

# Darfur: Teaching about the issues

## About this resource

This resource for ages 13+ helps you to begin to talk about the complex situation in Darfur. Below you'll find an introduction to the conflict, stories from young people about their lives in refugee camps there, information about Oxfam's work in the region, and ideas for what young people might do in response to learning about the conflict.

There are four sections:

1. Introducing the conflict in Darfur
2. Life in Darfur: young peoples' stories
3. Oxfam in Darfur
4. What can we do?

You might also find Oxfam's Global Citizenship Guide *Teaching Controversial Issues* useful in supporting you while you teach about the subject:

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teachersupport/cpd/controversial/>

# Darfur: Teaching about the issues

## 1. An introduction to the conflict in Darfur

Now entering its fifth year, the Darfur crisis continues to be one of the world's largest concentrations of human suffering.

The crisis began in 2003 when rebels in Darfur, a Western region of Sudan, rose up against the Government, claiming that they had been neglected by the capital of Sudan, Khartoum.

Since then the violence has escalated from all sides. There have been well-armed Arab militia causing atrocities, and today the situation has grown even more complex as the rebel groups have splintered into numerous factions, and inter-tribal violence has increased.

Darfur is a predominantly African area, while Khartoum and the rest of north Sudan is predominantly Arab; these distinctions were not an issue in the past but this has become the perception during the conflict.

The violence has led to many atrocities. Whole villages have been burned to the ground, possessions have been stolen, and many people have been sexually assaulted, tortured and killed.

More than 2 million people (more than one-in-three Darfurians) have been forced to flee their homes because of the violence, and are living in vast and crowded refugee camps both in Darfur and across the border in the neighbouring country of Chad.

Approximately 200,000 people and probably more have died. More than 4.5 million people are now affected by the conflict and depend on humanitarian assistance. The above figures are the highest ever in the history of the conflict.

Due to the crowded conditions of the camps for displaced people, the shortages of water and the soaring heat and rains, the risk of disease is enormous, and recently malnutrition is approaching emergency levels.

Many who leave the camps risk attack, and there have been countless reports of women being attacked and sexually assaulted as they venture out of the camps to collect firewood or fodder for their animals.

The camps have up to 130,000 people. There are also over 200,000 refugees from Darfur in neighbouring Chad. Most of them have been there for 4 years.

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### **1. An introduction to the conflict in Darfur (cont...)**

The humanitarian assistance being provided by organizations such as Oxfam has become increasingly more difficult to deliver in this climate of insecurity. Humanitarian staff in the last 6 months began to experience assaults, intimidation and harassment on a daily basis. This is alongside regular hijacking of humanitarian vehicles. All this has meant that many, particularly in much of the vast rural areas, have been unable to receive aid.

In an attempt to protect people and stop the violence, the African Union (AU) has 7,000 peacekeepers in Darfur, but with so few in an area the size of France, the violence continues.

After a long time with no agreement to have a joint UN-AU peacekeeping force in Darfur, an agreement was reached in July 2007 for a 26,000 strong UN-AU force in Darfur (UNAMID), then deployment of which should be completed in 2008.

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### **2. Life in Darfur: young peoples' stories**

In May 2007, Oxfam staff member Jane Beesley went to Darfur and spoke with children from refugee camps there. She spoke with many children in the camps and asked what life there was like. The information that follows is their experiences in their words.

Many of these children have lived in refugee camps for as long as three years. With no end to the conflict in sight, they could be living in these temporary camps for much longer yet.

#### **What are conditions in the camps like?**

'We're staying in straw shelters with plastic sheets. They're now destroyed and are in bad condition. Water is short. I feel that in the rainy season we will not be protected from the rain because of the condition of our shelter.

And the distance we have to go and collect firewood is too far. It takes us over 5 hours. We go in groups of 3 to 10 – boys and girls together...some adults go with us. Sometimes, when we are collecting firewood we face problems. Harassment from people we don't know.

Sometimes we have to pay to collect wood...if we go with a donkey cart. We don't know who they are. If we can't pay 500 SD (£1.25 or \$2.5) they won't let us collect wood. Sometimes we find people with guns who harass us – Arab people. When we see these men with guns we feel very scared (all the children agree). When we see them we try and run away. Sometimes they hurt us...when we return we tell our fathers.'

#### **Can you describe your day?**

##### **The boys**

'We get up at sunrise and we say our prayers. Then we go and get water for our families. After that we go to the border of the camp to collect grass and any pieces of firewood we can find. We take the grass to the market. We only get 300 SD for the grass. Sometimes it's less...and you can wait a very long time before you sell it. Then in the evening, around 4 to 5 o'clock we play football or play with our toys. When it gets dark we go into our shelters...we don't go out when it's dark because we're afraid. Then we go to sleep.'

