darfur. I have been involved in advocacy on behalf of the people of Darfur for about 2 years, calling on leaders in the United States and the United Nations to end the genocide there. The issue of genocide has been very important to my faith community, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which has made working to end the genocide in Darfur one of its advocacy priorities. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify in regard to the proposed Act Concerning Genocide Awareness Education, House Bill 5595.

Thank you, Chairman Fleishmann, for introducing this important piece of legislation. The issue of genocide is one that desperately needs to be addressed in our educational system in order to empower students to prevent future atrocities. All religious traditions and people of conscience recognize that genocide is one of the worst crimes that plagues humanity. Genocide goes beyond murder and torture in that genocide is the attempt not only to kill individuals but to eradicate an entire group of people based on their ethnicity, race, nationality or religious affiliation. Genocide is the crime of killing an entire group of people just because of their identity.

Historically, little has been done to prevent the crime of genocide or to stop genocide once it had begun. Most countries and individuals have stood by as genocide was committed. The twentieth century includes many instances of genocide: The Herero and Namaqua, Armenia, the Holocaust, Cambodia, Bosnia, Burundi, Rwanda, and we are already seeing the terrible effects of the first genocide of the twenty-first century in Darfur, Sudan. Many people are unaware of any cases of genocide aside from the Holocaust. Since many people do not know that genocide has been committed repeatedly in the past and continues today in Darfur, they are ill-equipped to work for an end to genocide.

Thankfully, this legislation begins to address this problem. It is an urgent problem. Genocide has claimed the lives of millions of people, destroyed cultures and left entire countries devastated. It is only by educating our children that we give them the tools they need to work against genocide. I am happy to see that under the proposed legislation, genocide education would be one of seven specific topics for which the State Board of education would be required to provide curricular resources. However, in order to ensure that every secondary student has the opportunity to learn about genocide, we would like to have a bill that gets genocide education into the social studies standards. I also strongly encourage the Committee to provide additional funding to the State Board of Education so that curricular resources could be assembled and training could be provided to teachers. Teachers have expressed a desire for training so that they can appropriately teach what is obviously a very difficult and disturbing topic. Quite simply, additional curricular resources and additional training for

teachers require additional funding. The Teach Against Genocide Advisory Board feels that $100,000 would be sufficient.

Genocide education is such a crucial issue that additional funding is appropriate and necessary. We have significant local resources, such as the University of Connecticut, to aid in the assembly of curriculum and training, so costs could be kept low without sacrificing the quality of the materials and training.

Last year, I was able to travel to Rwanda. I visited the genocide memorial in Kigali where 259,000 people are buried. I also visited another memorial: the small Catholic church in Ntarama. The bones of the 5,000 people who were killed there are laid neatly on shelves, and all the items they brought into the church when they sought refuge there are stacked near the front of the building. It is a very disturbing place; a sanctuary was turned into a slaughterhouse. As the parent of a toddler, one item particularly struck me: a red sippy cup with a white top spattered with blood. To the genocidaires, that small child was just one more "cockroach" to be killed, but that child was just as precious as yours or mine.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, we have an obligation to those who have suffered and died in past genocides, not only to remember them but also to work for an end to genocide. In a democracy like ours, the way that action begins is by educating citizens so that they can make informed and responsible decisions.

Thank you.