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# South Sudan: A War-Torn and Divided Region

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*Girma Kebedde*

## SOUTH SUDAN: A WAR-TORN AND DIVIDED REGION

**S**OUTH SUDAN comprises ten states in three provinces: Upper Nile (Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity States), Bahr el Ghazal (West Bahr el-Ghazal, North Bahr el-Ghazal, El-Buheirat, and Warab states), and Equatoria (Bahr el-Jebel, East Equatoria and Western Equatorial states). The region as a whole covers an area of 638,148 square kilometers, just over one quarter of Sudan's total area. It is an area as big as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands combined. It occupies approximately one-third of Sudan's Nile Basin. In 1993, the population of the region was estimated at 7 million, which was slightly over one-quarter of the country's total population. Several diverse ethnic groups inhabit the region, the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk being the largest. With a population size of about 3.6 million (approximately 12 percent of the population of Sudan), the Dinka are the majority in the region. They are spread over a wide area of southern Sudan. The majority of them live in Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile Provinces. A significant number also live in the southern part of Southern Kordofan Province. The Nuer, a population of nearly 1.5 million (5 percent of the country's population) live between the Sobat and White Nile rivers in Upper Nile Province. They occupy extensive grasslands. The Shilluk live in the Malakal area along the west bank of the White Nile in Upper Nile Province.

Before the civil war that has affected the area since 1983, it was estimated that two-thirds of the population derived their living from pastoralism, supplemented by limited cropping of maize and sorghum. The principal areas of pastoralism are the western provinces of the Upper Nile state, Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, and parts of Bahr el Ghazal. The remaining third of the population were crop cultivators who supplemented their main livelihood by harvesting wild food resources such as plants, fish, and game animals. Conditions for crop cultivation are nearly always favorable to grow at least two rounds of crops annually since precipitation in the region is generally high. There is ample arable land. In Upper Nile Province, which is the southerly extension of

the great central clay plain of Sudan of which the Gezira is part, two-thirds of the land is potentially arable, and rainfall is adequate for crop cultivation without irrigation (Ministry of Information and Culture, 1971: 18). Livestock are the mainstay of the province. Even though the Sudd swamp absorbs most of Bahr el Ghazal, it possesses nearly a million feddans of land suitable for crop cultivation. Equatoria, which has the richest forest resources in the country, also has great agricultural potential; in the past, all major tropical crops have been grown in this part of the southern region, along the border with Uganda, Zaire and the Central African Republic.

A substantial part of the South—100,000 square kilometers—is essentially inundated by the rising flood waters of the Nile, creating the vast swamplands of Bahr el Jebel and Bahr el Ghazal, known as the Sudd. During the dry season rich grassy plains cover over two-thirds of the Sudd to which the seminomadic Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk inhabitants of the region bring their herds of cattle to graze. These three groups make up the majority of the transhumant pastoralists in the region, and possess more than four-fifths of southern Sudan's cattle population (Full, 1988: 65). In the Sudd there are immense amounts of fish. People fish during the dry season when flood waters recede and rivers dry up in isolated shallow ponds (Noordwijk, 1984: 136). During the periods of high water people retreat to the higher ground where they have semi-permanent homesteads and grow millet and maize and graze their livestock on rainfed pasture (Smith, 1992: 132). In the humid highland regions bordering Zaire and Uganda, people practice shifting cultivation with slash and burn techniques. Many areas of these remote and almost inaccessible high altitude regions of Bahr el Ghazal and Equatoria are off limits to pastoralism, owing to infestation by the tsetse fly, particularly during the long rainy season.

The lack of development in southern Sudan has a long history. The region has never received its fair apportionment of development resources and political power, whether before or after independence. Under British rule, much of the political, economic, and infrastructural development occurred in the North, particularly in the fertile central savanna plains adjoining the Blue Nile River. What little economic and social services were established in the South under the British were concentrated primarily in Equatoria since they had control of this province long before they reached the migratory pastoral population further north. At any rate, after 58 years of British rule, the South entered independence having “only five university graduates, one secondary school, a handful of secondary school graduates, five junior administrative officers—and no doctors, engineers, agronomists, or other experts; and no industries, trade, or any economic projects” (Garang, 1985: 23). Ever since independence in 1956, successive national governments have deliberately ignored the economic, social, and cultural development of the South. Even

### 3. *South Sudan*

though relative peace and tranquillity prevailed in the region in the 1970s, the central government made very little effort to improve the living standards of the people. Most of the population of the region lack access to such basic social services as education and health facilities, clean water, and electricity. International organizations of various kinds, United Nations agencies including World Food and Agricultural Organizations, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Health Organization, provide the few services that exist.

