

Sudan photo display text

(2) Sudan, the largest country in Africa, is a mainly rural country of extraordinary social diversity. A multitude of cultures and ethnic groups co-exist. Over 400 languages are spoken.

About two thirds of Sudan's 26 million people live in the north where Arabic is the main language and Islam the majority religion. The south is populated by a mixture of peoples who regard themselves as non-Arab Africans. Most educated southerners are Christian and speak English, but the majority in the south speak their own languages and follow their own religions.

On 30 June 1989, soldiers led by Brigadier Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir swept away a democratically elected government and promised a revolution of "National Salvation". They have since delivered a human rights disaster.

The military government holds onto power through a policy of repression. Throughout the country, from cities to the countryside, it has systematically violated the human rights of ordinary Sudanese as it crushes opposition to its own ideology of political Islam.

The south and adjacent areas continue to be devastated by a bitter civil war which began in 1983 between government forces and the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which has been split into two factions since 1991.

Over a million people have lost their lives. Thousands of people have been victims of political killings and "disappearances" by security forces as well as by the SPLA. Millions have fled their homes and are reduced to dependency on food relief.

(3) "I vow here before you to purge from our ranks the renegades, the hirelings, enemies of the people and enemies of the armed forces... Anyone who betrays this nation does not deserve the honour of living."

Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, President of Sudan, public rally, December 1989

Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, President of Sudan

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(4) Men, women and children, Muslims and Christians, city dwellers and peasants —none have escaped the persistent violation of human rights in Sudan.

The government has dismantled civil society. The press, the judiciary, political parties, trade unions, universities — all have been purged. Freedom of speech and association no longer exist in Sudan.

Street scene, Khartoum

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(5) Karshum Mango Atia, a Muslim of Nuba ethnic origin, was arrested in November 1992 in Port Sudan, where he worked as a primary school teacher. No reason for his arrest was given and his place of detention is unknown. Before leaving Port Sudan, Karshum Mango Atia commented to a friend:

"They can kill my body but they cannot kill my soul."

Since 1989 thousands of people have been detained without trial for non-violent opposition to the government. Many have been tortured and some have died in custody or "disappeared".

Karshum Mango Atia

(6) Many prisoners are held in secret detention centres known as "ghost houses" where they are routinely tortured.

"Have you ever tried to shut yourself in a toilet for four months? The temperature can reach 100°F (40°C)... There is the foul smell of your own body... And the fatal loneliness, and sadness. Sadness. And the fatal feeling of being defeated. The silence in a 'room' (ha! ha!) not more than 1m. by 1.5m. Exactly the size of a prayer mat. I was enjoying the periods of torture because I could smell fresh air, because the place of being beaten was outside. Most of the time."

A detainee held for four months in 1992 describes his experience in a letter to a friend after his release

(7) "I paid them their fine but I refused to take the lashes... The judge called a policeman...who... lashed me...I grabbed the whip and twisted. Then two or three policemen grabbed me...and they lashed me with my hands tied to my back."

A woman flogged for wearing trousers

The 1991 penal code contains cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments, including flogging, amputation, stoning and hanging.

Flogging of a man found guilty of drinking alcohol

© Magnum

(8) Over a million people from the south, displaced by human rights abuses, poverty and drought, have settled in squatter camps in Khartoum, only to face further harassment.

Women have been flogged for brewing alcohol, a traditional source of income in the south.

Street children have been beaten by police and forced into special schools. Those who try to escape are flogged and held in leg irons.

Shilluk family from the south in a squatter camp in the capital, Khartoum

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(9) The deliberate targeting of civilians has been a strategy used by all parties in the civil war.

Government forces and both factions of the SPLA have been responsible for killing tens of thousands of unarmed civilians, including defenceless children.

Civilian targets have been regularly bombed by the government.

Children practising air-raid drill, southern Sudan

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(10) The two factions of the SPLA control most of the countryside in the south of Sudan and adjacent areas.

Both SPLA-Mainstream and SPLA-United have been guilty of gross human rights abuses in the war zones. They have tortured and killed political prisoners.

SPLA-Mainstream soldier loading an anti-aircraft gun

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(11) A cycle of killings of civilians marks the conflict between the SPLA factions.

In 1993 Dinka SPLA-Mainstream soldiers in Upper Nile moved through scattered Nuer villages killing anyone they found. At Pagau, 32 women were shot and 18 children were locked in a burning hut.

In 1991 Nuer SPLA-Nasir (later SPLA-United) troops massacred thousands of Dinka civilians further south.

Woman killed in a massacre at Pagau village, May 1993

© Rory Nugent

(12) "The militia caught me in the forest. They beat me... When [the train] reached Kuom, they started putting little children in sacks."
A child abducted by government militia in February 1994

Hundreds of people in villages and cattle camps along the only railway line linking north and south Sudan have been massacred by government forces. Women and children have also been abducted.

Dinka cattle camp in northern Bahr al-Ghazal

© David Stewart-Smith/Katz

(13) "We were called for a Chiefs' meeting by the government, but...there was no meeting. We were all detained... One night...we were taken from the prison. They shot us. I was shot in the back of the head... all the others died but I survived."

A Nuba chief, survivor of a political killing in late 1991

Government forces have massacred thousands in the Nuba mountains, an area virtually closed to the outside world.

Nuba woman

© Jack Piccone/Network

(14) "We walked for a week carrying a few utensils, everything else we had to leave. I have nine children, the grown-up ones carried the young ones when they were too tired to walk... Every person loves their own place, I don't want to flee from Sudan to Uganda."

A woman who fled after government air raids and attacks by SPLA-United forces

It cost the UN over US\$200 million to run its 1994 food relief operation in Sudan. Emergency aid alone is not enough. Human rights abuses lie at the heart of Sudan's humanitarian disaster. Resources must be committed to finding solutions to Sudan's human rights problems.

Relief food drop, southern Sudan

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(15) THE NEED FOR ACTION

There is hope for the future of Sudan, but this future depends on respect for human rights.

The government and the SPLA must take immediate action to break the pattern of human rights abuses.

The government should:

- stop political killings and "disappearances" - stop torture - release all prisoners of conscience - end arbitrary detention without charge or trial - abolish cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments in law

Each faction of the SPLA should:

- stop political killings and "disappearances" - stop torture - release prisoners of conscience

The international community too must live up to its commitment to make human rights a reality in Sudan. It should:

- deploy an international civilian human rights monitoring body in all parts of Sudan - ensure that human rights guarantees are at the centre of any peace agreement in Sudan - support the Sudanese people in rebuilding the human rights movement in their country

Displaced children

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(16) "A message to my wife: To those who call to ask about me And those who are too scared to call on you; To those who stealthily knock on your door To tuck a few pounds into your fist And those who hurry from the other end of town In the blazing mid-day heat To offer help or just to wish you luck And those who, though willing, cannot stand by you because of their own poverty And helplessness; To those who dare to stretch out a hand of greeting And shake my children's hands And those who hide their concern to keep your spirits up; To those who publicly recall fond memories of me And those who are forced to drop me through the holes of their exhausted memory; To all of them, my darling, convey That they will in my heart of hearts stay."

Friends (an extract), written in prison by Kamal al-Gizouli. Adapted from the Arabic by Khalid Osman.

Northern Sudanese woman and child

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