

Washington DC, 1/23/07—In advance of tonight's State of the Union Address, Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY), Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee that oversees foreign policy and Darfur Refugee Fatima Haroun, called for the President to highlight the urgent need for action to protect innocent civilians from ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan in tonight's address. Israel presented Haroun with a copy of the famous Holocaust-era poem hanging in his office "First They Came..." by Pastor Martin Niemöller.

"For me, Darfur is personal," explained Israel. "Not as personal as for the 400,000 people who have been murdered there. And not as personal as for the 3 million people who have lost their homes and villages and been turned into refugees. But, it is personal for me. Before I was elected to Congress, I visited the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington. I viewed grotesque pictures of people being beaten on the streets, families being led into gas chambers, bodies heaped on bodies. I remember thinking: 'What would I have done if I were in Congress when all this was happening? Would I have spoken out? Would I have tried to pass laws to stop it?' I do not have to ask what my decisions would have been in Congress had I been there seventy years ago during that Holocaust. Now, it is my obligation as a United States Congressman to act to stop this genocide."

"The crisis in Darfur is at a turning point, and the situation for civilians and aid workers has only deteriorated in recent months. Now is the time for President Bush to be resolute in his insistence that an effective international peacekeeping force be in place in Darfur immediately," said David Rubenstein, executive director of the Save Darfur Coalition. "The Save Darfur Coalition was pleased to facilitate the meeting of Rep. Israel and Fatima Haroun and to learn that the Congressman invited Ms. Haroun to accompany him to the State of the Union address."

Israel and Haroun hope to bring attention to the ongoing genocide in Darfur and urge President Bush to continue to put pressure on world leaders to advocate for an effective international peacekeeping force in the region.

"Tonight's address could be a chance for President Bush to regain credibility in terms of foreign affairs," said Haroun, who grew up in the small Darfuri village of Niripipy and is viewed as a leading Darfuri women's voice in the United States. "My father and siblings are still in Darfur and are facing many risks. My village has been attacked by the Janjaweed twice." Haroun, who works with the Darfur Rehabilitation Project in Philadelphia, has lectured widely on the crisis in Darfur and was a featured speaker at the Save Darfur Coalition rally in New York City on

September 17, 2006.

Israel has been a leading voice in Congress on the need to create a national discussion on the genocide in Darfur. In May 2006, Israel hosted the first nationwide Democratic Caucus Online Town Hall on the situation in Darfur with three of his colleagues. Believing that the discussion should take place in all communities and extend beyond the confines of Washington, Israel hosted a "Day on Darfur" briefing in Washington in July 2006 for Long Island clergy members, community leaders, teachers and students. This event built upon the success of the April 2006 "Darfur Day on Long Island," where over 400 high school and college students, religious, community and business leaders and Darfur refugee Yahya Osman joined together for a day of education, awareness, and discussion in response to the ongoing genocide in Sudan.