The region's rate of infant mortality is one of the highest in Africa. Estimates for various parts of the region range between 100 and 250 per 1,000 live births (House, 1989: 202). Those who survive their first birthday usually decline in health once they are weaned. Life expectancy at birth in 1991 was less than 49 years. The incidence of malaria, which has significantly been reduced in most African countries, remains the major killer in southern Sudan. Other preventable diseases such as measles, infantile gastro-enteritis, tuberculosis, and diarrhoeic disorders are major causes of death as well. The lack of safe, clean water is the major cause of ill-health as the main sources of water for the great majority of the population are streams, rivers and wells that harbor numerous tropical diseases. In 1990, primary-school age enrollment was 49 percent of the whole Sudan (World Bank, 1993: 293), but only 16 percent in Upper Nile and 6 percent in Bahr el Ghazal (House, 1989: 128). Only one in five southern Sudan's estimated one million school-age children are able to attend school. Only 5 percent of these students are girls. The three regional capitals of Juba, Malakal, and Wau—which house only three percent of the region's population—lack most basic urban amenities. These so-called urban centers are no more than agglomerated villages without any industrial establishment worthy of a name. Since the resumption of the second civil war, these cities have deteriorated to the point where they have essentially become almost uninhabitable. In the past, the inhabitants of these regional centers depended heavily for employment in the public sector and small-scale informal enterprises. With little development taking place in the region, however, jobs were extremely scarce. Many southerners migrated to northern cities or traveled long distances to large-scale agricultural schemes to work as manual laborers during the harvest season.

Transportation infrastructure is poorly developed. The region is served by no roads or rails for the most part. Rivers are the main channels of communication. Khartoum is more than a week away by steamer from Juba. Wau, Bahr el Ghazal's capital, is the only city that is linked with the North by a railway line. Large areas of the region are inaccessible during the four months of rainy season when roads and rails are flooded for the most part. Much of the South is cut off from the capital during this period.

## **The Birth of The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)**

In July 1983, a number of mutinous army units in southern Sudan convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and founded the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and its armed wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/A). The founders elected Colonel John Garang commander of both the SPLM and SPLA. With the birth of SPLM/A, the South seemed to unite for a common cause. The members of SPLM/A's 13-person High Command represented all the major ethnic groups in the region, even though the bulk of the SPLM/A rank and file initially came from the Dinka and Nuer, the two largest ethnic groups in the South. The movement brought in many of the younger generation of educated southern Sudanese. In the past, before the emergence of the SPLM/A, the internal southern leadership was fragmented. There was a proliferation of political parties and movements such as Southern Sudan Liberation Front, South African National Union, Sudan African Liberation Front, Southern Front Party, and Sudan Republican Party; all failed to end southern miseries because of lack of political unity and perspicacious leadership. SPLM/A's professed goal to end religious and racial discrimination as well as political and economic injustice was positively received by many in the South. The founding of the SPLM/A looked to have finally unified the region.

From the outset SPLM/A pronounced that its ultimate goal was not to separate the South from the North but to establish a "secular, non racial, federal Sudan." It opposed any attempt to divide Sudan on the basis of religion, ethnicity or any sort of cultural differentiation. On this matter, its manifesto unambiguously declared: "The South is an integral and inseparable part of the Sudan. Africa has been fragmented sufficiently by colonialism, and its further fragmentation can only be in the interest of her enemies." (SPLM/A, 1983: 43). This stance won the SPLM/A political support from many northern Sudanese democrats at home and broad, including the National Democratic Alliance (an amalgam of northern Sudanese opposition groups). Many northern opposition groups also supported SPLM/A's unity position. It is ironic that while over the last 13 or so years the SPLM/A has been pushing for a united Sudan free of any discrimination among its diverse national groups, successive ruling regimes in Khartoum have been pursuing policies that discriminate and divide Sudan.

The SPLM/A achieved several battle successes against the government Army during its early years. During the dry season of 1987, it captured Jokau, Pibor, and Tonga. By 1988, it took Pochalla, and Boma along the Ethiopian border, Kapoeta near the Ugandan border, and Shambe, Ler, and Yirrol in the center of the region. It even expanded its armed activities outside the South, penetrating into Blue Nile and Kordofan Provinces. By the end of 1988, it

expanded further to the west and controlled vast areas and a number of garrison towns in Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal Provinces. By the beginning of 1989, it controlled nearly all of southern Sudan and forced the Mahdi defense minister to publicly admit that the war was unwinnable by military might and that political solutions be sought instead. SPLM/A's battle victories added fuel to the political turmoil in Mahdi's coalition government and provided a conducive environment for a group of Islamic military officers, backed by the NIF, to overthrow the Prime Minister.

