

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 have been told, and accept, that there is formal recruitment by the GOS of militia to guard the train from possible SPLA attack. Up to 2000 are "recruited", then there are many others, some accompanying the train on horseback, and others who climb aboard for the journey and the chances of booty which it offers. These murahleen then go out from the train & attack villages suspected of supporting the SPLA on the way from Babanusa to Wau and back. The said booty has consisted not just of goods, some identifiably once belonging to relief agencies, 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. One such raid apparently hit the town of Abyei in 1997.

The theory is that such raids are conducted to attack villages believed to support the SPLA.

In all these events, men have been killed or forced to escape, and women and children have been taken.

The Committee on the Eradication of Abductions of Women and Children

When we met with the new Committee on the Eradication of Abductions of Women & Children, we heard how this group sees the problem and how it should be addressed. The senior civil servant of the Ministry of Justice, Abdurachman Ahmed Ibrahim, stressed that the mandate of the CEAWC is to facilitate the safe return of abductees by supporting tribal leaders; to investigate reports of abductions and bring perpetrators to trial; and to investigate the causes of abduction and ways to eliminate the practice, and were told that it is persistent among tribes in the Bahr El-Ghazal area but is confined to that area, and has never been highlighted as a matter of purchase/sale of people in Sudan. It was common for us to be told that no-one has yet identified a classical "slave market" in Sudan--though here it must be said that a responsible official with a highly credible NGO told us of having heard that there was one such in South Darfur.