

January 1996

THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN SUDAN

ISSUE

Continuing violations of human rights in Sudan.

BACKGROUND

The current government of Sudan took power in a military coup in 1989 orchestrated by the National Islamic Front (NIF) of Dr. Hassan al-Turabi. The programme of the Government, known as the "National Salvation Revolution", declared that multi-party democracy had failed, outlawed all political parties and initiated policies to create an Islamic State.

Grievances by Southern Sudanese, who are culturally, linguistically and religiously distinct from the north with its more Arab identity, have been the cause of a civil war that continued intermittently since independence in 1956, eased for a decade as a result of the Addis Ababa peace agreement in the early 70's and resumed as a sustained conflict in 1983.

The policies of the NIF Government headed by General Omar El-Bashir have led to ever increasing international isolation since 1989. Human rights abuses and the civil war have resulted in an almost total freeze on development assistance. The civil war and the religious radicalism of the NIF government have had a negative impact on regional stability in the Horn of Africa. Eritrea severed diplomatic relations with Sudan in December 1994 citing Sudanese support for subversive groups in Eritrea. Uganda subsequently severed diplomatic relations citing Sudanese support for Uganda armed opposition groups. Evidence of Sudanese support for the terrorist attempt on the life of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the June 1995 OAU Summit in Addis Ababa resulted in strained relations with Egypt and Ethiopia.

In the North, an elaborate security apparatus closely monitors political and social activity with NIF controlled committees responsible for approving certain private activities to ensure their compatibility with officially defined Islamic and government objectives. For example, women wishing to travel outside the country must provide written approval from a male "guardian" for consideration and approval by the Women's Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Although the government of the Sudan continues to exempt the 10 southern states from parts of the 1991 Criminal Act which incorporates elements of Shari'a law, there are continued reports of enforced Islamization of southerners.

Political dissidents are not permitted to operate freely and are subject to forced disappearances, prolonged detention without trial and torture. A number of citizens were indiscriminately killed by security forces during demonstrations in September 1995. On the positive side, the Government of the Sudan acknowledged some abuses: security agents were tried and punished for abuses and a group of political prisoners were released last year.

Although it is difficult to corroborate reports of organized slavery in Sudan, there are numerous indications that it persists as a traditional practice in the countryside, particularly

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