

Teenagers form group to help Sudanese genocide

By SHEILA ABRAMS
Contributing Writer

Following the liberation of the Nazi death camps and discovery of the horrors of the Holocaust, many world leaders declared that such things would never happen again. Somehow, those noble sentiments faded as time passed.

When Arielle Wisotsky, 17, of the Basking Ridge section of Bernards Township, visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., last spring, she was thinking of her family history. Her grandmother as a young girl was a Holocaust victim, one of the few in her family who survived. To her surprise and dismay, she discovered during that visit, that the nightmare of genocide is still with us. She saw an exhibit about the situation in the Darfur region of the Sudan where, even now, the government is sanctioning horrors committed against its own people.

In Sudan, in North Africa,

the government has sponsored an Arab militia called the Janjaweed in a campaign to rid the country of a population of black African farmers in a region called Darfur. That campaign has used as its methods rape, starvation, torture and murder. In spite of treaties signed, Wisotsky said, the genocide is continuing.

"Almost half a million people have been killed," she said. About two million people have been driven from their homes, and most are living in terrible conditions in refugee camps, mostly in neighboring Chad.

Disease is widespread, and food and medical supplies are in short supply. No mercy has been shown to children, and many have fallen victim to the conditions under which they are forced to live.

"When I learned about it," Wisotsky said, "I couldn't understand how this could be going on without my knowing about it."

Thinking about her grandmoth-

er's life, she felt she wanted to do something. She spoke about what she had learned to two friends, brothers David, 17, and Eric Messinger, 15, of Millburn.

The three decided to organize a group, which they call Help Darfur Now. Their goals are to promote public awareness of the situation half a world away, to get people to let the government know that something must be done, and to raise funds to help improve conditions in the UN-run refugee camps.

With the help of Wisotsky's father, Bruce Wisotsky, an attorney, they established the non-profit group. They participated in a rally on the Green in Morristown in November.

At their website, www.help-darfurnow.org, the teens have provided considerable information, including pictures from refugee camps and background about the situation.

There is an online petition which will be sent to members of Congress, urging them to

vote for H.R. 3127, The Darfur Peace and Accountability Act. This bill would, in summary, put the power and prestige of the United States behind international efforts to stop the genocide and help its victims.

The site also encourages people to familiarize themselves with the situation in Darfur, to share their knowledge with other people, and to contact government representatives to make their opinions known. Attending rallies and demonstrations to help shine the light of public awareness on this situation is also encouraged.

Funds donated will be used to purchase food, provide shelter, medical supplies and other needed items for Darfur refugees. The website explains that "aid organizations, which are working diligently to help refugees in the camps, need our financial support." Donations can be sent to Help Darfur Now, P.O. Box 5061, Basking Ridge, N.J. 07920-5062.

Since the group has no over-



(Photo by Dobbie Weisman)

Teens With Compassion

Arielle Wisotsky of the Basking Ridge section of Bernards Township, along with David Messinger, left, and his brother Eric of Millburn, work on a mailing to help raise awareness and financial support for the genocide occurring in the Sudan.

head and all operating expenses are donated, 100 percent of all proceeds contributed go to Darfur relief efforts.

Arielle Wisotsky is a junior at Ridge High School. She has worked in community service efforts before, even traveling to Peru to work in a village.

She is not sure where she would like to attend college, but thinks she might want to study international relations. Asked what her grandmother thinks about what she is doing, she answered, "I think she's proud of us."



Club Calendar

•The Chester Lioness Club meets at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 11. Families 79. Meeting 82.