Gov. Rick Perry’s Comments on Divestment in Sudan

*Note - Gov. Perry frequently departs from prepared remarks.

Thursday, June 21, 2007

Thank you Commissioner Williams It is a tremendous honor to be here today with men and women who have publicly voiced their opposition to the genocide in Sudan, such as Chairman Berkowitz (Pete Berkowitz, chairman of Holocaust museum, Senators Rodney Ellis and Florence Shapiro, and Representative Corbin Van Arsdale. It is great to be here too with a man who is known more as a country performer, but who is also a true, global humanitarian, Big Kenny of “Big and Rich.” And it is also an honor to be with all the members of the Sudan Divestment Task Force. Your good deeds are recognized today even if your names are not.

Today we gather in a building that is a memorial to human atrocity. Its very existence sends a simple message: Never again. Never again should the world stand idly by while evil regimes commit atrocities against the Jewish people, and never again should the world be quiet when any people are a target of human hatred in its worst form: Genocide. Today in Africa’s largest country, Sudan, the Arab regime in the Capital City of Khartoum continues to perpetrate crimes against humanity, targeting the non-Arab people living in the Darfur region, most of whom have no connection to the rebel uprising of a few years ago. The Arab militia, called the Janjaweed which means “man on horseback,” began an ethnic cleansing campaign in February, 2003, with the full backing of the Khartoum government. To date, 400,000 people have been killed and more than 2 million displaced because of the color of their skin or their ethnic origin. Many have been tortured, traumatized and orphaned because of a policy of state-sponsored murder.

As a state, we cannot address this issue through our own foreign policy, but we can through our domestic policy. We can say we will not stand idly by as innocent blood is shed by the hands of evil. We can say that our money will not be invested in companies that prop up such a notorious regime. And we can say that human rights are more important than business profits. The bill I am ceremonially signing today, Senate Bill 247, sends a message that Texas is committed to ending the genocide in Sudan by making the Khartoum government pay an economic price. We will no longer allow the state’s two largest pension funds to be invested in companies that have come under scrutiny for their economic activity in Sudan.

Some may ask whether this one bill can truly make a difference. I say it can, when one of the world’s tenth largest economies, the State of Texas, says we will not tolerate those who commit genocide, nor the companies that turn a blind eye in order to increase their bottom line. When children are no longer left abandoned in the streets, when ethnic minorities are no longer tortured in Sudanese prisons, when villages are no longer set on fire and women no longer raped by the militia, when hatred finally gives way to peace, then and only then will our two largest pension funds look at investing in Sudan again.
The world must once again be reminded that there is something more basic than our ethnic or nationalistic origins, something more basic than even our religious affiliations, and that is the bond of our shared humanity. Before we are Americans, or Europeans, or Sudanese, we are all people made in the image of God. Our obligation is to stand in the gap for those who are not treated with the dignity deserving every human being. There is no such thing as a dispensable life. There is no such thing as a hopeless human being. I do not believe God creates such beings among His whole creation. The faces of Darfur are not some poor people who occupy a foreign land, they are our brothers and sisters. We must embrace them with arms of love and hearts full of compassion. We must stand up for justice against their captors and oppressors. And we must set the captives free from the reign of oppression that renders their lives expendable in order to advance a political or tribal agenda. Let us do what is right, and if we do, we shall be able to sleep at night. Thank you.

Before we leave here today, we want to turn the microphone over to a celebrity artist and humanitarian who has made ending the atrocity in Sudan one of his great passions. Please welcome Big Kenny of “Big and Rich.”