

@Creating famine

Human rights abuse and humanitarian disaster

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There is a humanitarian disaster in Sudan. It is a disaster caused by war. Nearly 3 million people are displaced from their homes. The United Nations emergency appeal for 1994 estimated that 2.4 million people affected by war needed food aid. A total of 5.2 million were estimated to need other kinds of assistance.

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Since 1983 over 1 million of Sudan's 26 million people are estimated to have died because of conflict.

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The abuse of human rights lies at the heart of the war and the creation of this disaster.

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All parties to the conflict – the Sudan Government and each faction of the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) – have been ruthless in their assaults on civilians. There has been nothing accidental about these attacks. The aim has been to gain military advantage by killing non-combatants, by driving them from their land and by looting and destroying their means of livelihood.

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The central and southern parts of Upper Nile in south Sudan were pillaged between 1991 and 1993 as each faction of the SPLA exploited ethnicity to mobilize forces in a bitter internecine war. Thousands of civilians were deliberately and arbitrarily killed.

In northern Bahr al-Ghazal the Popular Defence Force (PDF) government

militia have burnt a swathe of scorched earth along the only railway line linking north and south Sudan. Thousands of ordinary villagers have been extrajudicially executed in raids since the start of the war. Women and children have been captured by PDF troops and taken into domestic slavery.

In the Nuba mountains of South Kordofan, government soldiers and militia have extrajudicially executed thousands more in carefully planned assaults to clear the civilian population from the mountains and to settle them forcibly in camps which the government calls "peace-villages".

The already weak infrastructure of the war zones has collapsed. Markets for grain and livestock exist as a shadow of their former extent, rendering subsistence farmers and herders, the majority of the population, vulnerable to the extremes of rain failure and severe flooding.

War has reduced the capacity of people to survive. Villages have been exposed to epidemic diseases such as kala-azar, which in some areas appear to have wiped out as much as 50% of the population.

But it is often the gross abuse of human rights that has caused people finally to flee, reducing them to dependency on famine foods gathered in the wild and food relief provided, in the main, by the UN and non-governmental relief agencies.



¶ blind man guided by a child in northern Bahr al-Ghazal

The displaced have congregated in camps inside the war zones, where they have been bombed by the government, attacked by rival factions of the SPLA and become prey to SPLA demands for recruits and labour. They have fled to northern Sudan to squat in Khartoum and other large cities, from where the government has forcibly deported them to ill-prepared camps out of sight and out of mind. They have ended up as refugees in neighbouring countries.

Vital relief aid will feed and sustain. But it cannot address the reasons why the humanitarian disaster has come into being.

For there to be a future for Sudan,

fundamental human rights must be respected. Without that respect the deep political cleavages which are destroying the country will persist.

The UN's appeal for funding for its 1994 emergency operation in Sudan called for donors to provide over \$US 200 million.

Amnesty International is calling on the member states of the UN and other appropriate inter-governmental organizations to additionally invest as a matter of urgency in finding solutions to the human rights problems which lie at the root of the creation of humanitarian disaster.

What can you do?

Join our campaign.

Contact the Amnesty International office in your country and ask how you can help.

For more information about Sudan, see Amnesty International's report, "Sudan: The tears of orphans - no future without human rights" (AI Index AFR 54/02/95), published in January 1995.