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Christians are literally fighting for their lives and liberty in Nagorno Karabakh, Angola and Sudan. The Christians in South Sudan have stood firm as a bulwark against the expansion of militant Islam into Central Africa for 14 centuries!

The vast Sahara desert is a barrier that separates the Arab Muslims of the North from the predominately Christian Black South. Sudan stands at the crossroads of Islam and Christianity in East Africa. The great Nile river has historically served as a channel for the expansion of Islam into the heart of Africa. For centuries the Black nations south of the Nuba mountains have courageously and effectively resisted every attempt by the North at Arabization and Islamization.

The relentless waves of cruel Islamic slave raiders during the 19th Century only deepened the resolve of the South Sudanese in their complete rejection of Islam. The vicious civil war between the Muslim Arab North and the Christian Black South since 1955 has even further entrenched the Christians' determination to defend their faith and freedom from Islamic aggression. Yet, despite this being the longest war in the largest country in Africa, few Christians seem to be aware of the extraordinary sufferings and heroism of our brothers and sisters in Christ in Sudan.

It was just before dawn, in December, when the Muslim army attacked Sadagh village. The soldiers had left their vehicles and had approached the village on foot. Suddenly they opened fire with rifles, RPG rockets and grenades. There was no resistance from the local population who fled. The Muslims then burned the church and school and most of the homes. The mosque, however, was left untouched. They also looted all the cattle, goats and sheep. Two young Christian girls were captured and taken into slavery.

The Muslim Militia, the *Popular Defence Force (PDF)*, sell young black children for between \$35 and \$95 to be slaves to Muslim masters. These slaves are usually dressed in just one piece

of cloth, a red *jallabia*, to be easily recognised if they attempt to escape. The boys are usually used to tend the cattle of the Bagarra and Rizeigat tribes whose youth have been conscripted into the Muslim army or militia.

Escape From Slavery

A Dinka tribesman testified of how his ten year old daughter and eight year old son had been taken from him in Aiel in 1992 by the Muslims. After many weeks he and his wife managed to find the slave camp where his children were being indoctrinated in Islam. He described it as a large camp with many straw buildings each occupied by 50 - 60 children. Most of these children were from Nuba or Dinka tribes.

The children were forced to attend the Islamization school and to cultivate the large *durra* farms around the camp. By God's grace he and his wife managed to locate their children, sneak out of the camp and escape back to their village with their children.

Michael was an eleven-year-old boy who was rounded up with other Christians in the market place by the Muslim police. The boys were interned in a camp where they lived under armed guard and were subjected to severe beatings with camel whips. All the boys were from Dinka, Nuer and Nuba tribes. They were all given Islamic names and not permitted to use their Christian names or ancestral family names. Michael was renamed Mohammed. They were forced to learn how to pray and recite Koranic verses in Arabic. Failure to perform led to savage beatings.

When Michael and his three friends tried to escape they were caught and flogged. They were then forced to hold a brick in each hand above their heads for a long time. After another failed escape attempt and more severe punishment Michael, and his friends managed to escape and return to their families.

The majority of Sudanese women also suffer systematic discrimination, repression and degradation at the hands of the *National Islamic Front* (NIF). Women have often been arrested and flogged for failing to adhere to Islamic dress codes. One Christian lady reported that she was arrested and threatened with sexual abuse for not wearing an Islamic veil. *"The Chief officer... wanted me to pay the cost of releasing me in bed! Of course, I refused... In the court I saw many women and the police were hitting them. I fell to the ground and fainted."*

Once she recovered the judge sentenced her to be lashed. This was carried out immediately in front of the judge. *"They took the shirt off my back and then lashed me. When I kept silent and was not affected, the judge said I defied him and ordered them to lash me in excess."*

These floggings are normally done with a camel whip and they leave deep and permanent welts on the skin.

