

With OLS help, the mission was able to visit a number of isolated communities, including one, Paboung, which does not seem to have existed until recently, when displacement from the town of Leer sent people fleeing into the bush and the swamps. Many of them gathered together in Paboung. Other places we visited include Biem in Ruweng County, Keriell, Nyall, Rumbek, Koch, Wuncuei. Testimony from people we met there appears in an appendix to this report.

This constitutes an indictment of all who can act to promote human security in Western Upper Nile, Bahr El Ghazal, and elsewhere in South Sudan but do not do so. Inaction is not an option.

An Urgent Matter

South Sudan's Bahr Al Ghazal was the scene of a major tragedy in 1988: famine struck, and thousands of people died, mostly the very young, the old, and the vulnerable. Human Rights Watch believes that as many as 250,000 lives were lost. The UN Resident Co-ordinator for Sudan, Philippe Borel, issued, in October 1999, a briefing note entitled Averting Another Potential Humanitarian Crisis: Western Upper Nile: Another Bahr Al Ghazal? He is convinced that a humanitarian disaster potentially similar to the Bahr Al Ghazal famine's been brewing for the last year in Unity State, Western Upper Nile, with the fighting there threatening to spiral out of control. Borel makes the point that it is difficult for outsiders to know what exactly is happening on the ground in Unity State/WUN, and the death toll from the fighting there is difficult to assess, but he is clear that it has caused massive and continuous displacement and disruption of life, with local cultivation no longer being possible. He insists that there can be no development to enhance the coping mechanisms of the population unless "security zones" can be guaranteed and he wants the international community to both prepare for providing emergency relief, particularly to the internally displaced and the communities to which they are fleeing, to help find a solution to the conflict, in which IGAD remains important.

Inaction is really not an option.

2 Slavery or Abduction: A Distinction without a Difference?

The core allegation of slavery in Sudan is not any sensational claim, which can be criticized for inflation of numbers or ignorance of complexities. It is a matter of record. It is the continued assault on lives and liberty of the Dinka people of Bahr El Ghazal by Arab raiders, the murahleen first armed by the GOS in 1985 and figuring, one way or another, in the "war strategies" of the GOS today.

The central question to which the Assessment Mission turned was whether the GOS has been "sponsoring" these raids against the Dinka and others through the practice of "hiring" the Baggara tribesmen, in effect the feared murahleen, as a protection force which takes its payment not in cash or kind from the GOS but as booty, the goods and people they can make off with.