Ethiopia's contribution to the SPLM/A military success in the 1980s was considerable. The Mengistu regime not only gave sanctuary to the SPLM/A's leadership but also supplied advanced weapons, equipment and medicine and logistical support to the movement. Thanks to the support of the Addis Ababa government, it managed to publicize its position to the world and win the propaganda war against the Khartoum regime to achieve international legitimacy. Its commander-in-chief, John Garang, looked a credible leader to most African nations—as someone who could save Sudan from degenerating into political disintegration.

However, too much dependence on Ethiopia and especially close association with its ruthless leader, Colonel Mengistu, later became a tremendous liability from which the SPLM/A has yet to recover. Following the overthrow of Colonel Mengistu in May 1991, the new Ethiopian rulers ejected the SPLM/A from its strategically vital military training bases in western Ethiopia. Overnight the SPLM/A lost all material and logistical support it had been getting from Ethiopia. This huge setback caused traditional rivalries and power struggles to surface within the movement. Some members of the High Command started to accuse the movement of human rights abuses, dictatorial leadership, and favoritism towards the Dinka ethnic group.

In August 1991, Commander Riak Machar, a Nuer, and two of his colleagues (Lam Akol and Gordon Kong) staged a coup to seize control of the movement from its founding leader, John Garang de Mabior, a Dinka. The coup attempt failed but led to the division of the movement along ethnic lines. Worst of all, and much to the delight of the Bashir-Turabi regime, it set off bloody battles between the Dinka and the Nuer, the two largest ethnic groups in the region. Thousands of people were killed and several hundred thousand civilians perished in the ensuing famine.

The SPLM/A thus split into two groups: the main Dinka-dominated force (now called SPLM/A-Mainstream) led by Garang and the splinter group (called SPLM/A-United, but later renamed the Southern Sudan Independence Movement/Army-SSIM/A) headed by Machar. The former controlled most of Equatoria while the latter controlled most of Upper Nile province. The two groups continued to engage in several ferocious battles in 1991 and 1992 and

intermittent clashes in 1993 and 1994 as well. The fighting between the factions inflicted as much destruction on local people and livelihood as did government offenses. Khartoum did everything in its power to exploit this fratricidal infighting by bribing and supplying weapons to dissident Nuer guerrilla forces. This divide-and-conquer policy is one of the key elements helping the regime to sustain the war and to regain most of the territory it had lost in the late 1980s. However, it has been unable to bring Garang and his armed forces to their knees, in spite of its equipment, troop and air superiority.

The division in the southern movement took a dramatic turn when in June 1996 the leaders of a splinter group (Riak Machar, Kerubino Kwanyim Bol, and Lam Akol) declared their defection and signed a "Political Charter" with the government calling for the resolution of the conflict through peaceful and political means. Bol was one of the founding members of SPLM/A in 1983 and second in command to Col. John Garang. He later joined the splinter group SPLM/A-United formed in 1991. Riek Machar, signing for the Southern Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) said: "I have come to contribute to the breaking of the barriers of mistrust, hatred, and lack of confidence which have characterized relations between north and south Sudan for the last 40 years." (Reuters, 10 April 1996.). It is ironical that Machar, who had vowed to separate the South from the North and accused Garang of holding a united Sudan view, would cooperate with a regime that is extremist by any standard. Interestingly enough, Dr. Hassan al-Turabi received these three former SPLM/A members and later witnessed the signing. By all account, Dr. Turabi is responsible for the escalation of the war and for unleashing the forces of intolerance against the southerners.

The signing of the "Political Charter" has not broken the war stalemate. Instead, it has deepened ethnic divisions and animosity between and among the Dinka and Nuer tribal groups. Armed and financed by the Khartoum regime, the Machar and Kerubino forces continue to fight against the SPLM/A-mainstream forces. Kerubino now heads a government militia which has brought untold destruction to southern Sudan in the last two years. The African Human Rights Watch has reported that "in alliance with Sudan government, his troops routinely attacked, looted, and burned civilian villages, killing civilians, wiping out their cattle and grain, and sparking a need for emergency relief." (Human Rights Watch: Africa, 1996: 57). This group routinely impedes the delivery of relief food to SPLM/A-controlled areas.

