

While UNICEF does now follow the practice of the UN Commission on Human Rights, and no longer uses the term Slavery, referring instead to Abduction, there has been no apology to the GOS. The contention over terminology is not simply one of semantics; but is an attempt by persons rejecting the term Slavery to blunt the allegations of its existence by raising instead the tribal practices of Nuer and Dinka, who have had a history of reciprocal raiding and abduction. Setting aside the debate over the word used to describe it, the Assessment Mission was concerned with the practice itself, and there is ample evidence that it is organized, and is accompanied by violence. And there is the end result: the wrongful use of a human being by another; one exercising "ownership" over another.

During our stay in Khartoum, we were fortunate to enjoy lengthy discussions with UNICEF personnel, including Mr. Ekvall, our understanding of what is happening in Sudan owes much to their observations and insight, not to mention their courage and fortitude in carrying out UNICEF's mandate in very difficult circumstances.

What we saw and heard

The Government of Sudan is resolute in opposing any use of the term "Slavery" as anything other than a descriptor of something which may have happened there long ago. In this, they are joined by many who are normally their most resolute critics, including many of Sudan's most prominent human rights lawyers and activists. It is almost as if there is a societal refusal to accept the possibility of the phenomenon, and this appears to spill over into just how "Abductions" are then dealt with.

The Special Rapporteur, as has been mentioned, expressed to the UN Commission on Human Rights the view that war in Sudan had revived and exacerbated slavery there and he called for "energetic measures to prevent and end unlawful practices, such as raids by armed militias, perpetrated against women and children." The GOS invited him to reconsider his position on this point but did create, on May 1, 1999, a Committee for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children which, in his report to the UN General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur welcomed as an encouraging decision, to be closely monitored in the future. He joined UNICEF in seeing CEAWC's establishment as a concrete indication of the political will of the GOS to deal with abductions.

We heard at length from virtually all quarters concerned about or involved with this problem.

UNICEF talked to us formally, and some of its field workers and those of other UN bodies did so informally; all were serious about bringing to an end an abysmal situation which disfigures the lives of so many people, particularly in Bahr El Ghazal but not just there.

The Bahr El Arab river, in its western reaches, effectively divides the Dinka to south from the Arabs to north. In 1985, an earlier GOS began to arm Arab militias, the murahleen, as a form of