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130+ Olympic Athletes and Advocates Call for Beijing and UN to Implement the “Olympic Truce” for Darfur

*As UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon Visits China for 3-Day Visit
'06 Gold Medalist Joey Cheek Releases Letter from Athletes*

Washington, DC – July 1– More than 130 Olympic and other athletes invoked the ancient Greek tradition of “Olympic Truce” today by co-signing a letter to Olympic host China and other international leaders to demand that the government of Sudan cease all bombing and ground attacks on civilians in Darfur for, at least, the 55-day period surrounding the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. The athletes’ letter is available at: www.teamdarfur.org.

The athletes and other advocates made this call on the first day of a three-day diplomatic trip by UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to Beijing where he will meet with President Hu Jintao and other senior officials. By precedent, the Olympic Host nation, as well as the United Nations, can invoke the Olympic Truce.

As athletes released their letter, Dream for Darfur released a report entitled “The Olympic Truce: 55 Days of Peace—And More—For Darfur,” which documents past diplomatic uses of the Olympic Truce. The report and an executive summary are available at www.dreamfordarfur.org/olympictruce.

“One of the Olympic host’s most sacred responsibilities is to utilize the Games to promote peace through sport,” said Joey Cheek, a 2006 Olympic Gold Medalist who organized the athletes’ letter. “There could be no greater example of the Olympic ideal at work than for this year’s host to lead the international community to bring lasting peace to Darfur.”

The 130 athletes supporting this call come from 22 different countries; 18 have qualified to compete in the August Games.

The letter said: “In our common aspiration to realize the ideals of the Olympic Games, we, the undersigned, urge the international community to convince the Government of Sudan to observe an Olympic Truce for Darfur before, during, and after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games... The violence in Sudan has gone on for too long. We hope you will use the opportunity of the Olympic Truce to work to end it.”

Beijing Has Already Expressed Support for the Olympic Truce

China has already endorsed the Olympic Truce for the 2008 Games. In October 2007, Beijing introduced a resolution at the United Nations, urging Member States to observe the Olympic Truce during the Beijing Olympic Games. It was co-sponsored by 187 member states and adopted unanimously by all nations – including both China and Sudan.

Historically, the “Olympic Truce,” which dates to the 9th century BC, was a cessation of hostilities for a period before, during, and after the Olympic Games, a major religious festival. The Olympic Truce was observed for a millennium. The Olympic Truce was revived as a diplomatic tool in the 20th century (used in the 1990s during conflicts in Bosnia and Iraq), has been affirmed nine times at the United Nations and is endorsed by hundreds of world leaders.

The truce period for the 2008 Beijing Games is from August 1 to September 24, 2008 – one week before the Olympics to one week after the Paralympics.

The athletes are calling on the United Nations Security Council, with China in the lead, to: (1) insist that the Government of Sudan does not attack its own unarmed civilian population in Darfur for the truce period of the 2008 Beijing Games, (2) use the truce period to allow humanitarian workers to access civilians who have been without food, clean water and medical care for years because of the conflict and (3) make progress on the deployment of peacekeepers and a lasting peace process.

Olympic Truce Report Documents Use as Diplomatic Tool

The report from Dream for Darfur outlines how the Olympic Truce has been used as a tool for peace in the diplomatic arena – from ancient Greece to Bosnia to Iraq. The report also calls on Beijing to implement the Olympic Truce – starting immediately.

“Beijing can go into the Games with international applause – having brought security to Darfur – or Beijing can tarnish everything the Olympics represents by its complicity in an ongoing genocide while acting as host of the Games,” said Jill Savitt, Director of Dream for Darfur.

“This is a moment for the members of the UN to work with China to utilize the Olympics as a true force for peace,” said Joey Cheek. “China will greatly honor the Olympics if it uses its leverage – as Olympic host and close ally of Sudan – to stop the Sudanese regime from killing its own people.”

Ellen Freudenheim, the Director of Research at Dream for Darfur, and author of a history of the Truce (available on the website), said the group was calling for the international community to “breathe life into the Olympic Truce, which represents the stated values of the Olympic movement – peace and international cooperation.” The most recent uses of

the Olympic Truce were to call attention to ethnic cleansing in Bosnia in 1992 and to forestall the US bombing of Iraq in 1998.

“The Olympic Truce alone cannot create peace, but based on lessons from its past use, we urge the Olympic host, the IOC, and the UN to work together and use it as a catalyst to force the government of Sudan to stop its campaign of killing,” Freudenheim said.

“The fact that there are no rules and little precedent governing the modern application of the Olympic Truce represents a huge opportunity to create a new tool for dealing with conflict: a two month period of peace every two years.”