



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH



# SUDAN SMALLEST WITNESSES

THE CRISIS IN DARFUR THROUGH CHILDREN'S EYES







H U M A N  
R I G H T S  
W A T C H

## Photographs by Paolo Pellegrin

*Cover:*

Forced from their homes, children study the Koran in a makeshift school set up at the Zalingei camp for internally displaced people in Darfur.

*Opposite:*

Women and children, displaced by the conflict, wait for food rations from international relief agencies.

*Preceding pages:*

A woman braves a rainstorm in a camp for internally displaced people.

*Inside back cover:*

A camp for internally displaced people in Darfur.

**Pseudonyms are used for all children cited in this document to preserve their privacy.**

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## THE DARFUR CONFLICT

One of today's gravest human rights and humanitarian crises is in the western Sudanese region of Darfur, a region the size

of California. Under the pretext of suppressing an internal rebellion, soldiers and Sudan-government backed Janjaweed militias have committed crimes against humanity against civilians. Human Rights Watch has documented massacres, executions of civilians—including women and children—acts of sexual violence, the burning of towns and villages, and the forced displacement of an estimated 2.4 million people. According to U.N. figures, as many as 200,000 people may have died since the beginning of the conflict in February 2003.

On a 2005 mission to refugee camps along Darfur's border with Chad, Human Rights Watch researchers gave children crayons and paper to draw while their families were being interviewed. Without any instruction or guidance, the children—some as young as 8—began to draw vivid and disturbing scenes of the violence and atrocities they had witnessed: the attacks by the Janjaweed, the aerial bombings by the Sudanese government, the rapes, the burning of entire villages and the flight to Chad.

Despite 14 Security Council Resolutions, the people of Darfur continue to suffer. Given the enormity of the suffering and the lack of a robust international response to the crisis, Darfur needs the world's urgent attention.



“I am looking at the sheep in the **wadi** [riverbed, or oasis]. I see **Janjaweed** coming—quickly, on horses and camels, with Kalashnikovs—shooting and yelling, ‘kill the slaves, kill the blacks.’ They killed many of the men with the animals. I saw people falling on the ground and bleeding. They chased after children. Some of us were taken, some we didn’t see again. All our animals were taken: camels, cows, sheep, and goats. Then the planes came and bombed the village.”

**Abd al-Rahman**, Age 13

# THE SMALLEST WITNESSES

In early 2005, two Human Rights Watch researchers, one a pediatrician, the other a lawyer, travelled to camps along the Chad-Sudan border housing refugee men, women and children from Darfur. The purpose of the mission was to examine the consequences of sexual violence on refugees as part of the conflict, and the services and protection provided. During interviews with refugees, their children were given paper and crayons to draw whatever they wished, while Human Rights Watch interviewed their parents and caregivers.

The first child Human Rights Watch encountered, an eight-year-old named Mohammed, had never held a crayon or pencil before. That is not uncommon in a region where education and other services are minimal in the rural areas and where children are often assigned chores such as shepherding from an early age. Indeed, although Mohammed could neither read nor write, he could count his sheep—12. So Mohammed gave the paper to his brothers. While we talked, they drew—without any instruction—pictures of *Janjaweed* on horseback and camel shooting civilians, Antonovs dropping bombs on civilians and houses, an army tank firing on fleeing villagers. Looking at the drawings, Mohammed whispered, “I am still scared of the *Janjaweed*. I remember the guns and the planes.” The last thing he said to Human Rights Watch researchers was “Darigi jugi—I need to go home.”

Over the following weeks of the research mission, these violent scenes were repeated in hundreds of drawings Human Rights Watch was given, depicting the attacks by ground and by air. Children drew the *Janjaweed* over-running and burning their villages and Sudanese forces attacking with Antonovs, military helicopters, MiG planes and tanks. With great detail, children drew the artillery and guns they had seen used, including Kalashnikovs, machine guns, bombs, and rockets. They also drew the attacks as they had seen them in action: huts and villages burning, the shooting of men, women and children, and the rape of women and girls.

