

Professor C. Eric Reeves LLD 2008  
 Honorary Degree Ceremony  
 Perspectives on the Darfur Genocide  
 March 6, 2008

I'm profoundly moved by this honorary degree from my beloved academic home of the past 28 years, and I'm just as deeply grateful for Bec Hamilton's wonderfully generous words. And yet I'm compelled to confess that my gratitude for this moment of recognition cannot lessen my sense of humility, finally failure, before the scandal of the world's continuing acquiescence in Darfur's genocide. This scandal extends to international acceptance of the deeply related ethnic conflagration in neighboring eastern Chad. Perhaps most consequentially, the international community refuses to invest the diplomatic and economic resources that might preserve the fragile peace in southern Sudan. Unfathomably destructive war looms closer by the day.

To know the suffering that the people of these regions endure, to understand how widespread civilian destruction and displacement have been, to see so clearly the evil responsible for creating this vast arena of human agony—all this leaves me feeling that no honor can be deserved, no praise warranted. My largest conviction, now and in my daily existence, is one of failure.

If I continue to use my voice in all ways possible, these efforts are animated not by any belief in success, but by a desperate desire to mitigate our collective failure. For mitigation long ago became the most that we might achieve.

Romeo Dallaire, force commander of the UN mission in Rwanda during the genocide, has repeatedly insisted on his own failure, his personal failure, during this terrible time. Of course he doesn't blame himself alone, and the subtitle to his harrowing memoir is "the failure of humanity in Rwanda." But Dallaire's self-assessment has seemed paradoxical to some, who see him (I believe rightly) as a hero. And yet I think I understand something of what he means by personalizing that sense of failure. I am of course no Dallaire, though nearly three years ago we spent a remarkable couple of hours together on his last day in residence at Harvard. And I am haunted by the memory of looking into those intensely blue eyes, eyes that had seen so deeply into a soul-destroying heart of darkness.

But if I am no Dallaire, and certainly can't lay claim to anything like the extraordinary physical courage that defined his command, I do believe I know something of what he has so often declared: "I failed."

For in the end it is not one's efforts or courage that matter, but their success or failure. These are harsh terms for self-judgment. But the more intensely I have felt the suffering of Sudan's people, the more inescapable these harsh terms have become. And perversely, the longer and more intense one's efforts, the more attenuated the terms in which success may be conceived. I know that I, too, have failed. Even so, Sudan's ongoing tragedy ensures that this failure has not yet become definitive, and there can be no excuse for giving up.

It is, then, with a continuing sense of obligation to mitigate failure that I accept Smith's honorary degree and the generous words that come my way. But as my efforts continue—amidst anger, outrage, and indescribable sorrow—the humility of failure is always present. So I stand before you.

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## Introduction of Panelists

Far the easier part of my comments this afternoon lies in welcoming four friends and colleagues from the past nine years of working on Sudan. I'll introduce them collectively, and they'll speak, *seriatim*, for ten minutes each about their particular perspective on Darfur (knowing they may have to walk home if they go over the time limit), and then there will be a question-and-answer period, though one with a rather different format: the panelists will ask questions of one another, easing my job as moderator and allowing some extra time for each of my distinguished colleagues to speak. My introductions will highlight briefly professional credentials, but focus more on my personal sense of, and connection to, these four remarkable people and their essential work on Darfur and Sudan.

**Jeb Sharp** has over the past decade been a journalist for the BBC/Public Radio International co-production, "The World." Her "History of Iraq" series won a 2003 Overseas Press Club award (Edward R. Murrow won the inaugural award in 1947). In 2006 Jeb also won a Neiman Fellowship at Harvard for distinguished broadcast journalism.

I consider "The World" to be one of the very best broadcast news programs available in English.

I've known Jeb from the first year of my Sudan work, and felt immediately that she was a journalist not only savvy and deeply intelligent, but passionately motivated to do stories that would otherwise be overlooked—and that she would be guided by only the very highest standards of journalism. Her ability to put together 3-5 minute segments on complex issues involving Sudan—to edit, craft, and frame each so as to include as much news as could possibly fit into such a constraining broadcast box—has been nothing less than a series of minor miracles of deftness, concision, and essential intelligence. She is scrupulously even-handed, always superbly prepared in the questions she asks, and has a sense of the truly newsworthy. Notably, Jeb was the first journalist in the world to give voice to the grim assessment by Jan Egeland, former UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs, that Darfur was probably the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world. This was in December 2003, when virtually all other broadcast journalists had yet to identify where Darfur actually was. I've dealt with literally hundreds of journalists during my Sudan career, from around the world. Jeb is one of the three or four most distinguished I've ever encountered, and it's a very great honor to have her on this panel.

