

UNICEF now follows the practice of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and no longer uses the term Slavery, referring instead to Abduction. The contention over terminology is not simply one of semantics, but is an attempt by persons rejecting the term Slavery to blunt the allegations of its existence by raising instead the tribal practices of Nuer and Dinka, who have had a history of reciprocal raiding and abduction. Setting aside the debate over the word used to describe it, the Assessment Mission was concerned with the practice itself, and there is ample evidence that it is organized, and is accompanied by violence. And there is the end result: the wrongful use of a human being by another; one exercising "ownership" over another.

UNICEF talked to us formally, and some of its field workers and those of other UN bodies did so informally; all were serious about bringing to an end an abysmal situation which disfigures the lives of so many people, particularly in Bahr El Ghazal but not just there.

The Bahr El Arab river, in its western reaches, effectively divides the Dinka to south from the Arabs to north. In 1985, an earlier GOS began to arm Arab militias, the murahleen, as a form of opposition to the SPLA. This practice has mushroomed into armed banditry and lawlessness at best, and the use of the raiding by the murahleen against Dinka communities as a war strategy at worst.

We were told that there are really three different phenomena in the Slavery/abductions issue. First, there is armed and organized raiding in which the role of the GOS is not clear, and is likely complex. Sometimes, we were informed, the GOS provides arms, sometimes the groups of murahleen go off on their own. Tribal groups have been known to organize raids with "representatives" from other Arab groups; returning with children, women and cattle taken in these raids, all of them have had a common celebration.

Then there is the train which carries GOS supplies from the north down through Aweil and Wau in Bahr El Ghazal, down through contested territory. We believe there is formal recruitment by the GOS of militia to guard the train from possible SPLA attack. These murahleen then go out from the train and attack villages suspected of supporting the SPLA on the way from Babanusa to Wau and back. Their booty consists not just of goods, but also of women and children.

Finally, we were told of joint punitive raids carried out by the GOS and the murahleen, who, under the Popular Defence Act, can enjoy status as state-sponsored militias, the PDF.

The Committee on the Eradication of Abductions of Women and Children

We met with the new Committee on the Eradication of Abductions of Women and Children, and heard how this group sees the problem and how it should be addressed.

We were then told that, yes, there was speculation that there have been abductions from the train. CEAWC held meetings in Aweil and Wau and developed a two-fold plan. There would be workshops in Wau, Babanusa and Aweil to ensure the murahleen and tribal chiefs understood the