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University Wire

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HEADLINE: Voting against violence

BYLINE: By Sophia Brumby, Cavalier Daily; SOURCE: U. Virginia

DATELINE: CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va.

BODY:

Student at the University of Virginia have the opportunity to make a concrete impact on the government of Sudan's ability to commit genocide. Last week, Students Taking Action Now: Darfur, Hillel Public Policy Institute, the International Relations Organization and the University Democrats co-sponsored a meeting to discuss the current situation in Sudan. STAND gave a presentation on the gravity of the escalating violence in the region, which was followed by a talk by History Prof. John Mason and Sociology Prof. Justin Holcomb about the world reaction to genocide. As was hashed out several times during the evening, students feel powerless in the face of such depravity. While raising awareness of the conflict is important, few students feel as though they can make a real impact to end genocide.

However, the students of STAND have put forth an opportunity for students at the University to impact the situation. A referendum, which will appear on the fall ballot proposes that the University divest from all multinational corporations which do business with the government of Sudan. By approving this referendum, students could persuade the University to join the nationwide divestment effort, placing pressure on the government of Sudan which relies heavily on foreign revenue to purchase weapons that it uses to carry out genocide.

Divestment boycotts the Sudanese government, cutting off foreign revenue which it uses to buy "high-end military weapons," according to the Genocide Action Fund. Paul Novick, co-chair of divestment for STAND, explained in an e-mail that "corporations are giving this murderous regime direct cash." Novick acknowledged that he is still researching which corporations the University invests in, to find out whether any do business with the Sudanese government. University spokesperson Carol Wood could not provide a definitive answer by press time. If it is discovered that the University does invest in "revenue enhancement" corporations, by divesting, the University would be severing foreign revenue used by the Sudanese government and ensuring that our endowment is not being used to fund genocide in Darfur.

Other universities, and even states, are following suit. According to the Statesman-Journal from Salem, Oregon unanimously passed legislation in July directing the state treasurer to "remove all investments with the state of Sudan and in companies that do business with that government." New Jersey and Illinois have enacted similar measures. According to Novick, several universities, such as Harvard and Stanford, have already divested. Other Virginia schools, such as William and Mary and Mary Washington, are launching similar campaigns.
Jessie Miller, co-president of STAND, in an e-mail expressed her belief that "our government has declared genocide in Darfur and all sources report that it is the government of Sudan perpetrating these crimes against humanity... by approving this referendum, students at the University can affirm their fundamental belief in human rights and justice."

In just the last two weeks, there has been a dramatic resurgence of violence in the region. According to the Washington Post, in the last week alone, the government, working with state-sponsored militias, has attacked at least four villages, two refugee camps and a town of over 33,000 people.

The African Union, impotently working without tangible support from the world community as a cease-fire monitor in the disastrous region, is still calculating the estimated number of casualties within the last week. According to SaveDarfur.org, the U.N. estimates about 10,000 to 15,000 deaths each month. On Sunday, the Washington Post reported that Sudanese government military forces have painted their vehicles white, to resemble the peace-monitoring vehicles of the AU, allowing them to travel from town to town -- pillaging, murdering and raping virtually undetected.

As the violence continues, there are a number of ways students can get involved, beyond supporting the referendum, in the local and national efforts to pressure the Sudanese government. Miller points out that although "fundraising is clearly the most direct method of helping those who are suffering," aid workers have been unable to deliver some humanitarian relief due to the increased violence and government obstruction. For this reason, political action is also key. According to Miller, students are organizing to aid in unifying disparate Darfur awareness and action organizations. Consolidating the call for intervention sends a powerful message to the U.S. government that standing by and watching genocide will not be tolerated. At the individual level, calling the White House is the easiest way to take direct political action.

To start the call for an end to the violence, students should vote to approve the referendum, affirming their fundamental belief in human rights and joining the nationwide effort to strip power from the Sudanese government to carry out genocide against its own people.

Sophia Brumby's column usually appears Thursdays in The Cavalier Daily. She is a member of the University Democrats. She can be reached at sbrumby@cavalierdaily.com.

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HEADLINE: New Approaches Address Getting Alienated Young Men Back to School or Jobs

BODY:
WASHINGTON, Jan. 12 [AScribe Newswire] -- Because the United States "can ill afford to have so many of its young people and adults be unskilled, unemployed, and thus unproductive," a new book from the Urban Institute Press tackles the thorny challenge of getting "disconnected" young men back in school or the workforce.