Do you not eat? 'Yes! We eat twice a day. We have our breakfast around 10:00 and our dinner at 8:00.'

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### **The girls**

'When we get up during the dawn we pray. Then we go and collect water...then we'll prepare breakfast. The smaller girls will help their older sisters or their mother but the older ones will prepare breakfast by themselves. Sometimes we'll wash clothes. Then we'll go and collect grass...but that's not every day. Later we might have a rest before preparing dinner. Between 4 and 5 we'll play with our friends...skipping, basketball or with toys...they're home made toys. After dinner we just sit and chat with our families because we're too scared to go out when it's dark. Then we go to sleep.'

### **Do none of you go to school?**

'Yes! We all go to school! But the schools are closed at the moment. When school's open we go from 8 until 2.'

### **Do you like school?**

'Yes...because we like to learn and we want to get an education.'

### **What do you want to be when you grow up?**

'I would like to be a teacher" (girl)... "a doctor" (boy)... "an engineer" (girl)... "a captain"... "a pilot" (boy)... "a nurse" (girl)... "a teacher" (girl)... "a doctor" (boy)... "a doctor" (girl)... "a teacher" (boy)... "a driver" (boy)... "a doctor"... "a teacher" (boy)... "an engineer" (boy)

### **What do you think life is like in the UK?**

'Life there is very different because there is peace. Not like here, where there is a lot of conflict and fighting, and we are very scared. They're really wealthy and they have a high income, and have good living conditions there, unlike here.'

### **How do you feel about living where you do?**

Mahmoud, aged 14 says that 'I've been here 3 years with my mother and father, six brothers and three sisters. Life in the camp...it's not good. We're not happy with the life here. Life in my village was very good but it isn't very good here. I'd like to be living back in my village...like it used to be.'

### **Do you have a message for children in the UK?**

Mahmoud would like to say to boys his own age in the UK 'To be good children, to help keep things clean, to concentrate on your education and to work at sport, especially football.'

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### 3. Oxfam in Darfur

Since fighting broke out in 2003, over two million people have fled their homes. Many of these people now live in the crowded camps that Oxfam works in, or on the edges of towns in Darfur and neighbouring Chad.

Oxfam has been working in Darfur for over three years (since early in 2004). Oxfam's work currently reaches over half a million people in the region.

This work divides into four areas:

- Providing clean water and sanitation facilities – drilling wells, setting up water tanks, digging latrines, and building washing facilities.
- Distributing essential items such as blankets, utensils, and clean clothes.
- Training community volunteers to promote good health and hygiene.
- Working to reduce people's dependency on aid, through setting up training schemes and providing animals and farming tools.

Oxfam works closely with children in the camps to help raise the profile of hygiene issues. Oxfam staff in the camps make lessons about germs and other hazards great fun, and compose songs to help children remember important points about hygiene.

Across the camps songs are enthusiastically sung about preventing diarrhoea and malaria with the excitedly gathered children – “Our food should be washed, our water should be covered!” Other songs teach about clearing up rubbish, how to set up mosquito nets, and the safe use of latrines.

Children have become ambassadors for good health in the camps by passing on the information they have learnt. Children's health has also got much better since these lessons and songs were introduced.

To find out more you can visit Oxfam's photo story about Chad and Darfur  
[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam\\_in\\_action/emergencies/darfur\\_photostory.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/emergencies/darfur_photostory.html)

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### 4. What can we do?

It's easy to feel powerless when faced with complex situations such as the conflict in Darfur, especially when they're happening so far away. It is important to remember that we can all make a difference, no matter how complicated or distant a situation might seem.

On the main **Darfur: Teaching About the Issues** page we've collected some lesson ideas for taking these issues further with your students:

[www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/darfur](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/darfur)

Below you'll find weblinks to places where you can find out more. Possible activities include:

1. A research project about the conflict – you could help your students to find out more about this complex and sensitive subject by exploring some of the sources below.
2. Helping students to write a letter to their MP, get involved in an organisation, hold a debate, or send or raise money for humanitarian efforts.
3. Raising awareness of the conflict – by helping your students to talk about what's happening in Darfur, you'll be helping even more people to understand what is happening and what they can do.

### Further information

#### For teachers

Teachers for Darfur <http://teachersfordarfur.blogspot.com/>

A community for teachers committed to teaching about Darfur.

Facing History <http://facinghistory.org/campus/reslib.nsf>

Ideas for teaching about Darfur and other complex issues.

#### For pupils

Oxfam's work in Darfur

[http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam\\_in\\_action/emergencies/darfur\\_chad.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/emergencies/darfur_chad.html)

Generation Why, Oxfam's website for young people

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/generationwhy/blog/2007/04/smart-kids-speak-up-about-darfur.html>

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10592>

BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3496731.stm>

The UN <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=88&Body=Sudan&Body1>