

" (d) Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years, is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour."

The prohibition was designed among other things to prevent children from being exploited as domestic workers through the practice of "sham adoption" (ie being nominally welcomed into a new household as a member of the family, when the real motive is to require the new member to work as an unpaid domestic servant).

"Forced labour" is sometimes confused with slavery, and sometimes it is implied that slavery is simply a category of forced labour. International standards adopted soon after the 1926 Slavery Convention prohibited the use of forced labour other than by the state, but the circumstances in which individual citizens can be obliged to perform forced labour are now clearly circumscribed.

International standards limit the use of forced labour very strictly and urge its total elimination. An International Labour Office (ILO) Convention adopted 65 years ago obliged each state ratifying the Convention, including Sudan, to "suppress the use of forced or Compulsory labour in all its forms within the shortest possible period".

Reports of Slavery in Sudan

Given our concern about the possibility of GOS "sponsorship" of the raiding carried out by the Baggara, it is necessary that a word of description be offered about this grouping.

The Baggara Arabs are mainly to be found along the southern borderlands of "Northern" Sudan, lands where water for the cattle they cherish is a seasonal commodity, often one they had to fight for, usually with Dinka and Nuer communities, where cattle is also king.

Though the Baggara are peripheral, during the years of the Mahdi at the end of the 19th. century, they "controlled" Sudan, and the settled Arabs of the Nile valley remember this well. In 1985, the GOS began to arm the Baggara as militia, the murahleen, with modern weapons, and this was continued when Sadiq El Mahdi became Prime Minister. When Omar Bashir and his NIF allies consolidated power, one of their first acts was to create the Popular Defence Forces, giving the murahleen a legitimacy which bedevils the Slavery issue today.

On November 27, the Sudan News Agency put out a story which began with the assertion that the resident representative of UNICEF in Khartoum, Thomas Ekvall "has affirmed that UNICEF has concluded that the practices which were once termed as slavery are actually cases of abduction in the conflict areas. He pointed out that the executive director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy, has apologized for the misunderstanding that has occurred in interpreting her statement".