Human Rights Watch Africa reports that in Sudan, under Islamic law, the testimony of a woman is not equal to that of a man. Marriage contracts and *hudud* offenses are heavily biased against women. Many of the women prisoners reportedly sleep in the open courtyards of the overcrowded prisons.

The Cross Under the Crescent

Restrictions on Christian churches date back to the *Foreign Missionary Society Act of 1962* which treats churches as foreign rather than domestic entities and forbids the building of churches without strict government control and permission. Routinely such church applications have been refused. Many hundreds of churches have in fact been burned to the ground with many pastors and elders crucified. All missionaries were expelled from the South of Sudan in 1964.

Children are not admitted to primary education in Sudan unless they have received two years Koranic instruction in a Muslim *Khalwa*. Adherence to Islam is also a condition for admission to university. Access to the war and famine stricken areas has been denied to non-Muslim aid agencies. Food aid is being withheld from non-Muslims. Christians have been forced to move to Muslim controlled areas to survive. They are then urged to renounce their faith and beg *"in the name of Allah"* to receive food aid.

Hundreds of Christians are routinely arrested without a warrant in arbitrary swoops. These believers are then held in detention, without any charges being laid against them and without any opportunity to communicate with their families. Torture is routinely used in interrogations. Merely partaking in communion wine during a church service has been sufficient cause for a sentence of 40 lashes to be imposed on a Christian.

Survivors of the infamous *ghost houses* of Khartoum, El Obeid and Port Sudan report enduring the following torture tactics: *immersion of their heads in water until they suffocated, burning with cigarette ends, electric shocks, mock executions, the*

*pulling out of finger nails, rapes
and
other degrading and cruel punishments.*

Nor have such abuses been limited to Christians. Muslims who have fallen foul of the fanatical NIF elite have received even worse tortures. For example Brig Mohammed Ahmed al-Rayah al Faki (age 53) presented the following sworn testimony:

“I was tried by a secret and summary military tribunal (23/9/91) one month after my arrest... During the 18 months I spent in Shalla I suffered: severe beatings with a water-hose and whipping on the head and all over the body, chaining and suspensions, locked in suffocating containers, sexually abused with solid articles, my sexual organs were crushed by pliers, electric shocks...”

Dr Sharif, the chief surgeon at Port Sudan Hospital, issued a medical certificate supporting the Brigadiers' testimony: *"he suffers from a slipped disc and testicular atrophy..."*

Abd al-Bagi al Raya, a lawyer in Khartoum had to have his leg amputated after 48 days of torture. Another lawyer had a plastic bag with hot pepper placed over his head, was whipped, beaten and underwent repeated mock executions. He witnessed 380 executions of fellow Muslims (mostly from the Sudan National Party) just because they failed to fully support the extreme NIF Islamization policy.

Public debate in Sudan has been silenced. All political parties have been banned. The Supreme Court has even upheld the right to extract confessions under torture, and crucifixion as a form of execution, as being compatible with Islamic Shari'a law and the Penal Code of Sudan!

In accordance with the NIF's social engineering plans, the homes of hundreds of thousands of people have been bulldozed down or razed to the ground. In 1991 the authorities relocated over 150 000 *"displaced persons"* and *"squatters"* from the capital city, Khartoum. During 1992 the authorities forced an additional hundred thousand people to an inhospitable terrain far outside the city. Many of the homes were destroyed to discourage any attempt to return. Fifteen people who resisted this move were killed.

Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) calculated that over 100 000 more people were forcibly relocated from Khartoum between November 93 and June 94, and a further 60 000 in July 94. Most of these displacements took place in night time raids with the razing of entire townships. These newly displaced people are now too far from Khartoum to commute to work from there and the opportunities for employment near these resettlement camps are minimal.

Meanwhile the offensive to subjugate the South Sudanese Christians continues. The Nuba Timu tribe near Lagawa has almost been eliminated. According to *Human Rights Watch Africa*, all the male population that failed to flee to the mountains have been massacred. The eldest males in the villages are 7 years old. All the females from 14 years and up are pregnant. Most of the population now live in the so called "Peace Camps" where *Khalwas* (Islamic schools) have been erected.

