

## NEW JERSEY LIGHTS A TORCH FOR DARFUR

On a cold and rainy November 13th morning, a torch was lit for Darfur in Newark, New Jersey. Over 1500 people gathered on the plaza in front of the Martin Luther King Federal Court House to voice their protest against the Chinese government's involvement in funding the genocide in Darfur, as they host the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing.

In support of the International Olympic Torch Relay, the event was organized by *The New Jersey Responds to the Crisis in Darfur Coalition*. The Coalition is comprised of universities, human rights groups, major Jewish organizations, the Darfur Rehabilitation Project, and other institutions and voluntary groups across the state. There was also participation from other state wide coalitions, including the North Jersey Coalition for Darfur, the Essex County Coalition for Darfur, and student groups such as Help Darfur Now, STAND, and A Gift for Life from a local high school.

Lori Price Abrams of the United Jewish Communities of Metrowest introduced Rabbi Don Rosoff of Temple Beth Or of Morristown, who led the invocation. Assemblyman William Payne, a national leader in the human rights movement, welcomed the gathering to the historic city of Newark, and brought greetings from Mayor Corey Booker.

With a fire pit blazing in the middle of the plaza, the torch lighting began. Jill Savitt of Dream For Darfur Olympic Torch Relay, which together with SaveDarfur has been sponsoring relays in the United States and in countries that have suffered genocide, set the context for this event. Abushabnab Adelbaggy, from the Darfur Rehabilitation Project of Newark, spoke about his experiences and the plight of family and friends still trapped in the genocide in his country. Joseph Sebarenzi, former speaker of Parliament of Rwanda and a survivor of three genocides, spoke of the pain of losing 49 members of his family in the spring of 1994. Mr. Sebarenzi called for government responsibility to end the genocide in Darfur.

The Torch was lit and passed to survivors of the Holocaust and Rwandan genocides, as well as individuals from Darfur and the Sudan. After a moment of silence, the crowd was addressed by our elected officials, notably both Congressman Donald Payne and Assemblyman William Payne, and then by the Governor of New Jersey, Jon Corzine. Addresses by Senator Robert Menendez, a leading voice for Darfur, and Senator Frank Lautenberg were read. New Jersey was one of the first states to recognize the crisis in Darfur and to respond with action. Our divestment bill was the first in the country. Governor Corzine has made four trips to the region, and spoke of his feeling of responsibility to keep this issue before the American public.

The students present then addressed the elected officials, and each in turn charged them with the trust of their people to act on behalf of Darfur. The students ended with this statement:

*"We are here as students...as refugees...as survivors...as Americans. Our voices are strong but they cannot be powerful without the determination of our government. We pass this torch to you, our Governor, our Congressman, our Assemblyman, in the belief that together our voices will make a difference".*

The program ended with a moving account of his visit to the refugee camps in Darfur by the Reverend Herbert Daugherty, and his closing prayer for peace.

