

## Activists praising Vermont for divesting in Sudan companies

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*By Ross Sneyd Associated Press*

MONTPELIER — Activists are praising Vermont officials for deciding to divest the state's holdings in companies deemed supportive of genocide in the Darfur region of southern Sudan.

State Treasurer Jeb Spaulding plans a news conference today with state legislators and people involved in the campaign to end the Sudanese killings. He plans to discuss the decision to sell off stocks in businesses involved with Sudan.

One of the activists who plans to be on hand is Brian Banks, of Essex, a freshman at American University in Washington who helped focus attention to the plight of the Sudanese people in Darfur last year as a high school senior.

Banks was the leader of a rally last summer that drew 1,000 people to City Hall Park in Burlington.

"Being a Jew, the word holocaust rings really deep for me," Banks said Monday in a telephone interview, as he prepared to return to Vermont. "I find it impossible to sit back when every day, 500 people die while my friends are playing video games."

Vermont's approach is one being urged by organizations such as the Sudan Divestment Task Force. Although it's the seventh state to divest of Sudan-affiliated stocks, Vermont is only the second state besides California to target its divestment.

Middlebury College and the University of Vermont are among universities nationwide who also have begun to divest their Sudan holdings.

There are about 500 multinational companies that operate in Sudan. But the Sudan Divestment Task Force has identified just 25 or so whose businesses support directly or indirectly the killings that has beset the Darfur region.

"There's a pretty direct link between these multinational companies and Darfur," said Scott Warren, a spokesman for the task force.

Companies whose business interests don't contribute to the genocide are considered safe investments, Warren said. "Coca-Cola is there," Warren said. "We don't want to divest from Coca-Cola because we don't think they're contributing to the genocide."

Internal strife has led to horrific conditions for thousands of people in Darfur. President Bush has labeled the situation, in which government troops and Arab tribal militia have been fighting ethnic African rebels from the Darfur region, as genocide. Other countries and organizations, including the United Nations, have not.

Banks said he was well aware that Vermont's divestment will not stop the genocide in Darfur. But he said it was symbolic for a small state to take such a step.

"They make the people of Vermont not helpless," he said. "We've made a difference. it sends a message to other states."