**Omer Ismail** is a Darfuri who escaped from Sudan in 1989 following the military coup by the National Islamic Front, the brutal junta that deposed an elected government and deliberately aborted the most promising chance for a north/south peace agreement since independence in 1956. This tyrannical regime remains in power and constitutes the greatest obstacle to peace and justice in Sudan. Before being forced to flee, Omer had become Sudanese director of Operation Lifeline Sudan, the largest humanitarian operation in the world at the time, and the essential means of serving the desperate populations of southern Sudan for many years.

In this country Omer helped found the Sudan Democratic Forum, an effort by Sudanese intellectuals to advance democracy in Sudan. He is spokesman for the Darfur Union, and is a co-founder of the Darfur Peace and Development Organization and its vice-president for advocacy.

The mission statement of the organization seems to me the perfect articulation of what might some day bring a just and sustainable peace to Darfur. Omer is also a key part of the new anti-genocide organization ENOUGH.

But these institutional roles can't do full justice to the remarkable work that Omer has done with a wide range of policy, advocacy, and human rights organizations, and his catalytic presence within the Darfuri diaspora. His remarkable understanding of the ways things work, and don't work, in the arenas of advocacy and investigative work are key to his success of many years. He is presently single-handedly engaged in a process of documenting atrocity crimes photographically in Darfur and Eastern Chad. Omer is both passionate and resourceful in serving the people of his homeland, and it's a very great honor to have him here today.

**Susannah Sirkin** is Deputy Director of Physicians for Human Rights, one of the most distinguished and institutionally thoughtful human rights organizations in the world.

If not as large as its well-known fellow human rights organizations Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and if unable to span the globe of human rights issues, PHR chooses its issues and crises very carefully, with an eye to the special expertise it brings to human rights investigation and advocacy. Perhaps most notably, Physicians for Human Rights was a co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize for its role in the campaign to ban landmines. Susannah played a key role.

PHR has been the most forthright and thoughtful human rights organization in considering the question of genocide in Darfur, and long ago established that key terms of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide indeed defined the nature of human destruction in Darfur.

Susannah herself has a long and deeply impressive career in human rights work, especially in organizing the grim but necessary forensic work in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. She has held her present position at PHR since 1987.

Her title as "Deputy Director" needs, I think, a gloss: it means that Susannah does everything. Her responsibilities are too numerous to list, and range from research to advocacy to grant-writing to lecturing to morale-boosting and coalition-building. Along the way she's found the time to author or edit numerous reports and articles on the medical consequences of human rights violations, the physical evidence of human rights abuses, as well as physician complicity in violations. I frankly don't know how PHR could function without her.

Susannah is also a beautifully compassionate human being, and able to move from the professional to the personal with an ease revealing that all her work is animated by the proverbial "heart of gold." She has become a very close friend and confidante, and I couldn't be more pleased to have her here today.

**Ted Dagne** is senior Africa Researcher for the Congressional Research Service, with responsibility for more countries than is humanly possible. Born in Ethiopia, narrowly escaping the horrific Mengistu tyranny as a teenager, and eventually taking his degree at Howard University, Ted is in one sense the ultimate immigrant success story. Every April, when I contemplate the federal taxes I'm about to pay, I think of Ted, and try to imagine that all my money is going to his salary. It's a fiction, but one that makes tax day a little less appalling. I can actually feel that I'm underpaying.

But introducing Ted is my toughest challenge this afternoon. My task is to convey to you how magnificently he is committed to improving living conditions and governance in Africa, how completely he has dedicated his life to a career that is more a calling than a profession, and how fully he has put himself and all his resources in the service of justice, peace, and development. Most particularly, I have to give you some sense of Ted's central commitment to the cause of Sudan.

I've known Ted for almost nine years, and must confess it took me some time to understand that underneath his quiet voice and demeanor lay an unyielding courage and ferocious compassion that are quite simply unrivalled in my own life's experience. As I came to know Ted better, and to work more closely with him, I understood what Roger Winter had tersely told me just before I met Ted for the first time in fall 1999: "Ted is a heavy hitter." Roger at the time was executive director of the US Committee for Refugees, and the person closest to serving as my "godfather" in Sudan work. It was he who pointed to the path that brings me here today.

But what sort of "heavy hitter" was I being introduced to? Roger's evident assumption was clearly that I'd either figure it out, or was too stupid to be of help in the cause of Sudan. But Ted's title was hardly exalted; my initial impression was of someone a bit reserved, confident to be sure, but the opposite of self-promoting or obviously powerful. It would take too long to describe the arc of my friendship with Ted, and how close I feel to him now, and how deeply I admire him for what is indeed his unrivalled "heavy hitting."

I certainly can't convey how closely Sudan has brought us together. Suffice it to say that when I'd finished my book on Darfur, the dedication could not have come more easily: "For Ted Dagne: friend, brother, champion of Sudan."

It is an honor past reckoning to have Ted here today.