After six years of fighting with Machar's breakaway faction and renewed government offensives, Garang's SPLM/A-Mainstream is now on the rebound. It has been rearmend by Sudan's neighbors, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea, who fear Sudan's support for armed Islamic groups and other anti-government elements in the region. Many officers from break-away factions

have rejoined the Mainstream forces in Nasir region of Upper Nile Province. In October 1995, the SPLM/A launched its largest antigovernment attack in years and captured Parajok. In May 1996 SPLM/A forces gained victory over the government army and captured once again the towns of Pachalla in the Upper Nile Province and Khor Yabus in the southern part of the Blue Nile Province. In the first half of 1997, SPLM/A forces dislodged government soldiers from several major towns in southern and southeastern Sudan. By mid-1997, the SPLM/A controlled about two-thirds of the South and a swath of territory in the east near the Eritrean border. The victory of Laurent Kabila in Zaire (now renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo) has redrawn the military equation in favor of SPLM/A. The Islamic government in Sudan was close to Mobutu Sese Seko, the ousted ex-Zaire's dictator, and often used the northern part of Zaire to keep the SPLM/A in check. The SPLM/A is Laurent Kabila's supporter and Mobutu's downfall has helped it to regain control over large areas in the South.

### **Consequences of the War**

The impact of the war has been devastating for both the people and the environment in the war-torn region of the South and has further affected the lives of all Sudanese in one way or another. The human cost of the war is quite substantial. No one knows for certain the precise number of people who have perished since the war began again in 1983. Estimates suggest that the war has already claimed over 1.5 million lives, starved to death several hundred thousand people, and displaced over three million (as many as one-half of these fled north to refugee makeshift shelters around Khartoum and Omdurman, trekking a perilous 1,000 miles). By the end of the 1980s, more than one-half million people sought refuge in neighboring countries (Woodward, 1990: 218-219). A generation of children and young people have lost their lives. Of the 250,000 or so people who perished owing to war and famine in 1988 alone, one-half were children (Minear, 1991: 6). Those 'fortunate' enough to survive are left with permanent disabilities that cannot be repaired at later ages even if their diets improve.

Fleeing the war zone does not necessarily guarantee safety. When twelve hours of torrential rain fell on Khartoum on 4 August 1988, over three-quarters of the city was under water, rendering an estimated million and a half people homeless. More than a million southern refugees living in makeshift shelters around the city were the hardest hit by the floodwaters. Hundreds died of diseases in the days and months following the disaster. As if this tragedy were not enough, toward the end of 1990 the government destroyed these makeshift camps and forced refugees to relocate 30 miles from Khartoum, in the midst of a barren desert area with no water, food or electricity (*The New York Times*, 4

November 1990). According to *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), A French non-governmental organization, between 1991 and 1993 an estimated 350,000 refugees were forcibly—in some cases violently—relocate to inhospitable sites too far from Khartoum to seek employment opportunities (Hammond, 1994: 3). Even those southerners, especially children, who live among relatives or work in Khartoum have not escaped this forceful eviction. A Human Rights Watch (September 1995: 2) reported:

Since 1992 the government has engaged in a campaign of ‘cleaning up’ city streets by rounding up alleged street children, mostly from the displaced population, and sending them to special, state-run closed camps. . . . What is worse, the state authorities running the cleanup campaign and the camps often do not pay attention to the children’s protestations that they have families. One young man told Human Rights Watch that although he told the police and camp authorities that he had a job and a family, they ignored him. Another small child, about six years old when he was captured on his way to market, was too intimidated to tell the authorities that he had a family, nor did they ever ask, in the more than two years he has been kept in the camp. Children have been separated for years, and remained separated, from their families, whose frantic search for their missing children is not assisted at all by the government.

The flow of refugees from the civil war into neighboring countries continues, often at the rates of tens of thousands every year. Thus far, over 500,000 southerners have been forced to flee and seek refuge in neighboring Ethiopia, Uganda, Zaire, and the Central African Republic. Uganda is the main recipient of Sudanese refugees. According to the UHNCR there are 209,796 refugees in Uganda, 110,000 in Zaire, 63,000 in Ethiopia, and 41,000 in Kenya (Miheisi, 1996: 6). These people remain trapped in disease-prone refugee camps, uprooted from their culture, their traditional way of life, and with no means to support themselves.

Whereas those who have fled to the neighboring countries receive relief help and some degree of security from the international humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), those internally displaced southern civilian populations continue to endure untold suffering at the hands of their own government. Since the main instrument of international refugee laws, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, specifically defines refugees as “being outside their country of nationality,” the UNHCR’s mandate is to assist and protect those refugees who have crossed international borders. Even though the UNHCR has in recent years been involved in a number of humanitarian operations on behalf of internally displaced people (for instance, in ex-Yugoslavia, Afghanistan,

Ethiopia, and Iraq), its effort in Sudan has failed because of the unwillingness of the Sudanese government to allow the international community to provide help and protection to war-displaced citizens within its national boundaries. Having lost their homes, their jobs, and their livelihoods, the three million or so internally displaced peoples of southern Sudan continue to endure more suffering. Those who fled to the Khartoum metropolitan area find themselves thrown in make-shift camps with very little support coming from the national government or humanitarian organizations and are constantly harassed by the Sudanese security forces. Hundreds of thousands of civilian populations constantly move from one place to another inside the southern region, seeking safety and food. More often than not for these people, such moves lead only to more suffering, insecurity, and death. Because these people find themselves within the conflict area, humanitarian interventions on their behalf are severely curtailed. Few humanitarian organizations are willing to work in combat zones. Those who are willing to take risks (such as the Red Cross, CARE, and *Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders*) are routinely prevented from providing emergency food relief and medicine by combating groups. These displaced people are also forced by one side or another to give military service, and accused by one group or another of supporting an enemy.