Human Rights Watch had been documenting these crimes against humanity for months. On multiple missions to Darfur and Chad, researchers talked with hundreds of victims, and documented these crimes of war. However, there were rarely eyewitnesses other than the villagers who were attacked. This “ethnic cleansing” was always meant to be out of the public view. There are virtually no publicly available photographs and little footage of *Janjaweed* militias or Sudanese soldiers attacking villages.

However, thanks to the children of Darfur, we now have graphic representations of the atrocities. The drawings corroborate unerringly what we know of the crimes. From the point of view of humanitarian law, the drawings illustrate a compelling case against the government of Sudan as the architects of this man-made crisis in Darfur. Moreover, these drawings are not confined to a few children, but were drawn and given to Human Rights Watch by children who had fled from many villages and areas across Darfur. The drawings have a scale and sophistication that belies the government claims, and have a credibility that speaks for itself.

**“I am still scared of the *Janjaweed*. I remember the guns and the planes.” The last thing he said to Human Rights Watch researchers was “Darigi jugi – I need to go home.”**

## BACKGROUND

and most inaccessible regions, on Sudan's western border with Chad. Since 2003, the Sudanese government and the ethnic *Janjaweed* militias it arms and supports have committed numerous attacks on the civilian populations of the Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa and other ethnic groups perceived to support the rebel insurgency. Government forces oversaw and directly participated in massacres, summary executions of civilians—including women and children—burnings of towns and villages, and the forcible depopulation of wide swathes of land long inhabited by the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa. The *Janjaweed* militias, Muslim like the groups they attack, have destroyed mosques, killed Muslim religious leaders, and desecrated Qurans belonging to their enemies.

The government of Sudan is responsible for “ethnic cleansing” and crimes against humanity in the context of an internal conflict in Darfur, one of the world's poorest

**The government of Sudan is responsible for “ethnic cleansing” and crimes against humanity in the context of an internal conflict in Darfur**

Countless women and girls have been raped. Hundreds of villages have been bombed and burned. Water sources and food stocks have been destroyed, property and livestock looted. Mosques, schools and hospitals have been burnt to the ground. The United Nations estimates at least 2 million people have been left homeless in the fighting, of which more than 232,000 refugees have taken refuge in neighboring Chad, one of the poorest countries in Africa. Abandoned villages have been destroyed. Even when the villages are left intact, most refugees and displaced persons are unwilling to return to Darfur unless their security is protected. “If we return,” one refugee told Human Rights Watch, “we will be killed.”

Estimates of mortality in Darfur vary widely. It is likely that at least 200,000 people have died from violence, disease and other conditions related to forced displacement and insufficient access to humanitarian assistance. The toll of death and displacement continues to rise. Those left homeless are still at risk: the 2 million living in camps inside Darfur are poorly protected, and women and girls are frequently the targets of sexual attacks when they venture from the camp to find firewood and food for their animals.





*"We were running from the burning houses. **Janjaweed** and soldiers with guns and planes and bombs came, all together, quickly. They were shooting...my uncle was shot. I saw them taking women and girls away. All of us—my family—we were screaming and running from the **Janjaweed** to hide in the **wadi** [riverbed or oasis]...holding each other by the arms to keep together. Here in camp we are safe, but my father...he was lost."*

**Magda, Age 9**

# THE LAWS OF WAR

All parties to the armed conflict in Darfur are bound by the laws of war (also known as international humanitarian law). The laws of war can be found in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and its two

Additional Protocols of 1977. Sudan ratified the 1949 Conventions in 1957; most provisions of Additional Protocols I and II are recognized as customary law and must also be respected.

The fighting in Darfur is considered a non-international (or internal) armed conflict. Article 3, common to the 1949

## **The children's drawings explicitly show violations of the laws of war, as illustrated by extracts taken from the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols.**

Conventions, which applies during internal armed conflicts, prohibits murder, torture, mutilation, hostage taking, and outrages upon personal dignity such as rape. When grave acts of violence are committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack on a civilian population, they are considered crimes against humanity.

