

WITNESS

Darfur refugee shares horrors of Sudan at ISU Human Rights Day

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TERRE HAUTE — El-Fadel Arbab escaped the horrors of genocide in Darfur, Sudan, yet the atrocities continue, he told an audience during Human Rights Day at Indiana State University.

The 27-year-old, who now dedicates his life to human rights, urged the many students who attended to get involved and make others aware of the systematic murder, rape and torture of Darfuris.

Darfur, an area about the size of Texas, lies in western Sudan, a country in Africa.

Since 2003, more than 400,000 people have died in Darfur and more than 2.7 million people have been displaced, according to Fur Cultural Revival, a nonprofit group based in Portland, Maine, that is committed to broadening the public's awareness of genocide in Darfur.

"This is about humanity. This is about human rights. It doesn't matter what country we are from ... we are all human. We are all the same, at the end of the day," Arbab said in an interview after his talk.

His appearance was co-sponsored by the ISU Human Rights Day committee, CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Terre Haute South Vigo STAND. He will speak at four schools this week: Terre Haute South Vigo, Honey Creek Middle School, Chauncey Rose Middle School and West Vigo Middle School.

Arbab showed pictures of burned villages, starving children and injured Darfuris. The plea of World War II Holocaust survivors was, "Never Again," yet, he said, genocide is happening again in Darfur, carried out by the Sudanese government and its support of local tribal and other militias, known as the Janjaweed.

Arbab was only 12 when Sudanese military forces and the Janjaweed militia attacked his village. He suffered multiple burns, and his family home was burned. His family scattered after the attack, and he was forced to survive on his own for nearly four years before being reunited with his mother and some of his siblings.

He described attackers killing Darfuri children with machetes and cutting unborn babies from mothers' wombs. Some children were thrown in wells. Brutal rapes of women and young girls were rampant.

"All these people who have been killed, they are innocent people. They are not rebels, they are not military," Arbab said.

When his village was attacked, the 12-year-old escaped and ran to the woods, staying hidden in a cloud of smoke. By day, he would hide in trees, and at night he would run. He made his way to a town and eventually the Sudanese capital, where he would scour garbage bins for food and sleep under cardboard boxes at night.

After finding his mother and brothers, he lived in Egypt for several years before obtaining a visa and relocating to Portland, Maine, where he now lives with about 24 family members. Other family members “have disappeared. We don’t know where they are,” he said. He has been in the United States for seven years and is now a U.S. citizen.

<http://tribstar.com/news/x333448632/Darfur-refugee-shares-horrors-of-Sudan-at-ISU-Human-Rights-Day>