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Students Lobby at the Nation's Capitol

By Fareesa Islam

STAFF WRITER

Four Bryn Mawr first-years and other tri-co students joined 400 other college students from over 42 states to lobby at Capitol Hill on Wednesday, April 6, to gain support for two bills currently being presented to the House and the Senate regarding the genocide in Sudan's Darfur region. The lobbying, which occurred on the 11th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, marked the launch of the "100 Days of Action" campaign. JiaJia Fei '08, Joanna Packer '08, Laura Pederson '08, and Vijaya Thakur '08, members of 'Students Against Genocide' at Bryn Mawr, traveled to Washington D.C. to speak to senators in order to raise awareness among the halls of Congress about the issue in Sudan.




Two Swarthmore College students, Andrew Sniderman '06 and second year senior Mark Hanis '05, discovered the Genocide Intervention Fund (GIF) that runs the hundred-day campaign and gathered students from the tri-co community to attend the protest. The tri-co students participated in a press conference attended by journalists and congressmen responsible for the bills. Following a press conference, the students were delegated to speak with their state representatives according to district. "When we met with Representative Gerlach from PA," said Fei, "we explained to him about the genocide in Darfur and how important it is to take action now because our window of opportunity to act is closing." Throughout the afternoon after the meeting with Gerlach, students roamed the Capitol searching for representatives to speak with in efforts to make their concerns heard.

The goal of the 100 Days of Action campaign is to raise \$1,000,000 and to write 10,000 letters over the next few weeks. According to Fei, the money raised by GIF will be sent to the under-funded African Union. "College students are sometimes seen as helpless," she explained. "The only way in which we can really make a difference is by supporting the AU, whose mandate is already limited."

The two bills the students lobbied for were the Darfur Accountability Act (S 495) and the Darfur Genocide Accountability Act (HR 1424). They are the first pieces of legislation to pass through Congress in efforts to give aid and protection to the Sudanese. The bills address the need for international intervention. They specifically emphasize the importance of establishing no fly zones over refugee camps and stress the need for civilian protection. The first bill is presented through the Senate and is co-sponsored by Senator Brownback (R-KS) and Senator Corzine (D-NJ). The second bill is represented in the house by Representative Payne (D-NJ).

The Bryn Mawr students who attended considered the day to be one of the most triumphant moments of action that an activist can achieve. Going from setting up a group on campus to actually speaking to influential members of the government was rewarding for the students. "Students Against Genocide," the organization on campus pressing for changes and action, said their future plans include raising more awareness on campus. They hope to achieve their goal of reaching out to the community through a letter writing campaign and a coalition with other organizations on campus.

The members of SAG hope that because of their efforts and the efforts of others, both bills will successfully pass. According to the club members, it is only through the effort and time of those who are dedicated and aware of the genocide in Darfur that the Sudanese people will finally be given the chance of a peaceful future.

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