Preventable diseases have continued to wipe out tens of thousands of people in the South. The war has made it impossible to distribute medicine against river blindness and vaccinations of measles and polio. Even under normal circumstances, most people in the region are unreachable because of poor infrastructure and heavy rainfall which makes roads unusable for much of the year. About 80 percent of the world's guinea worm cases are found in Southern Sudan, mainly because the war has made it difficult to tackle the water-borne parasite which burrows into its host. Malaria kills more people now than 10 or 15 years ago. The anopheles mosquito, the variety that carries malaria, has become rampant in many parts of the region. Incidents of river blindness are on the rise. Tuberculosis has re-appeared one of the leading causes of death among the war-affected populations (see Jok's article in this volume). In 1995, former United States President Jimmy Carter moderated efforts to allow relief workers to treat cases of river blindness and guinea worm diseases in the region. That effort was terminated with the expiration of the cease-fire.

Civilian death and casualties caused by land mines are on the rise in the region as well. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, there are an estimated 500,000 to 2,000,000 land mines seeded in Southern Sudan (Battersby, 1994: 6-7). Most roads and trails throughout the region are mined. The mining of most roads has severely hampered the delivery of relief supplies. Mines have also cut off access to water wells, arable land, and market areas. Land mines are especially rampant around the principal towns of Juba,

Wau, Bor, Torit, and Kapoeta. The SPLM/A and other antigovernment guerrilla forces heavily rely on land mines to ambush armored government troops. The government also lays mines in strategic locations to inhibit the movement of enemy guerrilla forces.

The devastation of the regional economy is enormous. Exchanges of goods and services in the region have dwindled as a result of a total collapse of commercial networks. The war has disrupted traditional trading patterns, closing trade routes to the north. The break-down of markets has especially affected producers who depend on livestock sales for grain. The amount of land under cultivation has contracted due to large exodus of the labor force, as many of the young and able-bodied have either been forced to flee to refugee camps or recruited into the various guerrilla armies. The cattle population has contracted as well, owing to looting by Arab militias. Livestock is important for food security in the region, as milk and meat form part of the basic diet of most of the population. The disruption of veterinary services has also contributed to the reduction of the cattle population. Additionally, intra-SPLM/A fighting has resulted in cattle raiding, looting of food reserves, the total destruction of communities and their economic and social infrastructure, and the collapse of civil institutions. Consequently, a large proportion of the population of the region have become dependent on outside food aid.

Both the government and the SPLM/A have little or no concern for the rights of civilians, especially the government and the peoples militia it sponsors. Both sides have used food as a political weapon, even though they aggressively denied applying such a stratagem. The government has prevented relief food from reaching the starving civilians in the South, whom it accuses of being sympathetic to the SPLM/A. It has prohibited relief agencies to undertake humanitarian activities in SPLM/A-held territories and kicked out those defying the official insurrections. It has even denied relief services to those people living in places under its control—civilians in towns such as Juba, Wau, and Malakal, for instance—simply because they happen to be southerners and use relief food to feed its army. The government not only denies food to civilians most in need, but also uses aerial bombardment against civilian targets as principal tactics of war. In 1991, its Air Force bombed innocent southern Sudanese refugees returning to Sudan from their sanctuaries in Ethiopia after being expelled by the new Ethiopian government. The SPLM/A has also prevented food reaching its own civilian population by mining roads and assaulting relief convoys on the grounds that the government would use the food to feed its army. The liberation front is also suspicious that the government may use food as cover to transport weapons to replenish its army. Even when the two sides agreed to a cease-fire to allow relief to reach the besieged civilian population—as in the 1989 massive international relief effort, Operation

Lifeline—it was not for humanitarian purposes but for military and political considerations: to buy time to consolidate, regroup and rearm (Minear, 1991: 66).