All parties to the conflict in Sudan must also respect the laws of war on the methods and means of warfare. They must distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants, and between civilian property and military objectives, and limit their attacks to combatants and military objectives. Attacks against civilians are prohibited, as are attacks on military targets that would cause indiscriminate or disproportionate harm to civilians. Also prohibited are acts or threats of violence intended to spread terror among the civilian population. The destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as food, agricultural areas for food production, crops and wells or water points, is also unlawful.

The children's drawings explicitly show violations of the laws of war, as illustrated by extracts taken from the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols.

# ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS

## *Protocol II, Article 13 on the Protection of the Civilian Population*

**“The civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population are prohibited.”**

Musa drew this picture of Antonovs bombing his village. His mother, father, and brothers were all killed. Their uncle told the family’s story:

*“It was July 2003. At 6 a.m. the Sudanese government soldiers and **Janjaweed** came by car, tank, horse, camel, and on foot. There were three or four villages in our area, with a total population of maybe 1,200. Men, women, and children were killed, some by bombing, some by shooting. Some ran away. All our livestock, property, and food were taken. Then the village was burned: Some huts were set on fire by the **Janjaweed**. Later a plane came in the evening and burned the village. All the people who were still hiding in their huts—the old, the weak, the blind—were rounded up by the **Janjaweed** and shot. One hut was set on fire with someone still inside. I saw them with own eyes. I was then chased by **Janjaweed** but not caught. My family slept that night in the wadi [dry riverbed]. We returned the next day. I counted around 80 or 90 bodies: men and children, a few women. We made a grave for all the people, 10 or 20 people to a grave, five or six graves in total.”*