Refugees from Gogrial, Aiel and Mayom spoke of widespread famine as a result of the Arab scorched earth policy. Crops were burned, wells were poisoned and livestock were looted. The Mujahidin and PDF took advantage of a cease fire agreement with the SPLA to attack many unprotected Christian villages and make off with their cattle. In Gogrial a plague had broken out devastating the survivors.

Yet, amidst these tragedies, the strong faith and courage of the Sudanese Christians has been forged. One pastor of a village which had endured aerial bombing and military occupation by the Muslims declared:

"Though we are hungry, thirsty and dying of disease, we will take up our cross to show the world that we are Christians." Then he asked *"So why doesn't the Christian community in the rest of the world raise its voice on our behalf?"*

Despite the relentless persecution, the churches in Southern Sudan are experiencing phenomenal growth. Twenty years ago only 5% of Sudan claimed to be Christians. Now 20% identify themselves as Christians. In the South of Sudan 80% of the population attend Christian services. One denomination has grown from 2 to 140 congregations in just 10 years.

For many becoming a Christian is an expression of opposition to Islam - so nominalism is still a problem. However, for many, their conversions are a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. Revivals have broken out amongst the Nuer (Presbyterian), Dinka (Anglican), Mabaan and Uduk (Sudan Interior Church), Toposa, Acholi (Africa Inland Church) and some of the Nuba tribes (Sudanese Church of Christ).

The persecution has been particularly severe in the Nuba Mountains where the Muslims have declared a *jihad* (Holy War) against the Nuba peoples. Like the Armenian Christians in Nagorno Karabakh, the Nuba peoples are an island of Christianity in a sea of Muslims - cut off from the larger body of Christians in the South. The policy of the Khartoum government is to eliminate the Nuba people by the destruction of their villages, the massacre of their men and enslavement of their women and children.

Faith and Freedom

In the face of this jihad many Christians in the South have taken up arms under the banner of the *Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army* (SPLA). There are two major factions of this movement. One under Commander John Garang is fighting for the total independence of South Sudan. The other faction under Dr Riak Machak is fighting for autonomy for the South in a unified Sudan.

These resistance fighters have inflicted some serious defeats upon the Muslim Mujahidin and PDF militia. Major victories have been achieved near Lagawa, Juba and Way. Muslim military convoys have been ambushed and valuable munitions captured. Entire divisions of the Sudan army have been wiped out in offensive actions by the SPLA. Most of the Equatorial and Upper Nile provinces are securely in SPLA hands.

For most boys army life begins as soon as they are old enough to handle a rifle - normally 14 or 15, sometimes at 12 or 13 years old.

Life in Southern Sudan is very primitive. There are virtually no cars, no machines, no electricity, no medicines. Just about the only signs of technology are the AK47 Kalishnikov assault rifles, Makarov pistols and RPG rocket launchers.

The climate is oppressively hot - with walls of fine dust blowing across the dry sun scorched land. The heat is relentless and the sound of buzzing flies, mosquitos and other flying insects is continuous. Most of the people are shockingly malnourished. Many seem to be living skeletons with leathery skin stretched over their bare bones. Heat, dust, flies and starvation are ever present companions and the sound of gunfire is seldom far away. This is the forgotten frontline of the fight for faith and freedom.

Please alert your church and friends to the plight of our brothers and sisters in Christ in Sudan. And please pray for our Frontline missionaries, George and Maretha, who are ministering to these precious people. If you would like to channel gifts towards the suffering Christians of Sudan please designate your support for Sudan. Another Frontline mission team will go up to join our missionaries to Sudan as soon as possible.

“From beyond the rivers of Sudan My worshippers, My scattered people will bring Me offerings.” - Zephaniah 3:10

Peter Hammond