



In District Advocacy

August 2014

Congressional Meeting Action Plan

A Collaborative Campaign of



**Carl Wilkens
FELLOWSHIP**



enough

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity



stand



**TEN YEARS.
ONE LIFE AT A TIME.
FIGHT GENOCIDE. DO NOT STAND IDLY BY.**

**UNITED TO END
GENOCIDE**

Team

District:

Representative:

Possible Team Members:

Team Member Name	Email Address	Phone Number	Preferred Contact Method

Step One: Setting up your Meeting

- 1. Decide with whom to have your meeting:** Find your Member of Congress and locate the nearest office to you. You can use <http://www.house.gov/> and <http://www.senate.gov> to find out who your Senators and Representatives are.
- 2. Decide when to have your meeting:** For the purposes of the Decisive Action Sudan campaign, the goal is to have meetings held during the week of World Humanitarian Day, which falls on August 19, 2014. Congress is on recess throughout the month of August, so you are likely to find him, her, or staff members in the home district. You'll have the best luck in scheduling a meeting if you can be flexible about your dates. **If you are part of a team, decide as soon as possible: when would we like to try to meet with our Member?** Other team members might join after the meeting is already set and that works too.
 - A. On a specific day?
 - B. At a specific time?
 - C. Other?
- 3. Send a Meeting Request:** The next essential step is to formally request a meeting. You'll want to send a meeting request, addressed to the Scheduler in your Member's office.

If you need help setting up a meeting, Andrea Cohen, Decisive Action Campaign Coordinator, can help do this. Contact her at andrea@iactivism.org.

If part of a team, decide who is responsible for the following tasks:

Task	Responsible	Due Date
Call your Member's office and ask for the name, email address and fax number of the Scheduler.		
Draft and send (by fax AND email) the meeting request to the Scheduler		
Follow up with the Scheduler to secure a date		

Meeting requests typically include the following information:

- Preferred time, date, and location of the meeting
- Your name and contact information
- Name(s) (and addresses, if possible) of meeting attendees
- The issue you'd like to discuss

Below is a sample meeting request:

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]
 Attn: Scheduler <USE NAME WHENEVER POSSIBLE>
 U.S. House of Representatives [or U.S Senate]
 District Office Street Address
 District Office City, State Zip
 VIA FACSIMILE: [fax number]

[DATE]

Dear Representative (or Senator) [Last Name]:

I am writing to request a meeting with you in your [name of city where district office is located] office during the [season] recess, which ends on [date]. I, along with other constituents, would like to discuss upcoming legislation and opportunities aimed at ending the conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan. I am participating in Decisive Action Sudan, a nationwide advocacy campaign to engage Congress on these issues around World Humanitarian Day.

Right now, we have an opportunity to make significant strides towards achieving our goals of peace and protection for the people of Sudan and South Sudan. We look forward to working with you on this issue. I will contact you shortly regarding the possibility of scheduling this meeting. In the meantime, you can contact me at [insert phone number] or [insert email] if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

Tip! Schedulers require a LOT of follow-up. Make sure to call, then call again, and call again.

Tip! Congressional staffers have a ton of protections on their emails, which means lots of emails wind up in their spam folders. Make sure you follow any email requests with a fax request as well – and don't be afraid to call and confirm its receipt.

Step Two: Preparing for your Meeting

1. **Tell us!** Once you have a date solidified for your meeting, let us know! Fill out our [Decisive Action Sudan in-district meeting form](#), so we can keep track of your meetings. Andrea Cohen, Decisive Action Campaign Coordinator is available by email at andrea@iactivism.org. We can support you leading up to and following your meeting, just in case there are questions you're not sure how to answer. If you want to get in touch with us directly, email Andrea at andrea@iactivism.org.
2. **Join our Policy Calls:** We'll be holding policy calls on Monday, August 11th at 6pm PT/9pm ET and Wednesday, August 13th at 9am PT/12pm ET for you to learn about the issues, ask our experts questions, and prepare for your meetings. Additionally, if you have more in-depth questions about the asks, please contact Andrea at andrea@iactivism.org. Not all your team members have to join the call, but it will be helpful for at least your team leader who will be responsible for policy asks to attend.
3. **Missing anyone?** Take a moment now to think about anyone else in your community that could be brought into the meeting to make it more strategic (survivor, student, community or faith leaders). You should aim for 3-6 participants total in your meeting.

