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What Darfur Looks Like

By Nicholas D. Kristof

A few weeks ago, I mentioned the way Mia Farrow makes me look like a wimp when she travels to Darfur. I take a tent or at least a sleeping bag if I have to camp out; she takes a rope and makes a circle with it, and then sleeps in the center — on the theory that scorpions and camel spiders will reach the rope and then keep going around it. (The two scariest animals on this planet, I’ve concluded, are polar bears and camel spiders.)

Mia Farrow is just back from a stay on the Chad-Darfur border, and she has her regular updates on her blog. She traveled with a recent Harvard Law graduate, Bec Hamilton, who took lots of photos and set up a slideshow gallery that anybody can visit. The photos will give you a good idea of the refugee situation in Chad for Darfuris.

Bec also writes about an interesting education effort there that needs support:

There’s a great guy running education for UNHCR in Abeche - you might know him from previous trips, Marcel. Anyway, the major constraint on secondary education is a lack of teachers, so he’s trying to pilot a program of radio schooling - in that way just one teacher can reach students in camps all around the country (and access IDPs and refugees which would help in reducing the disparity between the two). He’s all set up to go with hand-crank radios made in South Africa. The more radios, the better the coverage. At present most of the radios in the camps are held by men so he’s also aiming to get some of these radios to communal places - like water points - where women gather and get broadcasts played that focus on issues for women in the camps.

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Chad, Darfur, mia farrow

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Previous post Your comments on my Bashir column
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6 Comments

1. 1. September 1, 2008 4:33 pm Link

I have read your important columns for weeks now and applaud your courageous work to keep neglected news stories in the public eye, whether it be this one on Darfur or your coverage of the squashing of protest efforts in China.

It might be worth your time to look at raids being conducted in the Twin Cities this week to shut down the activities of protest groups before they have violated any laws, one of them being a video group that
I have seen nothing in the Times about these raids but lots criticizing the Chinese.

How about protest at home?

— Jamie McKenzie

I think the idea of incorporating radios for education is such a wonderful outlet! I think it is a great way to make sure in helping keep the people involved with what is going on around them. I’m happy to hear these suggestions are coming to be a reality.

— Jessica Wanstreet

Why is being “more hardcore” necessarily better?

— pfandfrei

Hi Nick, this radio project reminds me of a lecture I saw a few years back by the head of the “Digital Study Hall” project in India: http://dsh.cs.washington.edu/

Are you familiar with it?

In their words, ” Digital StudyHall (DSH) is a research project that seeks to improve education for the poor children in slum and rural schools in India. In a nutshell, think of its technical approach as the educational equivalent of Netflix + YouTube + Kazaa. We digitally record live classes by the best grassroots teachers, transmit them on the “Postmanet” (effected by DVDs sent in the postal system), collect them in a large distributed database, and distribute them on DVDs to poor rural and slum schools. Education experts and teachers use the system to explore pedagogical approaches involving local teachers actively “mediating” the video lessons. By harvesting a “viral phenomenon” of community participation, DSH aims to help train teachers and deliver quality instruction to underprivileged children. The project is a collaboration between computer scientists and education experts. The main aspects of DSH are: * A “people’s database of everything” * A network of hubs and spokes * Mediation-based pedagogy * Technology for sharing community-generated video

A live deployment of DSH has been operating in India since the summer of 2005. As of summer of 2008, we run pilot “hubs” in Lucknow, Calcutta, Pune, and Dhaka, covering approximately 30 schools. And during this time, we have accumulated more than 1000 recordings of lessons in English, math, and science, in Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil, and English. We have also started applying the same approach to agriculture extension work (Digital Green) and awareness campaign for rural healthcare (Digital Polyclinic, operating in Lucknow and Ghana). Today, DSH is still a young research project, as we continue to work on rigorous evaluations and seek to understand many outstanding questions. We have, however, already seen initial promising signs, and we hope to eventually scale up the system to cover a far
It was a truly inspiring, awesome lecture! I would recommend you do a feature article on this incredible educational endeavor.

