

And fear no GOS reaction as they do so.

The arming of the murahleen with automatic weapons in 1985 was noticeably followed by an increase in raiding and the abduction of women and children which accompanied these raids, and before long, the situation had come to the attention of Anti-slavery International.

Anti-Slavery had, at the time of the coup which installed General Bashir and the NIF in power, been conducting an inquiry into Sudanese slavery with agreement of the GOS. Concerns about slavery in Sudan had grown following the 1987 publication of material on this practice gathered by two university lecturers at Khartoum University. One of these has since left Sudan following intense harassment and ill-treatment at the hands of the GOS, and the other is currently working on the issue for UNICEF. The Assessment Mission was able to speak with him as well as many others in its effort to understand the substance or otherwise of the allegations of slavery.

When it adopted the international treaty prohibiting slavery, the United Nations' predecessor, the League of Nations, gave the following definition of slavery:

"Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised."
(Article 1(1) of the 1926 Slavery Convention.)

Abhorrence of slavery is professed everywhere, including Sudan, where we were strongly told, and not just by the government and its supporters, that slavery does not, and could not exist. Foreign Minister Osman Ismail, during our lengthy meeting with him, personally offered to intervene in the most direct way in any case of slavery brought to his attention. Ghazi Suleiman, one of the most determined critics of the GOS, and a lawyer who has used the courts to free women and children from abduction, was equally insistent that there was no slavery in Sudan.

The 1926 Convention was intended primarily to abolish slavery and the slave trade, but the definition of slavery in Article 1 clarifies that the international community was also determined to abolish a wide range of other practices which were considered to be "analogous to slavery", including debt bondage and false adoption (of children to work as domestic servants).

There are other forms of servitude which exhibit many of the characteristics of slavery: servile domestic work, forced labour and servitude for ritual or religious purposes, for example. Governments are under an obligation to take urgent remedial action to prevent these if they amount to slavery-like practices, as is often the case.

Practices Analogous to Slavery

Article 1 of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery prohibits: