

have been away from their families from one to eight or ten years.

We knew that CEAWC had been created only since May 1999, and that for ten years before that, a group of Dinka leaders had been working to combat abductions. We were able to speak to their principal, James Agwair, who now also serves on CEAWC. He informed us that the Dinka Committee established sub-committees in the concerned provinces, gathered information, and follow individual cases. The children were given the option of going home or staying where they were. Some would go south again, some moved to Khartoum, some would stay where they were.

The Dinka Committee reunified 1,127 children in this way in the past ten years and received help from the Arab tribal leaders to do so. We take letters from the GOS to the Baggara tribal leaders (Rezgat, Messiriya), he said. When CEAWAC was established, we became part of it. We want to bring an end to this practice; it is a practice of war but we won't wait for peace to act.

We were later able to go with James Agwair to a "safe house" for abducted children in Khartoum where they are housed prior to re-unification. There were about 40 children present, and some had been there 3 to 6 years. Others have been there only a matter of months. They are all Dinka children, but from various regions. One boy was trying to join his mother in West Kordofan, but couldn't find her, because she moves around seasonally.

This house has been open to children for ten years. Sometimes Save the Children helps with feeding costs. There are, according to James Agwair, many obstacles because there is no money. He estimates that there are about 6000 abductees in South Darfur, and about 8000 in West Kordofan. We need two or three years of intensive work to get these individuals back, he thought.

This number corresponded more or less with a figure given by Save the Children UK and UNICEF.

UNICEF

Whatever the numbers, the situation is depressing. UNICEF is doing its best to change things, and to respond to change when it is driven by the GOS or activists such as James Agwair. We were told by UNICEF workers that the GOS sometimes intervene to secure the return of abducted children, and did so before CEAWC's creation, but GOS intervention seems to be ad hoc.

From a "proposal for decentralising the implementation of the abduction eradication project" prepared by the Sudan Country Office of UNICEF we have taken note of the following: "UNICEF is planning to advocate for mass voluntary retrievals. This can only succeed if the President and top government ministers, officials, the media, religious leaders, tribal leaders and intellectuals from the Baggara group participate in this national effort to end abduction.