During its nearly fourteen years of existence, the SPLM/A has acted more like a military organization and less like a liberation movement. The SPLM/A has not been able to bring any semblance of order to the so-called liberated areas, let alone build political and social institutions that overshadow tribal allegiance. Instead, the movement has often been reported to have been engaged in the destruction of vital economic and social infrastructure: blowing up bridges and rail lines, mining roads, shooting down civilian air craft with no military purpose (for instance, shooting down planes departing from Malakal in 1986 and 1987), destroying telecommunication lines, disrupting agricultural production, pilfering cattle and grain from civilians under its control, attacking convoys seeking to supply food and medicine to besieged civilians (the very people it claims it is fighting for), and forcing very young boys to join its guerrilla force. For most boys army life begins as soon as they are old enough to handle a rifle, usually at 12 or 13 years old. Forced conscription has driven many young boys out of their villages, fleeing to the North or to refugee camps in neighboring countries. Some 20,000 under-age boys are estimated to have been coerced into joining the SPLM/A forces. The SPLM/A has also attacked small tribal groups—the Mundari, Didinga, the Murle, and the Bari tribes, for instance—for their neutrality or lack of support. As a whole, the population in the regions the SPLM/A claims it has liberated are far from enjoying their basic human rights. Many hate the liberation movement as much as they hate the government army. For many in the South both the SPLM/A and the government are equally responsible for the destruction of their lives and their environment. With respect to the human rights of children, especially, both the government and the SPLM/A have failed to uphold principles stipulated under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1930 International Labor Organization (ILO) Forced Labor Convention (No. 29) concerning Forced or Compulsory Labor, the 1957 ILO Convention (No. 105) concerning the Abolition of Forced Labor, the 1973 ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), the African Charter, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to prevent and punish such abuses.

In many areas of the southern regions and bordering provinces, for instance, southern Darfur and Kordofan, law and order is carried out by the local militia, not by authorized state institutions. Arab militia, especially Baggara and Rizeigat militias, which were deliberately created and armed by the central government to impede the expansion of the southern rebellion, are using their weapons to attack and pillage neighboring non-Arab communities. While thousands have been forced to flee their land as a result, some ethnic groups

have opted to stay and defend themselves by creating militia armies of their own, armed with heavy weapons, including Kalashnikov AK 47s and bombs. Such confrontations have degenerated into ethnic wars involving cattle raiding, killing countless innocent people, and burning crops and destruction of entire villages. The impact of the war on the Dinka tribe is particularly profound. Tens of thousands of Dinka people have lost their lives, many have been displaced, and their cattle, which play vital social and economic roles, have been stolen by Arab militias and non-Arab tribal enemies.

There is also another ugly impact of the war: a booming slave trade. Slavery in Sudan dates back to the early 19th century when relentless waves of Arab slave raiders went deep into southern Sudan and forcefully stole away young and able-bodied Africans. Even though slavery and slave trade were abolished during the British colonial administration, northern Sudanese Arab Muslims continued, albeit clandestinely, to raid southern Sudanese villages for slaves to be sold in northern Sudan as laborers in farms and as domestic servants or to be exported to other Arab countries. For years successive regimes in Khartoum have denied the re-emergence of slavery and slave trade in the country. However, recent independent studies and Human Rights Watch reports indicate that northern Arabs routinely abduct southern young boys and girls and sell them hundreds of miles away in the North. In 1987, in a detailed study based on field work by two professors—Dr. Suleyman Ali Baldo and Dr. Ushari Ahmed Mahmud of the University of Khartoum—discovered the existence of a well organized enslavement of southern populations. Following the publication of this study two independent Khartoum newspapers showed as evidence several run-away slave children in the capital. Other international and national organizations have also investigated and documented slave trading in the country including the United Nations Labor organization (1993), the U.S. State Department (1992), the Anti-Slavery Society (1987), the African Human Rights Watch, and Southern Sudanese organizations such as Pax Sudani, the Southern Sudanese Community in America, and the Southern Sudanese Resource Center (Alley, 1996: 1).

A report written in 1995 by the Comboni Fathers, Catholic missionaries in Sudan declared that slavery is not a thing of the past. It said: “Nothing has changed in the way of life of these Arab groups for the past one hundred years. Their only progress has consisted in the provision of large amounts of modern weapons and up-to-date transportation. The time of long lines of enchained slaves marching north is over. Now truckloads of children are seen moving the same traditional direction.” (Gregory, 1996: 37).

This abominable practice has gotten worse since the resumption of the civil war in the South as the Sudanese troops and government-armed Arab militias conduct their war of attrition against southern populations perceived to

be the support base of the SPLM/A. As one eye-witness-based report put it: “The army and militias organize so-called ‘Ghazzu’, or raids, into southern villages or the Nuba Mountains, burning the settlements and killing all the men who do not succeed in escaping. The survivors, invariably children and women, are then rounded up, divided into lots and split up as war booty between the troops. The women and children are then transported to the north where they are either sold, presented as gifts on special occasions, or otherwise shipped-off to be sold at a premium in the rich Arab states of the Gulf or North Africa” (Samboma, 1995: 1).

