



mia farrow + eric reeves OLYMPIC PRESSURE

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When the summer Olympics open in Beijing this August, you can expect the typical, colorful fanfare. But while the triumphal music plays and flags wave, you might find yourself asking some tough questions about China and Darfur. You'll wonder, perhaps, if China has done anything to change its tainted relationship with Sudan, a relationship born of economic gain. You'll ask if the Olympic host country, so eager to present itself as a new world power, is ready to cast off its reputation for human rights abuses.

For bringing this issue to your attention — and that of the international community — two activists are largely responsible. They're an unlikely couple of co-campaigners: he, a tall, bookish academic from Massachusetts; she, an actress known for projecting waifish vulnerability. But Eric Reeves and Mia Farrow are united in their outrage. Both have put their regular lives on hold as they attempt to wake the international community up from its slumber over Darfur.

Fact: There are an estimated 400,000 dead, 2.5 million displaced as a result of the Darfur genocide. Financed by the government, rebel groups are continuing to burn down villages, raping and torturing the inhabitants. Fact: The international community, despite vowing "Never again" after Rwanda, has let the genocide continue unabated. The simple reason is oil: Sudan has a lot of it, most of which it sells to China. Chinese state-controlled companies are developing the largest oil fields in Sudan.

It's no wonder, then, that China has muscled the United Nations Security Council into watering down its resolutions on Darfur. Until recently, though, it seemed that Beijing was resistant to any kind of pressure. Then, in February last year, Reeves, who blogs regularly about Darfur, wrote, "It's time, now, to start shaming China. If people come to understand the connection between China as host of the Olympic Games and China as silent partner in the Darfur genocide, they may well be moved to object."

The tone was set, and a new campaign, Olympic Dream for Darfur, launched. Farrow, who began visiting Sudan in 2004 in her role as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, was on board. Dubbing the 2008 Summer Olympics the "Genocide Olympics", the campaign called on China to use its political leverage with Sudan. Farrow herself embarked on a torch relay from Darfur to Beijing, stopping to light an "Olympic torch" in countries with a history of genocide.

For Reeves, the campaign has taken on a new urgency. In 2003, shortly after he visited Sudan for the first time, he was diagnosed with leukemia. As the disease progresses, he finds that his hands sometimes shake too much to hold a telephone, and he can't remember facts as easily as he used to. But there's no question of giving up. The man who author Samantha Power has called "relentless, in your face" has cut back on his academic commitments to pursue his work on Darfur.

Farrow is equally passionate. "This is it, for me," she told PBS recently. "It has eclipsed everything else in my life." Her fiery op-eds have been appearing in influential newspapers around the world, and, like Reeves, her website has become a magnet for Darfur activists.

The good news: China seems to be taking notice. In the last eight months, it has publicly criticized Sudan, appointed a special envoy for Darfur, and voted for a new Security Council resolution. Whether this translates into effective action remains to be seen, but one thing's for sure: Reeves and Farrow will keep the pressure up. "It's as though the gods of history looked down on us and said, 'Your failure [in Rwanda] was so appalling, we're going to give you another chance,'" Reeves says. "We'll call it Darfur." ◊

miafarrow.org

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