

# The Beat Of Sudan Relief

## Wesleyan Students Compile Benefit CD

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The title says it all: "Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project."

It's a benefit album, compiled by three students at Wesleyan University and features some of the biggest names in Afrobeat, a musical mix of funk, jazz and reggae, with highly political lyrics.

Proceeds from sales of the record, available Tuesday on iTunes, will help fund relief efforts in the Darfur region of Sudan, where ethnic fighting between government-sponsored Arab militias and black rebel forces has killed 50,000 and left as many as 1.8 million people homeless.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell has described the situation there as a campaign of genocide on the part of the Sudanese military and the militias.

Although Darfur is half a world removed from the Wesleyan's leafy Middletown campus, three students with an interest in African music, politics and culture say what's going on there is a humanitarian crisis that demands attention.

"The sense of urgency could not be greater, really," says **Eric Herman**, 21, a senior. Herman coordinated the "Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project" for Modiba Productions, a company he co-founded with fellow students **Jesse Brenner**, 23, and **Dave Ahl**, 21, to help develop a self-sustaining, African-run music and film production industry in Africa.

Their interest in African musical forms predates the crisis in Darfur. Herman, a music major, has studied in Ghana and the Republic of Mali, and Brenner spent time in Botswana. The pair worked with New York University student **Joe M.F. Wilson** last summer on a documentary for Afropop Worldwide, showcasing the growing African music scenes in New York and Montreal. That project prompted the idea of a benefit album.

"Afrobeat is such an inherently political music and indigenously African music, there is no more suitable genre of music to put toward a cause like this," Herman says.

Created in the early '60s by Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Afrobeat draws on the influence of James Brown, jazz and the driving rhythms of African music. Kuti's lyrics were often political screeds that landed him in jail more than once. He died in 1997, but appears on this album in "Progress," a song recorded by his musical successor, Tony Allen, before Kuti died.

Herman says other artists, including the Antibalas Afrobeat Orchestra and Kokolo, were happy to contribute their songs, for no fee. Compiling and engineering the album, and commissioning artwork from Wesleyan senior **Adam Tuck**, 21, cost Modiba about \$10,000. Money was provided by TrueMajority, a nonprofit organization founded by **Ben Cohen**, better known for his eponymous role in Ben & Jerry's ice cream. Cohen knows a friend of the Modiba crew, and took a chance based on the friend's recommendation.

"If it didn't work, we would have lost some money," Cohen says. "But if it did work, there was a chance of raising a significant amount of money and consciousness about the issue."

Herman says he hopes the album brings in at least \$100,000, all of which will benefit relief efforts sponsored by Kebkabiya Small Holders Charitable Society in Sudan, in association with Oxfam.

"Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project" will be available at first on iTunes - the first benefit album the Apple-owned digital music service has featured. Physical copies will be available in early December at [www.truemajority.org](http://www.truemajority.org).

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