In the late 1996, the Christian Solidarity International (CSI), a Zurich-based humanitarian organization, reported to have redeemed nearly 60 slaves—mostly women and children—in the Province of Bahr el Ghazal. Testimonies of freed slaves revealed consistent patterns of sexual abuse, beating, forced Islamization, and denial of adequate food. One of the slaves, a young mother, told CSI the following:

The Arab militia came to my village early one morning in January 1995 while I was sleeping with my three children. We ran outside, but immediately surrounded by Arabs on horses. We were forced to walk at gun-point. My blind husband was left behind. The raiders forced me to carry their booty on my head and my youngest child, Deng, on my back. My other two children Akok and Kawac had to walk behind us. They both died of thirst during the long march to Dagg, near Saddama. There Deng and I were separated. He went to the home of our captor, Abdullah, while I was sold to a man named Sama. Sama already had two wives and used me as a concubine. He made me give birth to my little girl Achai. Sama was a cruel man who said his baby Achai was as worthless as a child of a dog. Sama beat me, while his wives made me work hard, grinding grain and fetching water, while they were idle. They gave me no money, no clothes and all I had to eat was the remnants of their food. Soon my clothes perished, and I was left completely naked. Sama also gave me the Muslim name Kaddija and forced me to pray in the Islamic way. I tried to resist, but they beat me with big bamboo sticks. One day, I ran away and found a man from my tribe who took me to an Arab trader. This trader bought me from Sama and then sent me here to Manyiel with another trader. I have been here for over one month, but cannot leave because my family does not have the money and cows demanded by the trader. He says he spent good money to buy me from Sama, and must be paid before I can go home (*Africa News*, November 1996: 1).

It is clear that slavery is a thriving practice in Sudan and the government of Sudan actively encourages it. One Arab slave trader who sold a Dinka boy to CSI spoke openly about the slave trade and the involvement of the government army, the PDF, and other government-backed militias:

The slave raids are undertaken by the PDF, with support from the regular army. . . . In addition to the regular army, two NIF organizations, one called "Birr" (Benevolence) and the other called "Jihad" (Islamic Striving or Holy War), supply the PDF with horses, weapons and communication. These militias on horseback then accompany the military train from Khartoum. In the South, they burn villages and catch slaves. The government of Sudan knows everything they do. Those who go on the raids do so mainly for grain. They take slaves and sell them to cattle owners for about one cow. I don't know how many slaves there are in the North, but there are many. Most of the cattle owners have at least one slave. Most of the slaves are treated brutally and are in a terrible condition. If a slave resists his master he can be burnt alive. I condemn totally slavery and related atrocities. It is not right for Muslims to take slaves. I am doing a good thing by bringing children back. I do it to help them (CSI, 1996: 2).

Today, estimates put the number of Southern Sudanese taken into slavery to be over 200,000 (Alley, 1996). Most of these are women and children; the men are usually killed during the raids. Most of the cattle owning Arabs in southern Kordofan and southern Darfur have at least one slave per household, according to Sudanese Christian organizations. The central government not only tolerates this atrocious practice but also encourages it as a weapon of war against SPLM/A. The slave raids are usually accompanied by the looting of cattle and the destruction of villages.

Many Christian groups and other humanitarian organizations working in Sudan are increasingly involved in liberating enslaved children by purchasing them back from slave raiders and owners. Bishop Macram Max Gassis of Sudan testified before a United States congressional committee in 1996 that his church had been instrumental in the freedom of 50 abducted children. The Bishop added: "Their parents or relatives approached me after having identified their children and needed money to be given to the abductors in order to liberate them." (Gregory, 1996: 38). Unfortunately, this humanitarian help is having unintended consequences. Slave raiders have increased their onslaught to benefit from increased slave buy-back activities by humanitarian organizations.

The devastation to the lives and sources of livelihood of the citizens of southern Sudan is immeasurable. The war is being fought on their farmland, pasture, villages, towns, and market places. The war has destroyed their basic services such as schools, clinics, roads, mills, drinking water facilities and commercial outlets, services that are in short supply during the peace times. In the battlefield, it is their children that pay the ultimate heavy price. The combatants on both sides are young southerners. As Berkeley recently noted:

In the Sudanese People's Armed Forces, the Government army, 90 percent of the rank and file are southerners while 96 percent of the officer

corps come from northern or central Sudan. In the first five years of the current war, when three-quarters of a million southerners died, only 3,000 northern government troops were killed. Ninety-five percent of the combatants on both sides were southerners who fought for a variety of reasons, from paychecks to outright coercion (Berkeley, 1996: 60).

