

## Spielberg Torches Olympics Role



Steven Spielberg

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Here's one A-list directing gig Steven Spielberg has decided to pass on.

The Oscar-winning filmmaker has opted out of serving as artistic adviser for the opening and closing ceremonies at the 2008 Summer Olympics, saying he can't devote his attention to the celebration in Beijing while there is still so much suffering in Darfur.

He made the decision Tuesday after Rosemary's Baby star Mia Farrow and other human rights activists chastised him for continuing to work with the Chinese government.

The United Nations has criticized China, which is one of Sudan's biggest oil customers, for its continued support of the south African nation, which has allowed Muslim militias to wage a bloody civil war with the region's ethnic tribes that has killed at least 200,000 people and displaced millions.

And Spielberg suspected a while back that these issues could very well create a conflict. He penned a letter to China's president, Hu Jintao, in April, encouraging the leader to use his country's upcoming global spotlight to press for change in Sudan.

"In anticipation that this day might one day come, I left unsigned the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games contract presented to me nearly a year ago," the Schindler's List auteur said in a statement.

"Since that time, I have made repeated efforts to encourage the Chinese government to use its unique influence to bring safety and stability to the Darfur region of Sudan. Although some progress has been made along the way, most notably, the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1769, the situation in Darfur continues to worsen and the violence continues to accelerate.

"Sudan's government bears the bulk of the responsibility for these ongoing crimes but the international community, and particularly China, should be doing more," Spielberg continued.

"China has much to offer the world and I have no doubt that its international contributions will grow in the years ahead. With growing influence, however, also comes growing responsibilities. As China welcomes the world to Beijing for the 2008 Olympic Games, I hope to be among those in attendance; and it is also my great hope that, with renewed and intensified efforts from China, there will be peace and security in Darfur at last."

Earlier Tuesday as part of a "Global Day of Action" focusing on Darfur, Farrow, a longtime human rights activist, and former Olympic swimmers Shannon Shakespeare and Nikki Dryden presented an open letter to Jintao at the Chinese Mission to the UN.

"We are all aware of the tremendous potential for China to help bring an end to the conflict in Darfur," the letter read, which was signed by a variety of celebrities, former Olympic athletes and Nobel laureates.

"How can Beijing host the Olympic Games at home and underwrite genocide?" Farrow, a UN goodwill ambassador long before Angelina Jolie made it cool, told reporters outside the Chinese Mission in New York.

"Time is running out for the people of Darfur."

After hearing of Spielberg's decision, Farrow issued a statement praising the director's "extraordinary act of conscience."

"Let us hope that Mr. Spielberg's decisive action will influence other participants, sponsors, and supporters of the Olympic Games to drop out," the actress said. "This is the time to increase pressure on Beijing, the host country to the Olympics, and tragically, the underwriter of the Darfur genocide."

According to the activist group Dream for Darfur, China has deployed noncombat troops to the region to help pave the way for a proposed 26,000-member UN-African Union peacekeeping force.

The 2008 Summer Olympic Games will take place Aug. 8-24 in Beijing.

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