

According to UNICEF, the authorities in Aweil do not any longer allow abductees to come into Aweil itself by train. In October, 1999, there were 8 abducted children on the train; six months ago, it would have been 80. The number of abducted has decreased, but it hasn't stopped.

The GOS does clearly have a responsibility. It's essentially a Government train, taking supplies to the garrison maintained by the GOS and the murahleen are there on behalf of the GOS, and should be controlled by the GOS.

Philippe Borel voiced the thought that the UN would like to organize a train to deliver humanitarian aid because it would be cheap and more effective but in addition to the fear that the murahleen would attack it unless it carried armed UN guards the train requires a US part which it cannot get because of the embargo.

Thomas Eckvall pointed out that verifying anything is almost impossible, and one way forward might be for CEAWC to ride the train, but the critical factor was for CEAWC to receive proper and public support from the GOS, which is so far lacking.

One former political figure had only this to say about CEAWC: if there is no change to the policy of engaging the murahleen to guard the train but not paying them, then how will the practice be stopped? If you want to be serious about this problem, pay the murahleen and warn that if anything happens, by way of looting and abduction, they will be responsible.

Redemptions

The UNICEF workers said there is no evidence that "redemption" is actually fuelling the abduction problem, whether the redemption was real or "staged".

One worker doubted that "staged redemptions", if such there are, actually incite more abductions, since the population being "redeemed" is not the population abducted by murahleen. And redemption was practiced before foreign Christians got involved, when local intermediaries were paid a fee, sometimes in cattle or kind, to retrieve abductees. However, reports, especially from CSI, about very large numbers were questioned, and frankly not accepted. Mention was also made to us of evidence that the SPLA was involved in "recycling" abductees, but it was thought that the SPLA has dealt with this.

There is a real problem here. Serious anti-abduction activists, who are quick to credit CSI and similar bodies with putting the issue on the international, and thus the Sudanese, agenda, cannot relate the claimed redemptions to what they know of the reality. For example we were told that it would be hard not to notice how passive these "slave" children are when they are liberated or to realize how implausible it is to gather together so many people from so many locations so quickly – and there are always just the right number to match redemption funds available!