Peter Edelman, Harry J. Holzer, and the late Paul Offner present an array of policies to improve the educational and employment prospects of 2-3 million youth ages 16-24 who have been out of school and the labor market for over a year. The authors concentrate on young men, especially African Americans and Hispanics, because young women have made more progress in recent years and their prospects have been spotlighted in discussions of welfare reform and other social changes. Young men make up about half of the nation's disconnected population.

"By proposing bold interventions for fellow citizens who aren't the least bit popular with politicians, the authors have embarked on an arduous journey of policymaking and moral suasion," notes Hugh Price, past president of the National Urban League, in the foreword to "Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men."

Suggested Policies Driven by Youth Characteristics, Economic Trends

The authors' action agenda flows from detailed analysis of the racial, ethnic, educational, and employment characteristics of disconnected young men. Troubling findings include:

- Only half of African-American men ages 16-24 who are not in school are working.

- Roughly one-third of young African-American men are in jail or prison, or on parole or probation, at any time.

- Ten percent of young African-American men and 9 percent of young Hispanic men are disconnected from school and work for a year or more. Including incarcerated populations, the rates rise to 17 and 12 percent, respectively.

The authors' research identifies three key policy areas: education and training, financial incentives to work, and barriers facing noncustodial fathers and former prisoners.

Expand Education and Training

Edelman, Holzer, and Offner found that employment rates of young African-American and Hispanic men lag behind those of white men for many reasons, including poor schooling, discrimination, weak employment networks, negative peer culture, and a mismatch between where these young people live and where the jobs are.
The authors suggest that initiatives to improve educational attainment should be accompanied by efforts boosting occupational skills, early work experience, and labor market contacts among high school students who are unlikely to attend college. Specifically:

- Proven programs, such as the Job Corps, Youth Service Corps, and Career Academies, deserve increased funding.

- The federal government should continue to encourage the development of community-wide education and training systems.

- The U.S. Department of Labor should create a new program to support employer-provided apprenticeships and internships.

- The U.S. Departments of Labor and Education should commission rigorous evaluations of charter schools, alternative schooling, and programs blending high school and community college.

Improve Financial Incentives to Work

The authors note the decrease in labor force activity among less-educated young men since the 1970s, partly because of declining wages. In contrast, large increases in the earned income tax credit [EITC] for low-income custodial parents in the 1980s and 1990s improved labor force participation among single mothers.

Their recommendation: raise the earnings of low-income men gradually, so as not to discourage employers from hiring less-skilled youth. Specifically:

- The federal minimum wage should be pegged to about 45 percent of the mean wage for production workers, which would raise the minimum wage to about $7.00 per hour.

- States should raise their own minimum wages if the federal minimum wage is not increased, especially as labor markets tighten.

Publicly financed subsidies or tax credits can also raise the earnings of less-skilled workers. The authors recommend several options, including:

- A broad-based subsidy for low-wage workers that pays a portion of the difference between a target wage and all wages below that level;

- A major increase in the EITC for childless adults; or

- An extension of the EITC targeted to low-income noncustodial parents who are paying all or most of their child-support obligations.

Reduce Barriers Facing Noncustodial Fathers and Ex-Offenders

By age 34, up to one-half of African-American men are fathers without custody of their children, and an estimated 30 percent have been to prison. Strong evidence suggests that both of these factors discourage labor force participation. The authors propose a variety of remedies addressing the situations of young noncustodial fathers and ex-offenders:

- Reconsider how child support orders and levels are established for low-income fathers.

- Promote options to forgive outstanding child-support debts for low-income fathers who are making good-faith efforts to meet their current orders.

- Encourage more states to pass income collected from noncustodial parents directly to their low-income families.

- Increase employment assistance for low-income fathers.
- Expand education, training, and work experience while young men are incarcerated.

- Provide more funds to help former prisoners return successfully to society.

- Set an aggressive evaluation agenda of school, employment, and other programs for young offenders.

- Develop links between the criminal justice system and other institutions and establish clear incentives for these groups to monitor ex-offenders' progress.

"Beyond the grim demographic statistics, there is now a large and growing body of knowledge and expertise about what works to combat this blight on America's soul," says Samuel Halperin, founder and senior fellow, American Youth Policy Forum. "In this magisterial guidebook for policymakers, the authors have distilled their wisdom into practical suggestions for public policy."

