

Mission

The mission met in Khartoum, with GOS, opposition, human rights, civil society, and diplomatic representatives, as well as with displaced Southern Sudanese and the UN officials trying to help them. In addition, visits were made to oil pipeline sites north and south of Khartoum, and to Dilling, in the lower reaches of the Nuba Mountains. The mission spent three days at the Heglig operating base of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company, GNPOC, and from this base visited a number of communities in the vicinity.

Locations in the south were also accessed from Lokichokio, in northern Kenya, the operating base of Operation Lifeline Sudan. This humanitarian operation is a consortium of the UN and major NGOs, and it organizes relief shipments and other forms of assistance for often desperate communities in Sudan.

An Urgent Matter

South Sudan's Bahr Al Ghazal was the scene of a major famine in 1988, and thousands of people died. The UN Resident Co-ordinator for Sudan, Philippe Borel, issued, in October 1999, a briefing note entitled Averting Another Potential Humanitarian Crisis: Western Upper Nile: Another Bahr Al Ghazal?

He is convinced that a humanitarian disaster similar to the Bahr Al Ghazal famine has been brewing in Unity State, Western Upper Nile, with the fighting there threatening to spiral out of control.

2 Slavery or Abduction: A Distinction without a Difference?

The core allegation of slavery in Sudan is not any sensational claim, which can be criticized for inflation of numbers or ignorance of complexities. It is a matter of record. It is the continued assault on lives and liberty of the Dinka people of Bahr El Ghazal by Arab raiders, the murahleen first armed by the GOS in 1985 and figuring, one way or another, in the "war strategies" of the GOS today.

The central question to which the Assessment Mission turned was whether the GOS has been "sponsoring" these raids against the Dinka and others through the practice of "hiring" Baggara tribesmen, in effect the feared murahleen, as a protection force which takes its payment not in cash or kind from the GOS but as booty, the goods and people they can make off with.

Abhorrence of slavery is professed everywhere, including Sudan, where we were strongly told, and not just by the GOS, that slavery does not, and could not exist. Foreign Minister Osman Ismail assured us he would personally intervene in any case of slavery brought to his attention. Ghazi Suleiman, a determined critic of the GOS, and a lawyer who has used the courts to free women and children from abduction, was equally insistent that there was no slavery in Sudan.