

Indeed, we were told by one ambassador from an EU country that given that the Wunlit Accords specify in some detail what to do in cases of abduction, it must exist as a practice.

It should be said that this Dinka-Nuer abduction is done by both sides, which not only impacts on how victims are treated, but gives an impetus to efforts aimed at ending the practice. Both sides have a stake in the success of such efforts.

However, there is no pattern of Dinka abduction of Arab women and children, and only the GOS can make the murahleen see the need to eradicate their practice of abductions. Yes, for consistency's sake, it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to Abductions wherever they occur in Sudan, and whoever they involve, which in no way lessens the moral and legal obligation on the GOS to eradicate, not condone, the practice.

The practice is ongoing. The train that arrived in Wau on October 25, 1999, did, we were told, have abductees on board. 47 were released by the Wali.

What happens to those not lucky enough to be released in this way? UNICEF workers have interviewed many children, and learned that they are quickly put to work. Some have been later exchanged, for seven goats for example. There is not a market as such but there are exchanges of children for goods and even money. Meanwhile, according to our sources, most Baggara villages in West Kordofan and South Darfur contain abducted children busy with domestic labour.

The UNICEF Resident Representative, Thomas Eckvall, had just returned from a tour of El Fula, West Kordofan, and South Darfur when he met with us in the company of his senior colleagues and the UN Resident co-ordinator, Philippe Borel.

There is progress, stated Eckvall. Reunifications are slow, but 11 were returned the other day. More could be done; for example, the Minister of Justice himself was meant to accompany the UN team, as a show of GOS support for the fight against abductions, but he failed to appear.

The GOS needed to demonstrate its will on this issue & to make its own resources available. It was put to us that every penny spent to date has come from UNICEF, which the GOS keeps harassing because of the Executive Director's statement.

Though progress was being made, there continued to be systematic obstruction of our humanitarian assistance; it is not just UNICEF specific. Obstacles appear to be caused by individuals rather than orchestrated by the state, he thought.

Aweil and the infamous train lie at the root of this problem, according to Eckvall. The main reason that 11 abductees were returned from Aweil recently was because the GOS officials knew that the UN planned to visit.