

and it is serious about it, witness the fact that Sudan now has a new constitution and courts to protect rights, and prosecutors in all districts are ready to receive complaints of crime committed in relation to abduction or slavery.

Mr. Abdurachman mentioned that a number of abductees are taken by rebel movement but the media never reports this. The GOS is always blamed.

We were also confronted by the "cultural" explanation, the essence of which is that there are always fights in this part of Sudan; both parties raid, they take women and children; this is not slavery, it is retribution and revenge; tribes are not taking women and children for ransom or for money, but even so, there is no law which allows them to do this. CEAWC has decided to see what the chiefs think should be done to resolve the problem without necessarily using the penal code in order to break this vicious circle and to avoid hardening positions. Our position is already hardened: the practice is abhorrent and must be stopped, now, not when it is convenient. It has already gone on too long.

There is no definite answer to how long the practice of abduction has been going on, but it has expanded and contracted over time. The Bagarra don't kill women and children, a Foreign Affairs official told us, they take them as war booty. There used to be periodic tribal councils, with compensation paid in cattle for any bloodshed. This has happened since "the British time". It happens where cattle are migrating, and where the rebels steal cattle in order to force people to move. It is an issue created by war, it is asserted.

After they are identified, abductees are taken to the "peacebuilding centres". The process of identifying a child through the tribal leaders may take a long time, & then it may take a long time to find the child's family. It may be that taking a person from one family where he is at school may not be helpful. So the child might be kept in school until a permanent solution is found. Here it must be reported that we heard elsewhere that the GOS is refusing to allow children over 16 to reunify with their families because they say they will join the SPLA, and that the GOS argument that they are staying behind to complete their education has no basis in reality. We're told that there are women and children who would like to stay and not be reunited. Reunification must always be done in the best interests of the child, said one CEAWC member.

Abducted children, it was also claimed, are treated by their families in the same manner as the rest of the family. Some times children have come for work and find their new family is better. Sometimes families not involved in abduction keep the children as a kind of foster family. It is left to the discretion of the appropriate subcommittee (Dinka, Messariyaa, Rezegat) to decide jointly what to do with the children. Anything done is done with the full knowledge and cooperation of UNICEF and Save the Children. If the parents want to take the child, it is done, but if the parents are unidentified or not found, the child is left where he is.

As to numbers, CEAWC has documented abductees who have reached safe houses, ("peacebuilding centres"), with 229 in South Darfur, and 100 in West Kordofan. Some of them