

Remarks of Jill Savitt, Executive Director

Dream for Darfur

July 1, 2008

Good afternoon. I am Jill Savitt, the Executive Director of Dream for Darfur.

Our campaign has spent the past year urging China, in its role as Olympic host and close ally of Sudan, to insist that Khartoum stop killing its own unarmed citizens.

We have maintained that it is hypocritical for China, the host of the Olympics, to use the Games to burnish its image while underwriting and profiting from a genocide – a slaughter China is in an unrivaled position to stop.

China's relationship to Sudan is well-documented. Khartoum sells oil to China. The proceeds from the oil finance the regime's military campaign, including its hired killers, the Janjaweed. China sells arms to Khartoum, weapons that are used against the civilians in Darfur. At the UN Security Council, China has exercised its power as a permanent, veto-wielding member to protect Khartoum from an effective international response since the start of the genocide in 2003.

Until a year ago, when Darfur advocates began to link China's role as host of the Olympics to its role in the Darfur genocide. This presented a unique point of leverage with Beijing, perhaps the most essential international player in the Darfur crisis ... and China proved to be sensitive. Over the past year, China has made some statements of concern and has taken some modest actions.

But a year later –the situation in Darfur much worse – it now appears that Beijing says one thing in public when the media is around, and does another in private in Khartoum. For example, despite statements of concern about Darfur, just last month China signed eight new economic deals with the Sudanese regime. Clearly these new arrangements – grants, interest free loans, a hospital and an agricultural center – were not contingent upon any progress on human rights in Darfur.

And there has been no progress: today, even now, attacks continue, aid workers are killed and harassed, and the peace force authorized almost a full year ago has not deployed effectively. The people of Darfur are watching each other die.

And so it seems that China is either unwilling – or unable – to use its influence to stop the Darfur genocide. Officially, China says it has done what it can. But, there is much China could still

do. China could stop selling arms to Sudan or threaten to suspend new oil deals. China could refuse to sign eight new economic deals with Sudan.

At the very least, China could implement the Olympic Truce for Darfur by insisting that the government of Sudan stops bombing and attacking its own unarmed people – at least in the period surrounding the Games. This would help fulfill the promise of the Olympic host’s “One world, one dream” slogan.

Of course, the 55-day period of the Truce is not enough – we want the violence to stop in the long term. But even eight weeks of peace would give the people of Darfur a break from the terror, would allow humanitarian workers to access the hundreds of thousands of people who have been out of reach of food, water, and medical care as a result of the crisis, and would allow the new UN envoy for Darfur to make progress on a peace process.

The Olympic Truce for Darfur is possible. But it has to be implemented – and enforced – by those with the power to do so. Two of those people are meeting today in Beijing.

Today is the first day of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon’s three-day trip to Beijing, where he will meet with President Hu Jintao. We call on the Secretary-General and President Hu to stand together and invite all the UNSC members to join them in demanding the Olympic Truce for Darfur. The UN Security Council can, at long last, stand up to Khartoum with a united front. There would be no greater example of the Olympic spirit at work.

Thirty-eight days from the games, Beijing has a stark choice: the government of China can be remembered as the hypocritical Olympic host – the nation that cynically used the Olympics to glorify itself on the world stage, while underwriting and profiting from a genocide – or the government of China can be remembered as the host nation that used its position to help end the first genocide of the 21st century, a host nation worthy of international applause and gratitude on the occasion of the Olympics. We hope the host nation rises to this occasion.