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Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law
"From Nuremberg to Darfur: Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity"
June 24, 2008

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Coburn, Honorable Representatives, it is my pleasure and an honor to be asked to submit a brief testimony on such a weighty issue as human rights and accountability. I am not an expert on the legal intricacies of international accountability. I am simply an athlete and a student, but in those positions I have had experiences that are unique.

In 2006 after seventeen years of preparation I became the Olympic Champion in my chosen sport of speedskating. After spending years traveling around the world as an athlete representing the United States my eyes opened to a tragedy occurring in a part of the world that was vastly unreported in my home country. That tragedy was the mass killings occurring in the Darfur region of Sudan.

For more than two years I have continued to try and raise awareness about the horrible atrocities faced by so many innocents in Darfur. I have founded a coalition, Team Darfur, to bring together like minded athletes to bring awareness to the abuses that are occurring. I have spoken in front of groups of thousands and I have traveled to Chad to visit firsthand with refugees driven from their homes in Darfur.

Like so many, I am appalled by the suffering that these innocents have gone through. The numbers of people killed in Darfur is as massive as the worst of natural disasters. However, unlike the loss of life and home that occur when natural disasters strike, these vicious crimes are the result of conscious and willful effort by a group of people. Over the last five years in the desert of Darfur, almost every day men make the decision to aim a gun at the head of an unarmed person and pull the trigger. They make the decision when they storm into a village to rape women over and over again. And then they make the decision to burn that village to the ground and drive anything living into a wasteland to starve to death.

In Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, decisions are being made that are every bit as vile as those occurring in the field. Officials of the government empower these savage acts on men, women and children. They arm the militias, they pay militiamen to slaughter innocents, and they use military aircraft to bomb civilians. Men there make the decision that they can destroy a group of people simply because they do not want them around.

When I first became aware of Darfur my intention was only to try and raise a little bit of money for relief and make a few more people aware of a crime that was occurring on such a horrific scale. I thought that once people realized what was happening this crisis would magically stop, what I have come to realize is that it takes much more than awareness.

In the face of crimes such as these, people must be willing to fight back. That does not always mean picking up a gun and charging into the fray, but using every available tool at your disposal to bring those murderers and rapist to judgment.

The situation in Darfur was complex, and has become increasingly so, but complexity cannot conceal the fact that throughout this conflict men have consistently made the decision to indiscriminately take the lives of huge numbers of innocent people. For that decision, there must be accountability. There must be the knowledge throughout the world that if you willfully destroy the lives and homes of innocents that you will be held responsible.

Respected individuals from around the world are working tirelessly to ensure that the perpetrators of the crimes in Darfur are held accountable. What I, and the other athletes who make up Team Darfur, hope to do to help is call upon the international community to observe an Olympic Truce period for Darfur.

The Olympic Truce originated in ancient Greece; in recent history, world leaders have invoked the Truce as an opportunity for the international community to expend exceptional effort, as athletes strive for medals, to create and promote peace.

In 2003, the United Nations reaffirmed the importance of the Olympic Truce in an statement signed by more than 400 heads of state and dignitaries who pledged "to support and disseminate, individually and collectively, the symbolic call for Olympic Truce throughout all future Olympic Games and beyond, and to exercise our best efforts within our communities, countries, and relevant international organizations to achieve its recognition and observance."

On October 31, 2007, China introduced a resolution supporting an Olympic Truce for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games [G/A 62/L.2, "Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal"]. The resolution calls "upon all Member States to cooperate with the International Olympic Committee in its efforts to use sport as an instrument to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation in areas of conflict during and beyond the Olympic Games period." It was co-sponsored and adopted by 186 nations, including Sudan.

A true Olympic Truce will only be possible for Darfur with an increased deployment of the UNAMID peacekeeping force and a rejuvenated peace process that has the full support of the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Therefore, we hope the Truce period will be used to exert diplomatic pressure to restart the peace process, and to initiate a rapid and effective deployment of the UNAMID peacekeeping force so that civilian protection would continue long after the Games.

With those measures in place, the international community could use the Olympic Truce period to provide humanitarian assistance in Darfur where hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians have no access to food, safe drinking water, and medical care.

In the spirit of the Olympic Truce, we issue a moral call for these essentials: a rejuvenated peace process, deployment of peacekeepers, a cessation of attacks, and unfettered access for humanitarian workers. If the Olympic Truce period is be marked by an increase of effort by the

international community to secure peace for the people of Darfur, the measures of accountability that your committee hopes to pursue will be more possible, and more effective.

I was raised to believe that we live in a nation that values justice, and I have seen that belief validated time and time again. I am proud of the work that we as a nation have done to help the innocents of Darfur, but there is much more to be done. We must continue to lead the international community to bring to justice the criminals that continue to perpetrate this violence. In doing so we will not only help hundreds of thousands of innocents in Darfur, but we will move the world one step closer to a place where men will know they face consequences for committing these crimes against humanity.