People to contact:

Name	Person Responsible	Due Date

4. **Develop an agenda:** We'll provide a draft agenda at www.DecisiveActionSudan.org but be sure to discuss how you want your meeting to go with your team ahead of time.
5. **Do Your Homework:** Do a little reading up on your Member of Congress. Check to see if he or she has taken any other action on Sudan or South Sudan recently. We can help you work any thank yous into the first part of your agenda. And remember that you can always call us for help on what to look for. Understand that Members of Congress and their staff members get meeting requests and meet with constituents all the time – it's their job. So there's no need to be intimidated. This isn't new for them!
6. **Assign Tasks to Participants:** Each participant in your meeting will be assigned a specific agenda item to discuss so that the meeting flows easily. You may also consider assigning some of the following roles to your team members:

- a. **Facilitator** – This is the person that will open the meeting, keep it on time, and might close the meeting with the follow up plan.
 - b. **Note Taker** - Someone should take notes and listen to responses so follow up questions can be tailored appropriately.
 - c. **Follow Up** - While it may not be a big focus of the meeting, someone should be designated as the “point of contact” or follow up person after the meeting.
7. **Prepare Materials:** Use our “leave-behind” materials which have information about the Decisive Action Sudan campaign, a summary of the policy asks for Congress, and background information on the conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan. Assign someone to print and prepare these materials!

Step Three: Running your Meeting

When you are meeting with a Member of Congress or one of his or her staff members, you should have two goals in mind: first, to get the Member to take action, and second, to develop a long-term relationship with the elected official’s staff through follow up. Developing a relationship with your Representative or Senator’s office staff will help you have lasting influence and building toward the elected official serving as a leader on mass atrocity prevention.

Here are some tips how to make your meeting more successful:

DO:

- **Identify yourself and your influence:** ID yourself as a constituent and what groups you represent (a faith-based community, school, club, etc.). The more influential you demonstrate yourself to be, the more likely the office will be to take action based on your recommendation. Be sure to tell them YOUR story – why you and your community care about the issues. It’s always best to make it personal!
- **Prioritize:** The lobby meeting should take around 30 minutes, but you could easily run short or long. If you only have a short meeting, be prepared to prioritize. The most important topics to get to in the conversation are your asks.
- **Refer specifically** to any legislation by number and make sure to be well versed in the status of that legislation—Congresspersons and Senators deal with a large volume of legislation on a wide array of topics; they certainly know to what you are referring, but it is best to be as specific as you can.
- **Be concise, direct, and use your own words:** We’ll help you craft talking points through our sample agenda, but it’s always best to be comfortable and say things in your own way.
- **Present a small number of clear, concrete requests:** make sure you let the person know what you would like to see them do in specifics.

- **Ask the Member or staff questions** about his/her own priorities. These questions open them up and help establish a connection.
- **Ask for a firm commitment and plan for follow-up:** Be sure to ask *when* you can follow up by email; which means that when you do follow-up, it can appear as if it was at their request!

DON'T

- Be afraid to say “I don’t know!” Promise to find the information and get back to them – it’s a good reason to stay in touch and helps to establish you as a reliable source of information!
- Apologize for taking their time—it’s their job. But be sure to be respectful and brief.
- Argue if the person you are lobbying does not agree with your position. Try to be persuasive but keep a positive rapport to allow for future visits to be a possibility. Remember – more than anything, the goal here is to establish a relationship.

Step Four: Follow Up

In the days following your meeting, set up a phone meeting for a future date with your contact person to discuss the progress of the requests you had made.

1. **Thank:** Send a cordial follow-up letter to thank to official for meeting with you. Email is okay, but handwritten is always appreciated.
3. **Continue the relationship:** Around a week or two after your letter has likely been received, make a phone call to the official’s office to see what progress has been made on your requests.
4. **Report back:** Let us know what next steps you’ve agreed on with your team and your Member of Congress. We can help you figure out what next – which may be another meeting!