

Steady raindrops fall from the corner of his glasses and onto the white garbage bag he has wrapped around his torso. He is soaked from head to toe. Sitting with his back to a tree, he waits for morning to come. The figure is Marcus Winn, 21, a student from Olivet Nazarene University in Kewanee, Ill. He watched a documentary film about children in Africa, and he sleeps in the rain in attempt to save their lives.

It is 3:30 in the morning and Grant Park is filled with similar figures huddled beneath trees and tarps. Nearly 2,000 people sleep enclosed in sleeping-bag cocoons and garbage-bag blankets. They gather to remember children they have never met. They gather to fight a war they have never seen. They gather to ask a government to open its eyes to an invisible genocide.

“I think all too often in America, we try to change the world from the comfort of our living rooms,” Winn says. “Coming out here raises awareness and allows me to experience a little bit of what people are experiencing around the world.”

The night was organized by the non-profit organization Invisible Children with the purpose of exposing the effects of a 20-year war in Northern Uganda, where children are forced to fight as soldiers. On April 29, over 50,000 people gathered in 136 cities across the country as a plea to the U.S. government to push the conflict to a higher level of priority.

“The Global Night Commute is an opportunity for Americans to rally with one voice,” says Jason Russell, co-founder and filmmaker of Invisible Children. “We are asking people to lie down and close their eyes with us for one night, so that we can open the world’s eyes to this unseen war.”

Invisible Children began when Russell and two friends made a documentary film about a war, in which more than 25,000 children have been abducted and forced to fight. Terrified to sleep in their homes and rural areas, nearly 45,000 children commute to the nearest city each evening to avoid abduction.

A rough cut of the movie was released in 2003 and has been touring the states, gaining supporters dedicated to ending the war and helping the children. After seeing the impact of the film, Russell co-founded the non-profit Invisible Children Inc. and returned to Uganda to gather more footage with plans to release a full-length film some time in 2007.

“This is an easy war to stop, but it is the worst crisis in the world because it’s so ignored,” Russell says. “This generation will be remembered for what we do to put the fire out in Africa.”

The rain douses those gathered in the park as they huddle over ink-smearred letters written to senators and wait in line to talk to Jacob Acaye, 17, a child from the film, flown from Uganda to see the event. He thanks each one in his soft voice, and says he didn’t know

this many people cared about Africa. He will go home with the story of soggy sleepers who believe that Uganda should be invisible no longer.

“We will knock on senator’s doors and we will ask them what they’re going to do,” Russell says. “When you have this many people determined, anything could happen.”