**There’s only one way to march in face of genocide: forward**

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President Barack Obama spoke on Yom HaShoah last week at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He stated, “It’s a bitter truth, too often the world has failed to prevent the killing of innocents on a massive scale … We have to do everything we can to prevent and stop mass atrocities.”

I am helping to organize the “Walk Against Genocide” this Sunday, April 29 at Lake Merritt in Oakland, but sometimes I wonder why. I have been involved for many years with the anti-genocide movement. Why persist when the movement has been so ineffective in stopping atrocities?

After Colin Powell called what was happening in Darfur a “genocide,” after President George W. Bush declared “Not on our watch,” after massive efforts and millions of dollars spent by a coalition of hundreds of grassroots organizations, after huge lobbying and letter campaigns to pressure Congress and the president, after the International Criminal Court indicted Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, in

2009 …

After all this, al-Bashir’s government is committing what some are calling the third genocide in Sudan — bombing, killing and literally starving the people of the Nuba mountains. An indicted genocidaire not only goes free and is allowed to travel outside his country, but he and his cohorts are actually overseeing another genocide.

And now Obama states, “The president of Sudan [al-Bashir] and the president of South Sudan must have the courage to negotiate.” Calling on al-Bashir to negotiate while he is deliberately bombing and starving civilians is outrageous.

And there is no outcry. Why? What happened to the angry and passionate voices of thousands and thousands of activists? How could this huge and unprecedented movement fail? How can al-Bashir continue to kill his own citizens with impunity?

There many reasons our movement stalled:

• The movement lacked the understanding of the context of the genocide in Darfur. Behind all of Sudan’s conflicts — Darfur, South Sudan, the Nuba mountains — is al-Bashir’s government.

• The movement was too piecemeal, never able to get at the root of the problem.

• The movement focused on trying to influence Congress, when international policies are guided by the executive branch. And when the movement did focus on the executive branch, our government’s global influence was too compromised by its other international involvements. In addition, any significant progress was (and is) impeded by China and Russia, two of the five members of the United Nations’ Security Council whose interest in Sudan’s oil quashes any initiative designed to stop al-Bashir.

• The movement was usurped by well-funded organizations whose leadership took control of the grassroots effort, effectively emasculating it and stifling its creativity makers, and too often bad decisions were made. In essence, the movement became “institutionalized,” pushing many committed people to feel they were on the periphery. Those on the ground were left conducting postcard campaigns, calling their members of Congress and going to rallies.

There have been, undeniably, some successes, most notably getting millions of dollars of humanitarian aid into the refugee camps, at least for a time. But those were not, by any stretch, enough.

So I ask myself, why do I “Walk Against Genocide”? I know there are mass atrocities occurring today — in the Nuba mountains of Sudan, in the Congo. I guess I feel we can learn a huge amount from the failures (and successes) of the Darfur movement. I would like to activate those not “burned out” by the previous failed efforts.

Creative, passionate people who use the knowledge of the previous movement are critical to carry forth more effectively. Let’s stay at the grassroots level, and resist the institutional “organization” that concentrates power, becomes self-serving and loses sight of accomplishing the ultimate goal — to end genocide everywhere.

After all, I guess I still have hope.

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