### Conclusion

It appears that Garang's military force is regaining some of the territories from which it was expelled by the government army four years ago and may achieve continued battlefield victories in the future. The question, however, is: which way is southern Sudan heading? This question remains unanswered. The leaders of the region appear to be in disagreement as to what the goal of their struggle ought to be. At this point no one knows for sure Garang's ultimate goal. Since the split, he has been consistently oscillating between unity and independence. He knows that his unionist stance is increasingly disfavored by many people in the South including the Dinka of Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal provinces. Many in the South feel that the nation state in which they had been coercively included by the British and northern Sudanese elites has been intolerant from the very outset. They believe their association with northern Sudan has brought them nothing but endless miseries, and they ought to break away from it. Many are also doubtful of the SPLM/A's goal of ultimately achieving a national victory over chauvinist, corrupt, and undemocratic northern rulers. They feel that liberating the South from northern political hegemony, cultural imperialism, and economic exploitation ought to be the primary objective of the SPLM/A.

The independence of Eritrea seems to have given some hope and comfort to pro-independence Southern Sudanese. They believe that the colonially drawn borders sanctioned by the Organization of African Unity no longer prevent movements seeking self-determination from seceding, as the case of Eritrea has demonstrated. Additionally, many southerners also cite the absence of traditional, religious, linguistic, or cultural ties between them and their northern counterparts in the North and that the North-South union from the very beginning failed to recognize the wishes and interests of the South.

On the other hand, there are some southerners who believe that autonomy within the federal system—as once sanctified by the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement—is the most realistic goal to pursue. However, many insist that this goal should not be negotiated with the regime of the day, especially with the current repressive Islamic military regime. The South must learn from its past experience that the northern ruling elites have repeatedly betrayed the South for too long. Any future political accord the South may enter with the North ought to be reached through constitutional changes where major issues such as religion and the state and regionalism, among others, are discussed and

resolved by all political parties representative groups in the country. At any rate, for the southern people any constitutional outcome that does not recognize Sudan's religious and ethnic diversities, that does not separate religion and the state, that does not recognize the historical, political and cultural necessity to provide for an autonomous self-administering status for the South, and a constitution that does not entitle regions with ownership and the right to use their own resources in ways of their choice, may not be acceptable. Without a secular constitution, many believe, it would be difficult to imagine Sudan remaining united.

One of the real problems of southern Sudan is that there is universal revulsion for northern political, economic and cultural hegemony but no solid unity to fight against it. The region is unable to do away with tribal animosities and distrust. Many southern elites continue to fall prey to divide and rule tactics of northern political elites. The division within the SPLM/A and the interethnic violence and warfare have immensely hurt the liberation movement. As long as the South remains divided, it can neither achieve military victory nor force the government to opt for peaceful resolution. The leaders of the region ought to know that the international community would also be less sympathetic to and supportive of their struggle if they fail to put aside their differences and stand united to advance their just struggle for self-determination.

There is, nonetheless, a greater danger for the South in lack of unity. It will not only encumber the chances of attaining independence or autonomy, but will lead to the fragmentation of the South itself. After all, the South is far from being homogeneous. It is diverse in its ethnic composition and religious beliefs. The region is inhabited by the Nilotic peoples such as the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk; the Nilo-Hamitic peoples such as the Bari, Latuko, Toposa, and Murl; and the Sudanic peoples such as the Madi, Belanda, and Azande. The people of the region speak over a hundred different languages. Many southern tribes, especially those in the province of Equatoria, have long-held hostilities and suspicions toward the Dinka. The Dinka, the majority tribal group accounting for about 40 percent of the population of the South, had control of the South when the region was accorded autonomy in the 1970s and many smaller tribes now fear a return to Dinka domination of the South as one region. There also exists profound aversion toward the SPLM/A for atrocities it has committed on many occasions against civilians reluctant to support the movement. Some minority tribal groups say they favor neither a united Sudan nor a united South, and are determined not to accept any political arrangement short of a complete political autonomy for their own individual homeland.

There is also a growing pessimism among the population and southern political leaders about the outcome of the war. Some rebel leaders even concede that neither side can win the war. The war has already caused great loss of lives

and immense destruction of the socio-economic fabric of the South. Attempts for a negotiated peace settlement have failed and cease-fire negotiations are going nowhere. The best hope of these leaders is that increasing national and international pressure will lead the regime in Khartoum to share power or even be willing to grant autonomy to the South. They consider the latest United States' support for Sudan's unfriendly neighbors and the diplomatic and economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations as good steps towards this end. These leaders are also amenable to a confederation arrangement between the North and the South. In this scenario, the two parts would have a separate sovereign constitution. The South would have a secular constitution, while the North may opt to govern itself on Islamic principles. A joint secular Central Authority would be created to handle matters of common interest. The Khartoum regime has thus far shown little interest in this possible solution.

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