

Teaching about Darfur—additional resources

Dr. Jerry Ehrlich: A first-hand account

“As a pediatrician I cared for children in Kalma Camp, which was the largest IDP camp [Internally Displaced Persons] in Darfur. When I first arrived in Darfur, there was an estimated 30,000 inhabitants of Kalma. When I left two months later, there was an estimated 60,000.

I cared for children in the medical centers that held approximately 200 children, and I was a hands-on eye witness to the horrors of Darfur. I saw an immense amount of malnutrition and all the problems that come with malnutrition—severe dehydration that would be very detrimental to these children and secondary infections such as pneumonia. It was very difficult for these children to fight infection. As I stated many times, it was basically like handling a patient with AIDS, only they were not compromised due to virus but they were compromised due to malnutrition, which made them very, very vulnerable. I have shown pictures of children who were two years old but looked like they were 102 years old due to severe malnutrition causing pre-mature aging. There were children that died in front of my eyes because they were so compromised, they were overwhelmed by infection, that they died very quickly. This was a very difficult thing to handle on a day in and day out basis.

The other problem that I became aware of was that of post-traumatic stress disorder in mothers. Because of all the horrors they have seen and been through, such as the assassination of their husbands and children, they are severely traumatized and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which is going to take a lot of counseling and therapy when there is peace in Darfur to take care of this problem. I would sit and hold the mothers hands and try to reassure them, but frequently all I got was an expressionless look on their face.

Living conditions of the people in the IDP—no one should have to live that way. Totally dependent on humanitarian aid organizations for food, water, blankets, plastic sheeting to cover their thatch huts, and for latrines. People just wandering around in an endless, endless camp.

Unemployment is 70/80/90 percent. Maybe one out of every 10 children go to school—the rest just hang around. There was a huge thatch straw building that was used as a school which I visited on several occasions to talk to a class through a translator telling them how important it was to maintain an education. I also met with teachers to tell them how important it was to continue educating children.

When I went to Darfur I wanted to bring back pictures drawn by the children affected by the genocide. I brought with me 25 boxes of crayons, 400 pieces of drawing paper and I gave them out to children ages nine to 12 in the camp and just told them to have fun and draw whatever they wanted to and to please bring back five or six pictures as a remembrance of my time in Darfur. I never expected to get back many; however I received 157 pieces of artwork in which the children showed their life in Darfur. This was very sad and very moving.



Dr. Jerry Ehrlich is a New Jersey physician who worked in Darfur through Doctors Without Borders.

And Then They Came For Me

First they came
for the Jews
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came
for the communists
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a communist.

Then they came
for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out—
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me—
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

The idea for this came from a story I heard about the Holocaust when the children in Terezin Concentration Camp drew pictures and wrote poems about life in a book called *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*.

People have asked me what the average American can do to be involved. My answer is public awareness, activism, writing, e-mailing your senator, congressman, and President Bush to support a United Nations peace-keeping force to be in place in Darfur, which is what most people feel is necessary to end the conflict in Darfur.

Get involved—this time we have to try and make sure it happens never again, really never again.”