



# *Congressman Donald Payne*

## Tenth District - New Jersey

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### Payne and Lee Launch Capitol Hill Darfur Fast for Life Campaign *Call for Meeting with President Obama*

Washington, DC – Today, Representative Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health and Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Chairwoman Representative Barbara Lee, held a press conference to launch the Darfur for Life Campaign on Capitol Hill. Payne and Lee were joined by fifteen Members of the CBC, actress/activist Mia Farrow, social activist Reverend Marcia Dyson, and Darfuri activists Mohamed Yahya and Omer Ismail. During the press conference, they also called for meetings with President Obama and Special Envoy to Sudan General Scott Gration to address their concerns on this issue.

Members of the CBC, starting with Chairwoman Lee, will fast in solidarity with the Darfuri people who are suffering at the hands of the Omar al-Bashir regime in Sudan and will call on the entire Congress to join them. By fasting, Payne and Lee seek to remind Americans that the violence in Darfur continues and also to compel the U.S. government and the international community to take robust steps to end the humanitarian crisis. The Darfur Fast for Life Campaign will continue until Congress adjourns in August.

On May 10, 2009, Representative Payne began a four-day water-only fast to prompt congressional leaders and the Obama administration to keep Darfur high on the agenda. He followed in the footsteps of Ms. Farrow and Virgin Group Founder and Chairman Sir Richard Branson who have also fasted to express their outrage at the Khartoum-based government's actions. "We are calling for a meeting with President Obama and General Gration to put forth the CBC's concerns on the ongoing crisis. For far too long, al-Bashir and his regime in Khartoum have committed unspeakable atrocities in Darfur," Payne stated. "The recent expelling of 16 aid organizations is just another wicked move by the regime to further harm the people of Darfur." He continued, "I am seizing upon the momentum built after my initial fast by launching the Darfur Fast for Life Campaign on Capitol Hill. I applaud CBC Chairwoman Barbara Lee and CBC Members for also taking up this charge. We are calling on other Members of Congress to step up and speak out for the people Darfur. This is our small way of saying to Darfuris that they are not alone, they are not forgotten and that we stand with them."

"Almost 15 years ago in Rwanda, the international community turned a blind eye while a million civilians were hacked to death," said CBC Chairwoman Barbara Lee. "Can we really say we have done any different in the case of Darfur, South Sudan, Abyei, and Nuba? We declared genocide in 2004, but we failed to act decisively to stop it. If we had acted then, we could have saved many innocent people. If we do the right thing now, we can save children from a certain death and end the suffering for millions."

Since 2003, the Sudanese government, led by President Omar al-Bashir, has executed an operation of rape, starvation and murder against the people of Darfur after their protests against social, political and economic marginalization. The Khartoum-based government unleashed a brutal drive against the people via the Janjaweed militia and the Sudanese Armed Forces which have caused the deaths of over 400,000 people and the displacement of nearly 3 million.

The genocide declaration by the U.S. government in 2004 has not led to a tough stance against the Bashir government. Congressional leaders, like Payne and Lee, have clamored for the US and the international community to work towards bringing a lasting peace to the Darfur region. From Congressman Payne's successful passing of the resolution declaring genocide in Darfur to Representative Lee's call to name and shame companies doing business with the Sudanese government, they have been on the frontlines of this issue and continue to sound the alarm against the atrocities perpetrated by the al-Bashir regime.

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