

## Team Darfur Blog Entry – The Power of One

If you've never read the autobiography of Paul Rusesabagina *An Ordinary Man* then you are missing out on the story of a true hero in the midst of what is possibly the most atrocious crime that has been committed too many times in the twentieth century and is still occurring in this century. That crime is known as genocide. There really is no need for me to put that word in all caps but it represents how I frustrated I feel when I think of how big we, as a civilization, have allowed it to become. Paul Rusesabagina was the hotel manager that saved 1268 lives during the 1994 genocide that took place in Rwanda. His story is so inspiring because he went on to save these people by doing the ordinary tasks of his job as a hotel manager with extraordinary courage. His story is a perfect example of the type of heart and mind that can change lives and the world.

The most fascinating part of his narrative for me is near the end of his autobiography when he talks about the power of words. On page 187 he says, “[w]ords can be instruments of evil, but they can also be powerful tools of life. If you say the right [words] they can save the whole world.” It’s an amazing thing to think that words are so powerful that they can save 1268 people in the midst of mass murder. In many respects I do believe that it’s a miracle those people that Rusesabagina saved weren’t killed, but I’m encouraged because his example is proof that speaking up and saying something really can make a difference. Words encourage action. Sometimes that action is positive; and sometimes it’s negative. The right words are never known until something is first said. So, if we, as highly influential people, stand around and continue to play sports while people are being killed everyday we are honestly doing nothing but aiding the killer. I know it’s a harsh thing to say, but another quote comes to mind after reflecting upon Rusesabagina’s words. It’s a quote by Professor Elie Wiesel and it’s found in the book *Not on Our Watch* by Don Cheadle and John Prendergast. It qualifies my ‘harsh’ statement above:

“Remember: silence helps the killer, never his victims.”

To say the wrong thing might be harmful in just about any situation, but to say nothing at all might be more detrimental and more telling. There are things that we just know are indecent and intolerable in this world. Unfortunately, more often than not, we find ourselves doing nothing because whatever it is doesn’t seemingly have a direct impact on our own life. Well, the reason why I’m taking time to write this blog and why I’ve joined Team Darfur has a lot to do with my empathy because I imagine how I’d feel if I were in that situation and was helpless to stop what was happening to me and my fellow neighbors. I would hope that people on the outside looking in, people who could help stop and even prevent what was happening, would take action and try to save my life and others just like me. I might not be in that situation now and if I’m lucky, I never will. But if I were that’s how I would feel and I imagine that that’s how the victims in Darfur feel. Truthfully, if we stand by and allow this genocide to go on someday the lives we currently live may very well be affected in more ways that we can currently imagine.

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Like John Mayer repeats throughout his new single *Say* it's time to "say what [we] need to say" as one voice: "Never Again" "Not on our Watch" and "Enough". I hope that all athletes form a united front to shed light on something greater than ourselves . . . the value of a human life. The sports we play are meant to bring joy, peace and hope to people all over the world. It's not the sport that brings this joy, it's the players. People believe in us; and they cheer and cry with us and for us. When we play they play along side of us in their hearts and minds. In many ways we represent them. Isn't only fair that we use the notoriety with receive, no matter how little or great it may be, to help those who lift us up with every game we play?

Personally, I can no longer live my life as a runner knowing that there are children running because they are running from danger. I can no longer happily shoot a basketball at a basket for fun knowing that a mother is being shot at because she has a different faith than the man who is shooting her. I can no longer toss a football knowing that there are grenades being tossed at small villages in remote parts of the world where innocent people are unarmed and unintentionally involved in war. How can I live my life when there are others who are not being given a fair chance or a choice?

The greatest play that we can make as athletes and members of the greatest team to ever exist, human society, is the one that brings an end to the genocide occurring in Darfur, Sudan and prevents another from ever happening. I'm making that play right now, will you please join me?