

Promises

An account of a Comcast interview in which Mia Farrow tells "what she can never forget" about her humanitarian trips to the Darfur region in Sudan.

"The old Philosophy 101: You walk by a pond and see a baby drowning. Do you have a moral obligation to save the baby? Most people will say, 'Indeed.' Well how about if you're late for your job? How about if the pond is through the woods and you can only hear the crying? Do you have a moral obligation then? 'Well if I hear the cry, sure.' What if someone tells you that a baby's drowning a mile away? Do you have a moral obligation if you know the baby's drowning? 'Well if I know the baby's drowning, perhaps I do.' Now what if a baby is drowning on another continent? Do you have a moral obligation to save the baby then?"

According to Mia Farrow, "Now... you are getting into another area. It's not so simple for everyone. But, in my view, you define yourself and your position within the human family by the answer to this question"

Children are dying everyday in the Darfur region of Sudan. They are being killed as a result of an on-going genocide, and they are dying by attrition; hunger, disease, and despair. During her two visits to this region, Mia Farrow has looked into the eyes of these dying children; seen the scars of the battered women; and heard their stories of murdered sons, husbands, and fathers. She has seen the face of evil and the shadow of death. The government of Sudan and its proxy Arab militia, the fearsome janjaweed are responsible for the carnage. As many as 90% of Darfur's villages have been bombed and burned. Crops and food supplies are destroyed and the wells are purposely poisoned, stuffed with dead bodies. And staring through these horrific shadows were the women of Darfur. They asked Mia Farrow to tell the world about what is happening because they believe that if people know, then surely they will do something to save them. Farrow promised to dedicate her life to helping the victims by spreading awareness about the genocide. Thus far she has given nearly one thousand interviews and continued to fulfill her promise by providing Comcast Television with this recent interview in Danbury, Connecticut.

Mia Farrow was drawn to Danbury because of the award-winning documentary, *The Promise*, which seeks to remind humanity of its promise of "never again" made in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The film was created by six students and their assistant principal in an effort to raise awareness about the atrocities in Darfur. The eight minute film has traveled far and wide to fulfill this purpose. Since the video was released in February it has been requested by schools, colleges, religious groups, and civic organizations from across the country. Mia Farrow was touched by the power of the film. "I found it startlingly moving and remarkable and concentrated—a plea for help for the people of Darfur who urgently need it," she said.

Most of the 2.6 million inhabitants of the squalid refugee camps across Darfur are women and children: men and boys are killed but some have been taken to fight in militia

groups. The surviving women have endured unimaginable levels of violence. Farrow showed a picture of a woman who had a cigarette burnt into her face. "Her baby had been torn off her back and bayoneted in front of her by janjaweed. Three of her five children were killed that day and her husband too. They were stuffed into the well" she said. Other women showed how their tendons had been sliced, forcing them to hobble. This brutal act makes the perilous twenty mile journey for firewood as difficult as it is dangerous, for the janjaweed are everywhere. Still, the women must go. Sorghum, the grain donated by the World Food Program requires some two hours of cooking over an open fire. The mothers must feed their children and try to stay alive themselves.

Farrow met a 17 year-old woman named Fatima at the Kalma refugee camp. Fatima was alone, her family had been killed and she had been raped by the janjaweed. During her rapes, the men shouted "Now you will give birth to a light-skinned child." Fatima was heavily pregnant. There the women shunned her, calling her "janjaweed, janjaweed!" When Farrow asked, "What is anyone doing for you?" Wordlessly Fatima handed Farrow a zip-lock sandwich bag. Inside was a little blue plastic square she said she was supposed to have her baby on. Fatima had no idea who would help her or what fate might lie ahead for her or her unborn child.

Gang rapes are common practice for the Arab janjaweed. The brutality against women goes beyond rape and its life long trauma. A woman named Halima showed Farrow the scars of brandings on her arms. The raping of women often involves mutilations and brandings. Today, up to a half- million people have been killed, including hundreds of thousands of children. Additionally, 4 million people have been displaced. The dire situation is in rapid descent. The 7,000 African Union troops deployed since 2004 have a near-impossible task in trying to monitor a region the size of Texas. They have been the only protection for civilians, yet they are outmanned, under-trained and under-equipped. They are also bankrupt. Twice in the past month they requested assistance from the United Nations.

The only way to save Darfur now is through a robust UN peacekeeping force deployed under a full Chapter VII mandate. The Government of Sudan who sponsors the on-going atrocities has refused to accept such a force declaring Darfur would be a "graveyard" to any peacekeeping forces. Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir stated "we are determined to defeat any forces entering the country just as Hezbollah has defeated the Israeli forces." In the face of the first genocide of this century, we must demand a nonconsensual deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur.

Mia Farrow has seen what most cannot begin to imagine. In a place called Darfur the cries of innocent men, women and children echo silently in the face of evil-doers hell bent on wiping out generations of ethnic Africans. This is happening right now, in 'real-time.' So we are back to the Philosophy 101 question...do we have a moral obligation to help end the suffering? According to Mia Farrow we do..."for with knowledge comes great responsibility." Collectively we have a responsibility to fulfill the elusive promise of "never again." But we must act now to put an end to this genocide.

Mia Farrow urges people to "support our courageous humanitarian aid workers including Save the Children, and UNICEF. Tell our legislators, our congresspersons that we want and expect them to take action. Words are not enough. Time is running out for the people of Darfur."

For more information about the situation in Darfur, the film *The Promise*, or for a transcript of the entire interview visit <http://www.dhsthepromise.com>.

Promises is a collaborative piece written by Katherine Calle along with UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Mia Farrow and Danbury High School Assistant Principal Tim Salem. Calle is a freshman at Harvard University. Her involvement in raising awareness about the genocide in Darfur began at her alma mater, Danbury High School. At Danbury High School she helped create and promote *The Promise*.