

It is over a hundred and twenty years since General Charles Gordon suppressed the slave trade in Sudan. Before he began his campaign, seven out of every eight Sudanese were slaves. Incredible as it may seem, the spectre of slave raiders swooping down on unprotected villages is once again becoming commonplace in Sudan. Tens of thousands of Sudanese Christian men, woman and children have been kidnapped and sold as slaves by government soldiers.

The thunderous sound of horses made the villagers of Nyamlell drop their hoes and scatter into the bush. Gunfire crackled around the village as 300 men on horseback, camels and on foot crashed through the fields of maize. Clad in turbans and jalabas (long white robes) they brandished AK47 and G3 assault rifles, swords and spears. Within minutes they had killed 82 men.

The invaders were Arab slave raiders from the North. Their victims were Dinka Christians. First they siezed the cattle, then they searched from hut to hut gathering food, blankets and slaves. In one hut they grabbed Abuk Marou Keer, a blind Dinka woman. "Now you belong to me" she was told. During this raid the Muslims captured 282 men, women and children from Nyamlell. When 3 men tried to escape from the slave column two were shot and the third had his throat cut. Then several women were selected for gang rape. Even blind Abuk was abused by her captors.

After 2 days forced march Abuk reached a compound which she was told would be her home. Soon she was collecting firewood, carrying water and washing clothes as a slave for her Arab master.

After 2 months of bondage Abuk persuaded her Arab guards to give her a few moments of privacy. She then managed to meet up with her mother and sister who took her by the hand and helped her escape into the darkness! Now they are back in Nyamlell, but Abuk's son and daughter are still enslaved.

One Arab slave trader openly described how marauding gangs of soldiers have regularly

swooped down on villages of Christians - killing, looting and capturing as many as possible for slavery. This campaign was part of the National Islamic Front (NIF) government's campaign to Islamise the South of Sudan.

"The slaves, in most cases children and young women, are taken north where they are forced to provide agricultural labour, domestic work and sexual services against their will", reported one CSI researcher.

"Slavery is used to debilitate the Christian communities, they are forcibly dispersed and/or imprisoned. They have to surrender and submit to becoming Muslims or they are killed."

A captured PDF officer, Farjellah Wada Mather from Dafur, testified: *"We were armed by the GOS to fight; we were asked to collect children, sheep, goats and cattle and we used to burn some houses. Whatever was taken belonged to the PDF and was our income."*

He said that children who were captured in raids were brought up as slaves by their captors, being used to look after livestock or to do domestic work. He described the significance of the railway from El Obeid to Wau:

"The train comes from the North to the South, taking troops and weapons to the South. When it returns, it returns with people."

Deng Ater Kwany from Path, near Nyamllel recounted: *"My wife and four children were abducted during a raid in March 1994. Three of the children and my wife managed to escape. But my 8 year-old daughter, Abuk, remained behind. She is now kept in Naykata in southern Dafur by a man named Ahmed Ahmed who bought her from her captor. When I discovered where she was, I went North and tried to get her back by legal means. I opened a case against Ahmed Ahmed at the police station at Dira Dira, and had to pay the police 20 000 Sudanese Pounds (LS) to do this. A police officer named Abdullah accompanied me to the home of Ahmed. This man demanded 50 000 LS for her release. The policeman said that as he had bought the girl she was his property. I was forced to leave her there where she is badly mistreated by Ahmed's wife who calls her by the Muslim name, Howeh. I also lost the 20 000 LS which the policeman refused to return to me. I had to return home empty handed."*

There is no longer any doubt that slavery is widespread in Sudan. There are also frequent and consistent reports that slaves are being exported in the Persian Gulf and to Libya. Many of these captives are beaten, treated brutally and sexually abused. Many are branded like cattle. Slaves who are caught trying to escape are often beaten, mutilated or even murdered. Slavery acts as both an inducement for PDF militias to attack the South and a weapon of terror to destabilize the South.

In an official report (20 February 1996) to the Commission on Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Sudan, Dr. Gaspar Biro, presented documentation on the systematic pattern of aerial bombardment of civilian targets, arbitrary arrests, detention without due process of law, torture, extra-judicial killings, summary executions, forced removals, forced labour and slavery by the GOS. According to this report the slave trade is most prevalent in Bahr-el-Ghazal and the Nuba Mountains. *"Abduction of southern civilians has become a way of conducting the war."*

Dr Biro's report

concludes that:

"... the abduction of persons, mainly woman and children, belonging to racial, ethnic and religious minorities from southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and the Ingasemma Hills areas, their subjection to the slave trade, including traffic in and sale of children and woman, slavery, servitude, forced labour and similar practices are taking place with the knowledge of the Government of Sudan ... and with the tacit approval of the Government of Sudan."

(Copies of the full 31 page report *"Situation of Human Rights in the Sudan"* by UN Rapporteur Mr Gaspar Biro, February 1996, to the Commission on Human Rights are available from Frontline Fellowship for R6 each + postage)