

NEWS RELEASE

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Mock Negotiations at USM Teach High School Students about Sudan's Darfur Conflict

(Leavenworth, Kan.)— One hundred nine students from eight area high schools discovered that negotiating peace in Darfur is more complicated than they first thought. They participated in mock negotiations to bring peace to the Darfur region of Sudan. The negotiations were the focus of the Second Annual High School Human Rights Conference at the University of Saint Mary on Tuesday, April 22.

The eight participating high schools were Atchison, Bishop LeBlonde (St. Joseph, Mo.), Cristo Rey (KC, Mo.), Immaculata (Leavenworth), Lansing, Leavenworth, Pleasant Ridge (Leavenworth), and St. Pius X (KC, Mo.).

The USM Lawrence D. Starr Global Studies Institute sponsored the conference. USM students from the Advanced International Peace Building course (taught by Natalya Reigg, professor of political science and global studies) briefed the high school students and facilitated the conflict resolution exercises.

After a morning briefing, one or two students from each school dispersed into eight rooms. Students from each high school advocated for an interested party in negotiations regarding the Darfur conflict, which traces its origins back to 1650 in Sudan, a West African country.

Atchison students advocated for the United Nations. Bishop LeBlonde advocated for the Sudan military. Cristo Rey advocated for the Sudan government. Immaculata advocated for the northern nomadic Arabs. Lansing advocated for the janjaweed militia. Leavenworth advocated for internally displaced people. Pleasant Ridge advocated for black Muslims. And St. Pius advocated for the Darfur rebels.

Each of the eight rooms negotiated a framework for a ceasefire, utilizing the United Nations to supervise the process for periods ranging from three months to five years.

“We’re probably much more trusting [than the interested parties],” said Matthew Karalek of Bishop LeBlonde. “They have a long history of not trusting each other.”

Students walked away with a broader understanding of the conflict. “Before this, I knew people were being killed,” said Vanessa Sanders of St. Pius. “I had no idea there were at least eight groups fighting with each other.”

The Lawrence D. Starr Global Studies Institute is a professional, academic organization at USM dedicated to the examination of global integration and to the promotion of attitudes, policies, and practices that foster peace, justice, generosity, and the equitable enrichment of life for all members of the global community.

(MORE)

[Sidebar]

Four Sudanese-American Students Participate in Negotiations

The mock negotiations hit close to home for four students from Cristo Rey High School. All four were children of Sudanese immigrants. Madelena Nak, Yom Riak, Max Telar and Peace Telar. Max and Peace are brother and sister. Madelena and Yom are distant cousins.

“Our parents chose Kansas City to live because they said it was a safe place to raise their children,” said Max.

“Our father is working for the UN,” said Peace. “They are supplying aid to the people of Sudan and trying to negotiate peace.”

The four students found themselves representing the government, an entity that their parents often criticize.

“As we wrapped up negotiations, another student asked, ‘What did we really accomplish?’” said Max. “We made 109 high school students aware of what is going on.”

“Now, we can all contact our representatives in congress and ask them to do more to help,” said Peace.

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