

We cannot say what these state institutions want, but the practice of Arab raiders making life hell in Dinka villages in Bahr El Ghazal is either a measure of the inability of Sudan, a state at war, to provide human security to its citizens, or it is a war strategy, one wilfully dismissive of humanitarian law as it applies to internal conflict. It would have to be one rooted in a cultural disdain for the Dinka by the Arab elite which cannot admit to itself or others that something very much like slavery is going on under their noses and so, shamefully turns a collective blind eye. Either condition demands serious effort by the GOS to redress the situation.

This brings us to a related issue, one which is also rarely discussed but must be considered and addressed: sharecropping.

Many of those abducted in Bahr El Ghazal end up in South Darfur, but they are by no means the only Southerners to be found there. Despite the presence of about 100,000 IDPs in the state for 7-10 years, most still suffer chronic insecurity exacerbated by the exploitative agricultural practices of the host community.

Our information is that they are given no access to arable land, even though there is no shortage of it. They are consigned instead to sharecropping, with exploitative terms dictated by the landowner, usually an Arab. The sharecropper IDP must borrow food throughout season against his share of the crop, which leads to a situation of bonded labour. Does the GOS also turn a blind eye to this practice, which gives local Arab landholders a supply of very cheap labour?

The plight of IDPs is everywhere hard & Sudan is no exception, as we found when we looked at this aspect of the situation there. Many of the IDPs in South Darfur went there as a result of murahleen raids along the railway corridor; raids which took many of their children to Arab homesteads in that same state. Another Sudanese irony, but not the least, or the last we would encounter.

One of the most credible voices raised against slavery in Sudan is that of Anti-Slavery International. In 1997, it joined with Sudan Update to publish a comprehensive account of the practice. In its concluding section, this made the point that "The Sudan government is guilty of enough crimes for its critics not to need to exaggerate or distort its record. Unfortunately, this is precisely what some of its opponents are doing in the slavery debate. There is a danger that wrangling over slavery can become a fatal distraction from abuses which are actually part of government policy--which slavery is emphatically not.....The government is--largely--turning a blind eye rather than actually promoting the practice."

With the caveat that the GOS is relying on war-strategies in which abductions play a large part, the Assessment Mission shares this analysis and concern. The support for armed raiders must stop, and the GOS must find the will and the way to look at the practice clearly, and move firmly to eradicate it

The creation of CEAWC is a first step, but so far an insufficient one, towards ending a practice,