

Darfur Mothers - Tragic Victims

The Holy See “has been following with grave concern the terrible suffering of the people caught up in the tragic conflicts intermittently erupting in the Darfur region of Sudan... which shows a horrific violation of human rights: killing of children, sexual rape of girls and women... burning of villages.”

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Permanent observer of the Holy See to the U.N., December 13, 2006



Human Rights Watch (2007), www.hrw.org

During this month of May, the month of Our Mother and all mothers, we remember the Darfur mother. She has been forced to live in a refugee camp after seeing her village burned. She fears the real dangers of rape and other aggression while she seeks basic necessities such as firewood and water. Often, her child is sick and malnourished. Catholic Social Teaching calls us to solidarity with all God’s children, especially those who suffer. It also urges us to create an option for the poor and vulnerable and to advocate for their rights and dignity.

Fast Facts: Who is the Darfur Refugee Mother?

- She is part of what the UN now calls the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis.”
- She is one of 2.5 million people displaced in the past four years.
- Her family members and friends are among the 450,000 killed since 2003.
- She is likely among the multitudes of people who suffer from pneumonia, diarrhea, and malaria, conditions which account for 47% of hospitalizations among the Darfur refugee population.
- She may be one of the 40% of women interviewed in several villages who admitted to having been raped and branded.
- If she has been raped and branded, she may then be prosecuted for adultery, whipped and imprisoned. If she reports her rape, she may be punished for reporting rape without the required four male witnesses.
- If she becomes a mother due to rape, she confronts a difficult dilemma – abandon her baby or risk community rejection or legal prosecution by caring for it.

Fact sources: Oxfam America, Human Rights Watch, UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights



www.physiciansforhumanrights.org

Darfur mothers in refugee camps share their experiences:

Karam is from a village which had lived at peace with neighboring villages for many, many years. Karam tells how her village was raided by both government soldiers and rebel bands of Janjaweed. During the raid, she was confused about who was killing whom and why. Afterwards, she heard conflicting report about who fired the first shot. She thinks that it was a conflict between Blacks and Arabs.

Bushra tells how men who proclaimed to be “friends” suddenly appeared in her village with automatic weapons, burning huts, stealing cattle and killing those who resisted. During the raid several men from the village were killed. Bushra’s friend was burned alive in her hut because she wanted to keep her blankets and would not come out. After the raiders had killed the men, they killed others who wanted to bury the dead.

Abia was in the fields when she heard gunshots. She had to decide quickly whether she would hide or try to find her children, who were still at home. She did what only a mother could do and ran towards home. The enemies caught her there in the fields, beat her with their fists, and raped her. Back at her house, she saw her eldest unmarried daughter raped in front of her. Broken in body and spirit, the family set off for the refugee camp, reaching it only after many weeks of fleeing the rebels and government soldiers.

NOTE: The names in the above stories were changed but the experiences are real and were taken from reports by the following: Oxfam America, Human Rights Watch, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights





www.oxfamamerica.org

Every morning, in hundreds of camps and towns across Darfur, mothers get up to face yet another day filled with the threat of robbery, murder, and rape. Hiba, a mother of five, was displaced to a refugee camp, along with 15,000 others. For mothers like Hiba, the fear is real, but the options are few. The decision to leave the relative safety of the camp to collect firewood for cooking, water to drink, and grass to feed her donkey means facing the chance she will be beaten or raped. If she does not leave camp to collect firewood, she will not be able to cook breakfast for her children. She will also not be able to feed the donkey; without which she cannot carry enough water back to camp. She also needs to sell some of the firewood in order to buy some fruit and vegetables and so supplement the food rations she receives. Despite the dangers, she decides each day to leave the camp, risking her own safety, in order to survive. Hiba dreams of the day when her children can again attend school. She dreams of the day when she can return to farm the land that has been in her family for generations.

Excerpted and adapted from www.oxfamamerica.org

“To be especially lamented is the condition of so many millions of refugees, and of every group of people suffering persecution – sometimes in institutionalized form – for racial or ethnic origin or on tribal grounds. This persecution on tribal grounds can at times take on the characteristics of genocide.”

“Justice in the World,” Synod of Bishops, 1971



www.wikipedia.org

Questions for Reflection

1. How has misuse of power contributed to the situation you have learned about in this resource?
2. Our faith teaches us the need for pardon and reconciliation. Someday these mothers will need to pardon and forgive those who have harmed them or their children. Who do you need to forgive? What do you need to pardon?
3. How are women treated in your family, culture, and society? What similarities or differences do you find between your own experiences and those of the Darfur women?
4. Read Matthew 2, focusing especially on verses 16 to 18. How does this text relate to the situation in Darfur? How might Darfur mothers be able to relate to Rachel?

Prayer

With the Mothers of Darfur, let us pray these words from Psalm 77: "I cried out to God for help. I cried out to God to hear me." Let us make the prayers of the Darfur mothers our own, for we know that where there is one mother who suffers, all mothers suffer. We ask God to hear all our prayers and to not only grant mothers the ability to survive such inhumane conditions, but also to grant us all the ability to bring justice to this tragic situation. Amen.

Take Action

- Try to find out from which countries refugees mothers in your community might have come.
- Check with your diocese to see if it can help arrange for a refugee to come and share her or his story with your parish or school.
- The Vatican and bishops have urged the international community to take action. Join them by writing to President Bush to urge action to end the conflict. The Save Darfur Coalition is an alliance of 170 faith-based and advocacy organizations. Use this online form on their website to take action now: <http://ga6.org/campaign/savedarfurcoalition>