Peter Edelman is a professor of law and former associate dean at the Georgetown University Law Center. Harry J. Holzer is a professor and associate dean of public policy at Georgetown University and a visiting fellow at the Urban Institute. Paul Offner was a senior research associate at the Urban Institute and a former Wisconsin State legislator.


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ABOUT: The Urban Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy research and educational organization that examines the social, economic, and governance challenges facing the nation

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HEADLINE: Marijuana may spur new brain cells

BYLINE: STEVE MITCHELL

DATELINE: WASHINGTON, Oct. 13

BODY:

Scientists said Thursday that marijuana appears to promote the development of new brain cells in rats and have anti-anxiety and anti-depressant effects, a finding that could have an impact on the national debate over medical uses of the drug.

Other illegal and legal drugs, including opiates, alcohol, nicotine and cocaine, have been shown to suppress the formation of new brain cells when used chronically, but marijuana's effect on that process was uncertain.

Now, a team led by Xia Zhang of the department of psychiatry at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon may have found evidence the drug spurs new brain cells to form in a region of the brain called the hippocampus, and this in turn reduces anxiety and depression.

Marijuana appears "to be the only illicit drug whose capacity to produce increased ... neurons is positively correlated with its (anti-anxiety) and anti-depressant-like effects," Zhang and colleagues wrote in the November issue of the Journal of Clinical Investigation. The paper was posted online Thursday.

In the study, rats were given injections of HU210 -- a synthesized version of a cannabinoid chemical found in marijuana -- twice per day for 10 days.

Zhang told United Press International this would be "a high dose" of smoked marijuana, but he added he is not certain how many equivalent joints it would take or whether patients now using the drug typically would be getting this much HU210.

Although HU210 was injected, Zhang said there would be no difference if it was obtained by smoking marijuana.

The rats showed evidence of new neurons in the hippocampus dentate gyrus, a region of the brain that plays a role in developing memories.

Zhang's team suspected the new brain cells also might be associated with a reduction in anxiety and depression, because previous studies had indicated medications used to treat anxiety and depression achieve their effect this way.

To find out, they treated rats with HU210 for 10 days and then tested them one month later. When placed in a new environment, the rats were quicker to eat their food than rats that did not receive the compound, which suggested there was a reduction in anxiety behaviors.

Another group of rats treated with HU210 showed a reduction in the duration of immobility in a forced swimming test, which is an indication the compound had an anti-depressant effect.

Asked how he thought the findings might impact the debate over using marijuana to treat medical conditions, Zhang said, "Our results indicate cannabinoids could be used for the treatment of anxiety and depression."

He added that his view is "marijuana should be used as alcohol or nicotine," noting "it has been used for treating various diseases for years in other countries."

Last June the U.S. Supreme Court voted 6-3 that the federal ban on marijuana supersedes the laws of certain states that allow the substance to be used for medicinal purposes, such as the treatment of pain, nausea in cancer patients and glaucoma. Eleven states have passed laws legalizing marijuana use by patients with a doctor's approval, including California, Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington.

The Bush administration, through the Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement Agency, began conducting raids in California in 2001 on patients using marijuana. Two of those arrested by the DEA -- Angel Raich, who suffers from brain cancer, and Diane Monson, who used the drug to help alleviate chronic back pain -- sued Attorney General John Ashcroft, requesting a court order to be allowed to grow and smoke marijuana, which led to the Supreme Court decision.

Paul Armentano, senior policy analyst with the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, told UPI he thought the findings "would have a positive impact on moving forward this debate, because it is giving ... a scientific explanation that further supports long-observed anecdotal evidence, and further lends itself to the notion that marijuana, unlike so many other prescription drugs and controlled substances, appears to have incredibly low toxicity and as a result lacks potential harm to the brain that many of these drugs have."

The DEA Web site, however, contends that "marijuana is a dangerous, addictive drug that poses significant health threats to users," including cancer and impaired mental functioning.

Armentano said this is a distortion of what scientific studies actually show. Studies in animals indicate marijuana actually may protect against many forms of cancer, rather than cause the disease, he said. In addition, studies in marijuana smokers have found little evidence of cognitive deficits, and even when they do, the effects disappear if the person stops smoking for 30 days.

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