

**Rabbi Raskin's Speech at Dallas City Hall**  
**Rally for Darfur**  
**April 30, 2006**

It is so invigorating and inspiring to know, as we stand here today before our City Hall, that tens—hopefully hundreds—of thousands of fellow Americans are standing in solidarity in Washington D.C. and in cities across our nation today as together we raise the consciousness of our society and our leaders to the horrifying, deplorable tragedy in Darfur. Many of us, Jews, Christians, Muslims, have in our faith traditions prayers and meditations describing a world restored to peace and healing. Many of our hymnals and devotionals are laced with messages of hope and redemption. In my own tradition our daily prayers end with the words: *letakein olam be'malchut Shaddai*, words that imagine a world that is healed of its fractures, and wounds, and contortions, and restored to its original wholeness, as God had intended it. But in my tradition, and I imagine in many of yours, we are not simply to wait for that global healing to descend upon us from on high. We are not to sit passively, in prayerful silence, through suffering and devastation, waiting for God to intervene. Indeed a second century Jewish sage by the name of Rabbi Tarfon taught us, that even when the odds seem overwhelming, even when the task seems too great for any one of us to overcome, we are nevertheless obligated, OBLIGATED to get involved. The miracle will happen if we dedicate ourselves to making it happen. God demands that we be here today, and that we speak for those who have no voice.

I am here today, because I am an inheritor of this tradition. I am also here today because I am part of a people that has known millennia of suffering. And I am part of a people whose suffering was rarely met by protests or rallies or demonstrations. A half-

century ago when my ancestors; men, women, and children, were shuttled from across the European continent to the infrastructure of death created by the Nazis—huddled into gas chambers and crematoria; babies dashed against brick walls and thrown out of windows; women raped and brutalized and tortured before being summarily executed; men being humiliated and degraded and dehumanized before being forced to dig their own graves while shooting squads anxiously waited...And all the while a deafening silence enveloped the civilized world. It was not until American generals and soldiers surveyed the killing fields of Europe and walked the landscape of death that people began to realize what had happened. This dark chapter of human civilization must never be repeated. Yet, at this very hour, at this very minute, women are being raped, children are being tortured, villages are being burned, communities are being razed, all with the sponsorship and encouragement of the government of Sudan. 75% of the casualties are children under the age of five. Water and food sources have been cut off throughout Darfur causing a plague of hunger and thirst. Routine pogroms are carried out as Janjaweed militiamen ride through villages with destructive and horrifyingly brutal attacks. Because DP camps are so sparsely staffed, thousands will continue to die of disease and infection caused by standing sewage that is not being cleared. African Union troops have been largely ineffectual at stopping any of the violence, and the UN as yet has not made significant commitments to the region, and we still await meaningful sanctions against Khartoum...In fact, yesterday's Wall Street Journal reported that the UN cut its food aid to Darfur down to a mere 1,000 calories a day...The explanation: providing more food was just too costly. This is a shameful excuse. What will it say about our generation if we allow another wholesale genocide to occur under our watch.

What will it mean to the victims of the Holocaust that we failed to react or responded too slowly to another attempt to extinguish a whole civilization of human beings in all too similar ways. By being here today, you are making a statement to our leaders in Washington, that even though Darfur is a place that many couldn't find on a map; even though Darfur is a region that many of us have never traveled to and may never travel to; that even though Darfurians speak a different language and live a radically different lifestyle; that even though Darfur is not a part of the world known for its wealth or gross national product; that we nevertheless care for each one of those victims and we are here to be their voice and their advocates! You remember that commandment in Leviticus, "do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" -- The text does not say your brother, or your countryman, or your co-religionist...It says your neighbor—your fellow human being. We are here today to fulfill that commandment—We refuse to stand idly by as the blood of hundreds of thousands of Darfurians is mercilessly shed!

The great spiritual father and modern prophet Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "Religion's task is to cultivate disgust for violence and lies, sensitivity to other people's suffering, the love of peace. God has a stake in the life of every man. He never exposes humanity to a challenge without giving humanity the power to face the challenge."

We have the power to face this challenge. Today we are exercising our power by flocking to this public place to demand action on behalf of Darfur. Every time we communicate with our representatives in government, write letters and editorials in our

papers, send post cards to the White House, host events that raise awareness, make contributions to relief agencies, attend rallies and protests, we are using our God-given power to bring hope and healing to a world of devastation and violence. May the God of us all bless us all with strength and fortitude in this great struggle. Amen.