

If there is such a mass movement led by the President and/or the First Vice President, UNICEF envisages that as many as 90% of all abductees, perhaps numbering more than 14,000 children and women would be retrieved within a few months;"

At first, UNICEF workers thought the creation of CEAWC was different, a very positive step, with the enabling order published by the Minister of Justice.

Now the assessment might be changing, as it seemed that that leadership was no longer being provided on this issue; no Minister or Wali (State governor under the new federal system) was providing leadership and advocating in affected regions against abductions.

The point was made to us that the President, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have never spoken publicly about CEAWC and the need for it. It was suggested that for them to do so would be construed as admitting there was a slavery problem in Sudan. Certainly, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs told us he would get involved in any slavery case, he was silent in respect of abductions.

Was the GOS only cooperating with UNICEF to the extent necessary? We heard about the UNICEF worker, Dr. Hamid El Bashir, who had been working in Wau. He was arrested and tortured for 3 days in June/July 1999, and his wife and child were threatened. UNICEF had to get him out of the country. Also, it seems that UNICEF is also harassed with flight bans, as are the other humanitarian agencies of the UN system such as WFP.

Knowing that the GOS keeps saying UNICEF must retract previous statements about slavery, is it impossible to believe accounts that government bureaucrats sometimes obstruct the working of CEAWC? In addition, we were told there are members who see their role as being to show that there is no problem, and though we cannot judge whether this is so, some of the views expressed to us by committee members seemed more related to denial than demonstrative commitment. A case in point must be the argument that Dinka children willingly travel by train in Bahr El Ghazal to make tea for Arab guards.

But the fact that the CEAWC framework now exists surely means that international pressure matters in Sudan today, and this reality is heartening the UN workers in the field.

These workers do not see abductions as the result of "tribal fights", and since 1986, there have been no "tribal fights" as such between the Dinka and the Rizegat. Nor do they have evidence that the Dinka are engaged in this practice of abduction into slave-like status. UNICEF has asked for lists of abducted Rizegat children, but have never received them.

Here it is appropriate to acknowledge that abduction has certainly figured in relations between Dinka and Nuer, to the point where the GOS, and groups such as the Sudan Foundation, have asked why, in the Wunlit Accords fostered by Christian church groups, is the practice termed "Abduction" but these same groups use "Slavery" when talking of Arab/Dinka abductions?