

Building schools in Sudan: Story of slavery inspires action in East Aurora High School February 21, 2011

Boston - The story of Francis Bok, an escaped slave and modern-day abolitionist, resonated with

the faculty and students at East Aurora High School who raised over \$7,000 to build schools in Southern Sudan and to sponsor Bok's talk.

Mr. Bok will be speaking tomorrow at the school's Hawks Auditorium at 7:30 pm.

The event comes at a historic moment for Southern Sudan: last month nearly 99% of its people voted to create their own independent nation. The declaration is expected for July 9th, 2011.

Inspired by his autobiography "Escape from Slavery," over 150 students and staff members walked around the East High football field for 12 consecutive hours to raise money. Fifteen businesses also donated to the cause. The event was called Day of Sacrifice.

"He sacrificed years," senior Nancy Andrade told Beacon News about Bok.

"We're 17; we're living a normal life. He was 17 and he was focused on escaping a life of slavery," added senior Diana Soto.

In 1986 seven-year old Francis was selling eggs and peanuts near his village in South Sudan when Arab militia stormed the marketplace, slaughtering men and rounding up women and children. Strapped to horses Bok and others were taken to North Sudan and sold into slavery. For ten years, Bok was a chattel of an Arab master – he slept with animals and endured hard labor, constant beatings, and humiliation. He was given an Arab name and was taunted as "abeed," a black slave.

"It took a tremendous amount of legwork by the students and there was a lot of talking to share our plans. But - many people wanted to help in whatever way they could," said Shane Gillespie, a teacher who chose the book for his Survival Literature Class.

Today, an estimated 35,000 Southern Sudanese still remain enslaved in the north. Around the

world, some 27 million are held in bondage.

“For the students who have read Bok’s autobiography and are aware of his story - hearing him speak will help make things even more real. We all know these are real events and real people, but when you get to see, hear and meet someone who lived them they become that much more powerful. For those who do not know his story as well - I am sure they will be tremendously moved and affected,” said Gillespie.

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