

1 Introduction

Sudan is a country in ongoing crisis, or to be more accurate, in ongoing crises, and fashioning a comprehensive, and comprehensible, policy on Sudan has proven to be no easy matter for Canada or other countries.

On October 26, 1999, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy and the Minister for International Co-operation, Maria Minna, announced several Canadian initiatives to bolster international efforts backing a negotiated settlement to the 43-year civil war in Sudan, including the announcement of an assessment mission to Sudan to examine allegations about human rights abuses, including the practice of slavery.

The need for more information is compounded by the difficulty of obtaining it, when so much of Sudan is closed territory for so much of the time. As result, observers often have to deal with numbers which just don't add up: such as Leonardo Franco, the UN Special Rapporteur, speaking of 6,000 houses burnt in the Ruweng area of South Sudan and 1,000 people displaced when, if the story has any truth to it, the numbers could well stand to be reversed: the average house in South Sudan's Western Upper Nile, the tukul, is usually home to about 6 people. Or when Christian Solidarity claims to have bought into freedom some 15,447 "slaves", mainly women and children, in Sudan since 1995 and the most credible Dinka activist and Save the Children Fund aver that there are far, far fewer documented cases of those freed. In fact, they estimate a total of about 15,000 people being illegally held as abductees.

The human toll in Sudan is horrific, whatever numbers are used. According to the United Nations, nearly two million people have died since 1983. In excess of four million people are internally displaced, dispossessed of their homes and separated from their families.

There are few other parts of the world where human security is so lacking, and where the need for peace and security - precursors to sustainable development - is so pronounced. Canada's commitment to human security, particularly the protection of civilians in armed conflict, provides a clear basis for its involvement in Sudan and its support for the peace process.

A War in Progress

Almost ten years ago, Alex de Waal of Africa Watch wrote a report on the war in Sudan which began with a presentation of "views of the war". The first held, then, and now, that the war was/is one the Moslem Arab North against the African, Christian, South.

A second view held that the war was/is one between the dominant centre and the ignored periphery, with the South being part, but not the only part, of the periphery. Witness conditions and conflict in the Nuba Mountains, the Red Sea Hills, or farthest Darfur. A third view attributed the war to a failure of leadership, which, according to some commentators, brought about, the collapse of the Addis Ababa Agreement, thus the resumption of war in the early 1980s and the