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STAND looks to end genocide

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Published: Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Updated: Sunday, May 2, 2010 09:05

A small group of students is taking a stand against genocide. STAND recently was formed at Truman under the STAND Genocide Intervention Network.

STAND is focused on giving students a chance to affect issues in the international sphere. Members can be a part of the group by signing a petition, calling the state department or joining in fundraisers, protests and conferences.

The group is small right now, but has big plans to combat genocide in the future. STAND's first project is collaborating with Amnesty International in its week-long International Justice campaign.

President of STAND senior Casey Millburg said during the campaign members will be manning a table to support a petition geared toward the arrest of Sudan's President Omar.

"The petition is going to say, 'I support the arrest of [the] Sudanese president or the International Criminal Court for issuing [an] arrest warrant against Sudanese president for crimes against humanity and war crimes and genocides relating to the conflict of what has been happening in Darfur,' - somewhere along those lines," Millburg said.

Millburg said she will cheer the day al-Bashir is handcuffed because no sitting president of any country has ever been arrested or prosecuted for ongoing genocide.

"Often times we hear about the problem but we do not hear there is a solution to the problem - especially with genocide," Millburg said. "The petition is to make students aware of what is happening and that there is something that is being done about the genocide. So when they sign the petition we'll be sending it off to the White House, the International Criminal Court, to our state senators as well as state representatives to let them know that the students of this school support the arrest."

STAND is taking unique approaches to the usual fundraising and awareness campaign. The group has two other projects in the planning stages: Dresses for Darfur - a fundraiser - and a traditional Sudanese dinner - an awareness program.

"We are going to ask students over [midterm break] Spring Break [to bring back dresses] or if they have dresses lying around here to donate them, and in late March we are going to have a dress sale," Millburg said. "It's to raise funds

for the genocide intervention network - trying to help out people who are essentially being killed just because they are alive."

Senior Lauren Walter, president of Amnesty International, said she is pleased about collaborating with STAND for the petition and believes the group can have a positive influence on campus.

"There are so many international justice issues that it's hard just to pick one, but STAND really helped us provide a focus as far as the petitioning was concerned," Walter said.

She said genocide is a huge problem in many parts of the world, and she hopes STAND can bring students' attention specifically to that concern.

"It is very easy for students who are very far away from the issue to be completely complacent and put it in the back of our mind and forget that these horrible crimes are happening in other parts of the world," Walter said. "I think it's important that STAND is initiating this campaign and is willing to work with us because together we can be much stronger than either one of us can be individually."

Marc Becker, STAND's adviser and professor of history, said he feels strongly about the topic of genocide and the group's initiative.

"Genocide is one of those issues that affects us all as humans," Becker said. "Genocide is not something you just . . . become concerned with. Genocide is something that impacts all of humanity . . . All of us as humans have to take responsibility - take actions to stop it."

Becker said groups like STAND play an important role in bringing awareness about what is happening in the rest of the world. He also said he thinks STAND has a lot of potential to progress as a group.

"If we think of Mahatma Gandhi in India, for instance, and all of these global movements - [they] start out small with initiatives like this," Walter said. "Sometimes they are successful and sometimes they are not. Particularly when we are dealing with issues like genocide, we are morally [obligated] to do what we can to make people aware of the situation and to stop it if possible."

STAND does not just deal with genocide in Sudan although this has been its primary focus for the past few years. The situation involving Burmese immigrants in Thailand, along with situations in Sri Lanka and Democratic Republic of Congo, have triggered STAND's concern. Visit www.standnow.org/chapter/tsu for more information.