

@Behind the veil

Human rights abuses against women

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Women in Sudan have regularly been the victims of abuse by the Sudan Government and each faction of the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). They have been detained without charge or trial, flogged, raped, unlawfully killed and sold into domestic slavery. They form a disproportionate part of the displaced and refugee populations surviving on food relief provided, in the main, by the United Nations.

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In northern Sudan fewer women than men tend to be involved in political parties or overt opposition activity. However, the cultural context which leads them to be less active in formal politics gives women's public political action a special impact when it does take place.

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The women family members of 28 army officers summarily executed in 1990 organise regular non-violent protests against the government. They have been the target for harassment by the security forces. Their meetings have been disrupted, their homes searched and they have been repeatedly questioned. In 1992, 11 women activists were detained without charge or trial for three weeks.

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Women active in banned political parties have also been liable to

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detention without charge or trial. For example, Sara Nugdallah, a senior member of the banned Umma party, has been detained uncharged for short periods on several occasions. In 1994 she was arrested in April and held for 10 weeks. Other women have been made to report and wait each day in security offices for weeks on end.

The penal code makes certain activities which are traditional sources of income for women punishable by law – and then provides for the cruel, inhuman and degrading penalty of flogging in punishment. Hundreds of women have been arrested and flogged for brewing alcohol.

Sections in the penal code which define the offence of wearing clothing in public which "offends public morality" have been interpreted to particularly apply to women who do not cover their hair or wear flowing garments covering the shape of their



bodies. Many women have been flogged as a result.

It is in the war zones of the south and the Nuba mountains that many of the most gross human rights abuses have been perpetrated against women. There are many reports of rape by both government and SPLA soldiers, but in Sudan rape is considered a crime of such shame and degradation that few women

are prepared to speak about it. The true scale of these atrocities remains hidden.

Government forces have killed thousands of civilian women in attacks on villages in the Nuba mountains and the south. These assaults are indiscriminate – anyone who does not flee is liable to be killed.

Troops from a government-created militia, the Popular Defence Force (PDF), clearing a swathe of territory on each side of the only railway line linking north and south Sudan, have taken women and children captive and then sold them into domestic slavery. The authorities have done little to put this to an end.

Thousands of unarmed women have been deliberately and arbitrarily killed by each faction of the SPLA in bitter internecine fighting between 1991 and 1993 in Upper Nile. In just one incident among many,

in mid-1993 troops belonging to one faction, SPLA-Mainstream, shot 32 women dead and burned 18 children to death in a hut at the small village of Pagau.

Such attacks have destroyed the livelihood of rural people, forcing women to flee with their children to displaced persons camps in other parts of Sudan and refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Nearly a million southern Sudanese, the majority women and children, have fled to Sudan's capital, Khartoum. There they face new harassment as the authorities forcibly evict them from shantytowns and deport them to ill-prepared camps beyond the fringes of the city.

Amnesty International is calling on the government and both factions of the SPLA immediately to end human rights abuses against women.

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.



An Amnesty International briefing leaflet

Sudanese mother and child

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