— Nick Herman

Hello Mr. Kristof,

My name is Kimberly Kroll and I am a sophomore at Nature Coast Technical High School in Brooksville, Florida. First off, I would like to say that your articles on Genocide in the Sudan are absolutely incredible. I just got done reading “Tortured, but Not Silence” and these rapes and beatings have got to stop. The Janjaweed and the Sudanese government are torturing innocent people and this is why I am e-mailing you today. I am in a class called Global Studies where we are focusing on creating a documentary about the Genocide and Displacement that is happening in Sudan. We are getting footage from Karin Muller in the next week are so, and we are going to start putting it together soon. We are hoping this will make a great impact on everyone who sees this documentary, and we need your help. We would very much like to interview you on your opinions and expertise with the Sudan, and genocide in general. We need to get the word out and interviewing you is one of the greatest first steps in doing so. My global studies class is a group of very devoted individuals, and a very committed teacher who wants to see this Genocide come to an end. We have committees in our class, which we named “B.R.A.V.O.” The committees are Business Management, who helps keep everyone organized in our group, and helps everyone stay on our mission statement; Research who tried to get more information about the conflict to share with other groups and also is looking through the transcripts of the footage that we have received; Audio will be the ones who records narration and writes scripts for our documentary, and will also be trying to get powerful, background music to play; visual works with trying to set up the entire documentary together, also creating posters, buttons, t-shirts, and many other things to try and give to the community, once we have the footage, they will be editing and compiling it together into one big movie; and last we have Outreach (what I am in) who tries to get the word out about the documentary to the community, tries to contact people for interviews, helps visual make posters, buttons, ect. and many other things. Our group is very devoted and we want to see this documentary make a change in one person’s life. We need your help to do it. We are trying to focus our documentary of the stories of the people of Sudan and the stories of the people who have experienced all of this going on. Please help us achieve our mission statement in getting the word out to the community. And please reply back with your answer as soon as possible. I will be telling my class that I have e-mailed you and I hope that you will be able to give me a great response back. Again, thanks so much.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Kroll

— Kimberly Kroll

Why are women forced to walk miles to collect firewood exposing themselves to potential harm at the hands of the militants when they could be supplied with solar stoves or the means to construct them? See http://www.sunspot.org.uk/Solar.htm

— Hugh Harrison
Comment

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OPINION

From Victim to Heroine
Nicholas D. Kristof in Pakistan
Comments of the Moment

“I started a very different kind of school system in Pakistan where we teach the students who are primarily young women to teach others what they are learning. ... They bring their lessons home to their husbands and families, and they are learning to sew and embroider pillow cases. ... There are over two thousand students in twenty schools now and growth has maintained at 30% a month. ... This growth will be far higher if I can get some help to sell the pillow cases they are sending over for Christmas sales. I made a very simple website at www.lwco.org and you can find out a little more if you watch the video there. It is called Little World Community Organization.”

— Greg Zaller

Your comments on Pakistan

“One of the most important solutions for Pakistan is the provision of justice to the common man. The reasons why some tribals are sympathetic to the Taliban are two fold: Taliban provide a system of quick, brutal justice and Taliban resonate the anti-American rhetoric which rises due to American airstrikes. It is pertinent to mention that the deposed Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry took notices against both the Taliban-style jirga courts and honor killing. ... His reinstatement will be an important step in restoring the trust of the Pakistanis in the judicial system. Without trust in the court and in their earnest for justice, the people may end up supporting traditional or Taliban courts which will further aggravate militancy and extremism in the region.”

— Saif

Your comments on Pakistan

“Pakistan is run for and by a select group of military, business and agricultural (feudal elite) ... The rulers, military or civil, don't feel any pressure to look after the common man or woman. A semblance of normalcy (lack of bombings, strikes or protests) in the major cities of Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad is considered "successful governance." ... Pakistanis, and the military in particular, see everything in the context of survival vs. India. They are convinced that 60 years after partition, India is still out to get them, and the price of freedom (from India) is not just eternal vigilance, but extremist proxies, illiteracy and military rule. As Benazir’s father famously said, “We will eat grass but not give up our nuclear program.” Understanding this perspective would have helped the Bush administration realize why despite $10 Billion in aid, Musharraf was capturing low level Talibans while protecting the Taliban leaders at the same time. The military (which runs foreign policy) thinks they need these people in reserve to wage an asymmetric war against India... The final
— Farrukh Rehan
Your comments on Pakistan

About Nicholas D. Kristof

Nicholas D. Kristof, an Op-Ed columnist for The Times since November 2001 and previously one of its associate managing editors, is the winner of two Pulitzer prizes. Mr. Kristof has lived on four continents, reported on six, and traveled to 140 countries, plus all 50 states, every Chinese province and every main Japanese island. He's also one of the very few Americans to be at least a two-time visitor to every member of the Axis of Evil. During his travels, he has had unpleasant experiences with malaria, wars, an Indonesian mob carrying heads on pikes, and an African airplane crash.

- Full Biography of Nicholas D. Kristof
- Archive of Columns by Nicholas D. Kristof

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My Thursday column is about one of my heroes, Mukhtar Mai, and the work she does in the southern Punjab region of Pakistan. It’s been more than four years since my first column about Mukhtar, and since then I’ve repeatedly visited her little village of Meerwala. What she has accomplished — with the support of [...]

November 25
(20 comments)
Victor Harbison teaches civics and history at Gage Park High School in Chicago, where he also sponsors the school newspaper. In 2000, he became the first National Board-certified high school history teacher in Chicago and he has worked on several educational reform projects during his career. Gage Park faces the all-too-common challenges of an urban [...]
36 hours in Seattle

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