

SUDANISSUE

Chronic gross violations of human rights by all parties to the civil war which began some 15 years ago has perpetuated a terrible tragedy on the civilian population, making 1.9 million victims of violence, state-tolerated slavery and man-made famine. Only in 1998, famine affected over one million people in Bahr El Ghazal. Over 4 million people are internally displaced.

BACKGROUND

The civil war is waged by both sides in direct contravention of humanitarian law, with serious effects on the civilian population. As a strategy of war the Government has, for example, armed Baggara militias to divide southerners and weaken the support base of the **Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA)**. The effect has been that the impoverished Baggara, motivated by the prospect of booty (Dinka cattle, grain, children, women, grazing land and water resources) have displaced, killed or captured civilians and stripped them of meager assets that provide the means of survival in a harsh land.

The SPLA strategy of 'taxation' or diversion of relief food from a starving civilian population also increases their vulnerability. SPLA sieges of government towns have the most impact on civilian populations who depend on trade outside the towns for their livelihood. Canada is, however, encouraged by the ongoing work to identify the most vulnerable through the 'Joint Targeting and Vulnerability Task force' of the **Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA)** and **Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS)**.

Notwithstanding limited access to the **Nuba Mountains** by international observers, there is evidence of the wide scale violation of human rights in the region. Independent observers report that, in addition to aerial bombardments on civilian installations, government military columns devastated villages, burned crops, vandalized churches and looted livestock, virtually depopulating vast areas of the Nuba mountains. International NGOs, including Médecins Sans Frontières and the Norwegian Peoples Association, have reported the bombing of hospitals clearly marked with a standard red cross. The government has not been able to deal effectively with the well documented practice of slavery in contested parts of Sudan. By mid-1998, the government had apparently created 72 "Peace Villages" consisting of 170,000 people in the pursuit of - as President Bashir termed it - "peace by force" within the Nuba mountains. In discussions with President Bashir in May 1998, the **UN Secretary General Koffi Annan** was assured that the UN would be given access to the Nuba mountains in order to establish the humanitarian needs in the region. By the end of 1998, the government had not yet fulfilled this commitment. However, during a mission to Khartoum in January, 1999 by **UN Special Representative Tom Vraalsen**, the government indicated its agreement to an exploratory mission into the Nuba mountains in February, 1999.

With the resumption of its activities in Sudan in June, 1998, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been able to present courses on international humanitarian law to both sides. This included 31 senior SPLA officers in the Bahr el Gazal and 230 members of the Sudanese government armed forces and 180 policemen in Bentiu. Two sessions were also organized in Leer and Bentiu for 760 members of the government-supported Southern Sudan Defense Forces.

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