

Indeed, we spoke with a locally engaged staff member of an international NGO whose own son had been abducted ten years earlier. With all his diligence, effort, and expertise, he had been unable to track down his son for those ten years. Fortunately, the son managed to escape from the remote northern village of his abductors, and make his way back to his home area. This account casts further doubt on the plausibility of easy, mass, retrievals or redemptions.

Several informants reported various scenarios involving staged redemptions. In some cases, SPLM officials are allegedly involved in arranging these exchanges, dressing up as Arab slave traders, with profits being used to support the SPLM/A, buy arms and ammunition, and even to build a power base in opposition to John Garang, which, it is said, has caused a rift in SPLM, because those who object (including Garang) are reluctant to publicly expose it for fear of splintering the rebel movement.

Sometimes a "redeeming group" may be innocently misled, but other groups may be actively committed to fundraising for the SPLM/A & deliberately use "slave redemption" as a successful tactic for attracting Western donors.

We did speak with an eyewitness who can confirm observing a staged redemption and this testimony conformed with other reports we had from a variety of credible sources.

The "redeeming group" knew they were buying back children who had not been abducted or enslaved. The exchange was conducted in the presence of armed SPLA guards. The "Arab" middle man/trader delivering the children for "redemption" was recognized as a member of the local community even though he was dressed up in traditional Arab costume for the event.

Interestingly, even UNICEF has been accused of "Staged abduction redemption", in their case of recycling children from IDP camps. The accusations force UNICEF to be sure to focus on proper documentation, and it wishes CSI and others lived by the importance of this aspect of the struggle.

One NGO activist we met said that CSW & CSI have broached the issues in very different ways than his organization could, but have "upped the political & economic ante" with their claim that more than 4000 women and children have been redeemed. This does not solve the problem, but speaking up about staged redemptions or against CSI would "undermine what we could contribute to addressing causes".

Some Conclusions

The Governor, or Wali, of Bahr El Ghazal is said to have told a German parliamentary delegation bluntly that although he is governor and head of security, his decisions are only hypothetical – the Sudanese Army and security do what they want.