



SAVE DARFUR: IN DISTRICT ADVOCACY GUIDE

Fall & Winter 2008

The inauguration of a new president and the swearing in of a new Congress represent the greatest opportunity to redefine and reprioritize U.S. efforts in Darfur since the genocide began. We need to seize this historic moment and ensure that Darfur is made a priority of both the executive and legislative branches from their first days of business in 2009.

While President-Elect Obama's words and deeds in the Senate and during the campaign give cause for optimism, history has proven again and again that it is too easy for even the best of intentions to fall victim to the crush of competing priorities that any new administration inevitably faces. If we as advocates and activists can help ensure that solving the crisis in Darfur - and indeed throughout Sudan - is made a top tier priority for the Obama administration, we will not only be doing a great and long overdue service to the still-suffering people of Darfur, but will also be helping to set a crucial precedent for how the U.S. will respond to similar crises in the future.

We need to fire on all cylinders and take full advantage of this historic moment. One of the first and most effective ways to influence the new administration is by lobbying Congress. Aside from its ability to allocate funding and play its own role in directing U.S. foreign policy, Congress can use its influence to ensure that the priorities of the American people are reflected in the policies of their government.

We therefore urge you to add your voice to Congress and through Congress by requesting in-district lobbying meetings with your representative and two Senators (or their staff) before the inauguration of President-Elect Obama in January. Below are specific suggestions and strategies designed to help you set up the meetings, make them as effective as possible, and create lasting relationships with your elected officials and their staff.

Tips for the Meetings

Pre-Meeting

Do your homework. Research how much your Representatives and Senators have done to end the Darfur genocide.

- To find your elected officials, visit: <http://www.savedarfur.org/pages/pendinglegislation> and click on "Find Members of Congress".
- Learn about their past work on Darfur by visiting: http://www.savedarfur.org/pages/passed_legislation.
- To look at your elected official's website or check their committee listings, go to: www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.
- Current congressional "asks" can be found at: http://savedarfur.org/pages/pending_legislation (NOTE: there are fewer "asks" than normal at the moment because Congress is adjourned).



Put together an effective lobby group. The group should ideally consist of 3-6 participants. Remember, your elected officials and their staffs will listen a little better if they think you are a group with a large impact on their ability to be reelected.

Send a letter to their district office requesting a meeting and follow up with a phone call to the Congressman's district scheduler. Many of you have already developed relationships with your elected officials. Those of you who have already know that you can go lobby at different times of the year. Generally the best times are between November and January, during the Congressional Spring Recess (usually in March/April), and during the month-long recess in August. We hope you will go multiple times a year and develop a strong relationship.

At the Meeting

Set the Tone for an effective meeting. Begin with introductions, and make sure you make it clear that your group is politically important to listen to. If you are part of a larger Darfur advocacy community in your state or district, make sure you mention that you represent the tip of the iceberg in terms of constituents who care about and pay attention to the issue.

If the office you're meeting with has been supportive in the past, thank them for their support while stressing that much more needs to be done. Essentially, you want to be appreciative for their past efforts while making it clear that those past efforts don't let them off the hook for future action.

Make your pitch. Present your "asks," and ask for an answer to what the office will do to support them. Make it clear that you will follow up. It is important to remember that as constituents, they work for you, and that any staff members you meet with are likely overworked and stretched thin across several issues, which means that you probably know more about Darfur than they do. If you give them usable tasks and follow up to ensure they don't forget, there is a good chance they will take the actions you suggest. Remember to take notes, too!

After the Meeting

Follow up. Send thank you letters that reiterate any promises they make and/or reiterate any of your questions or requests left unanswered. Keep track of whether they fulfilled their commitments, and continue accordingly.

Stay engaged with the office on other Darfur "asks" as they come up, (Save Darfur will let you know about these via email and on our website as they emerge), and plan to schedule another meeting later in the year.

TIP: If you are meeting with a staffer for the first time, ask for a meeting with the member next time, and keep going until you get a meeting with the elected official!

Send us your info. Tell us what commitments you got from your Representative/Senator and how the meeting went. We are constantly looking to improve the communication between our government relations team members, who



lobby on behalf of Darfur in Washington, DC, and the activists across the country lobbying for Darfur locally. Together, our collective messages and efforts will reinforce one another and make us all more effective.

Do you have questions on current policy tasks? Check our website and if you need more information please send a question to lobby@savedarfur.org. Do you have an exciting update on your representative? Email us - we will do our best to get back to you and help you succeed in developing your relationships with your elected officials.

Policy "Asks"

It's important to ask your elected officials to take specific actions to support the Darfur cause. There are some actions they can always take if they have not already done so. Other actions will only be relevant during a certain time or might be specific to members of a certain committee. **The following actions will be pertinent through at least January 2009.**

- 1) If you are meeting with a Senator or Senate office, request that they use their opportunity in the **confirmation hearings** for President-elect Obama's appointees to ask questions about Darfur and highlight it as a priority issue. For example, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold a hearing featuring President-elect Obama's Secretary of State - it would be great if he/she were asked a question about what the Obama administration intends to do to resolve the conflict in Darfur.
- 2) If you are meeting with a Representative (or their staff), ask them to join the **Sudan Caucus**. The Sudan Caucus is an opt-in group of members of Congress who regularly work together to advance peace in Sudan. If you are meeting with a Senator (or their staff), you can ask them to join the **Human Rights Caucus**, which serves a similar role of promoting human rights and an end to the conflict internationally.
- 3) Ask your Senators and Representative to push for actions called for in Save Darfur's plan entitled, "[Saving Darfur: A Plan for the Obama administration.](#)" This is where your research comes in handy. Once you've found out what committees your elected officials sits on, you can connect those committees to a point in the Save Darfur plan. For example, if they serve on the Appropriations Committee, you can ask them to continue supporting full funding for the peacekeeping mission in Darfur, as called for in the plan. If they do not sit on a relevant committee, you can still ask them to support the points within the plan and pressure the Obama administration to do the same.

Once the new Congress is sworn in and President Obama inaugurated, remember to check back with us (and be on the lookout for emails from us) for updated "asks". Again, if you have any questions, please email lobby@savedarfur.org.

Good luck!