**Musa, Age 15**

**The civilian population as such,  
as well as individual civilians,  
shall not be the object of attack.**



**Taha, Age 13 or 14**

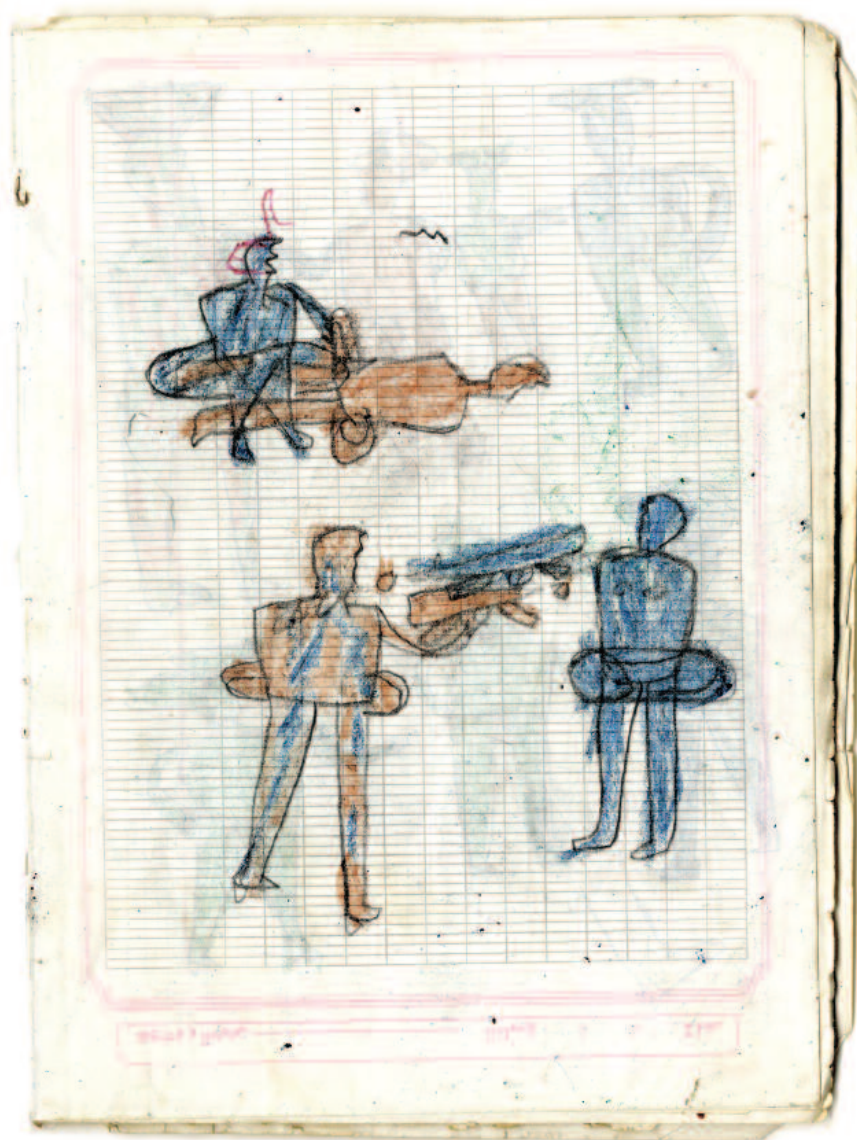


*“In the afternoon we returned from school and saw the planes. We were all looking, not imagining about bombing. Then they began the bombing. The first bomb [landed] in our garden, then four bombs at once in the garden. The bombs killed six people, including a young boy, a boy carried by his mother, and a girl. In another place in the garden a women was carrying her baby son—she was killed, not him. Now my nights are hard because I feel frightened. We became homeless. I cannot forget the bad images of the burning houses and fleeing at night because our village was burned...”*

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Rape and sexual violence against women and girls has been a prominent feature of the “ethnic cleansing” campaign carried out by government forces and militias, both during and following displacement in Darfur. Once displaced into camps in Darfur, or into refugee camps in Chad, women and girls continue to suffer sexual and gender-based violence. As discussed below, rape and sexual violence have numerous social, economic and medical consequences, including increasing the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

**Rape and sexual violence against women and girls has been a prominent feature of the “ethnic cleansing” campaign carried out by government forces and militias**



*“There were soldiers from Sudan, **Janjaweed**, and planes and bombs. I saw the **Janjaweed** take girls and women. The women were screaming. They seized them, they took them by force. The pretty ones were taken away...Girls were taken, small girls too, I think 5 and 7 and 14. Some came back after four or five hours...some we haven’t seen again.”*

**Saleh, Age 13**

**Protocol II, Article 4 on Fundamental Guarantees**

Civilians and captured combatants shall be protected against “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault.”



**Mahmoud, Age 13**

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *What's happening here?*

MAHMOUD: *These men in green are taking the women and the girls.*

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *What are they doing?*

MAHMOUD: *They are forcing them to be wife.*

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *What's happening here?*

MAHMOUD: *The houses are on fire.*

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *What's happening here?*

MAHMOUD: *This is an Antonov. This is a helicopter. These here, at the bottom of the page, these are dead people.*

# INHUMANE TREATMENT

## *Geneva Conventions, common Article 3 on Inhumane Treatment*

Soldiers removed from combat “by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause shall be treated humanely” and shall be protected from “violence to life and person, in particular ... mutilation, cruel treatment and torture.”

**Soldiers ... shall be treated humanely**

Like many other children, Ala’ witnessed conflict between rebel groups and the *Janjaweed*. This drawing depicts a rebel soldier first shot in the arm, then executed by gunshots to the groin. Ali, a teacher in the refugee camp, said the rebels are killed this way to emasculate them. “*They [the Janjaweed] know what they are doing,*” he said. “*They are doing it on purpose.*”





**Ala'**, Age 13

# FORCIBLE DISPLACEMENT

## *Protocol II, Article 17 on the Prohibition of Forced Movement of Civilians*

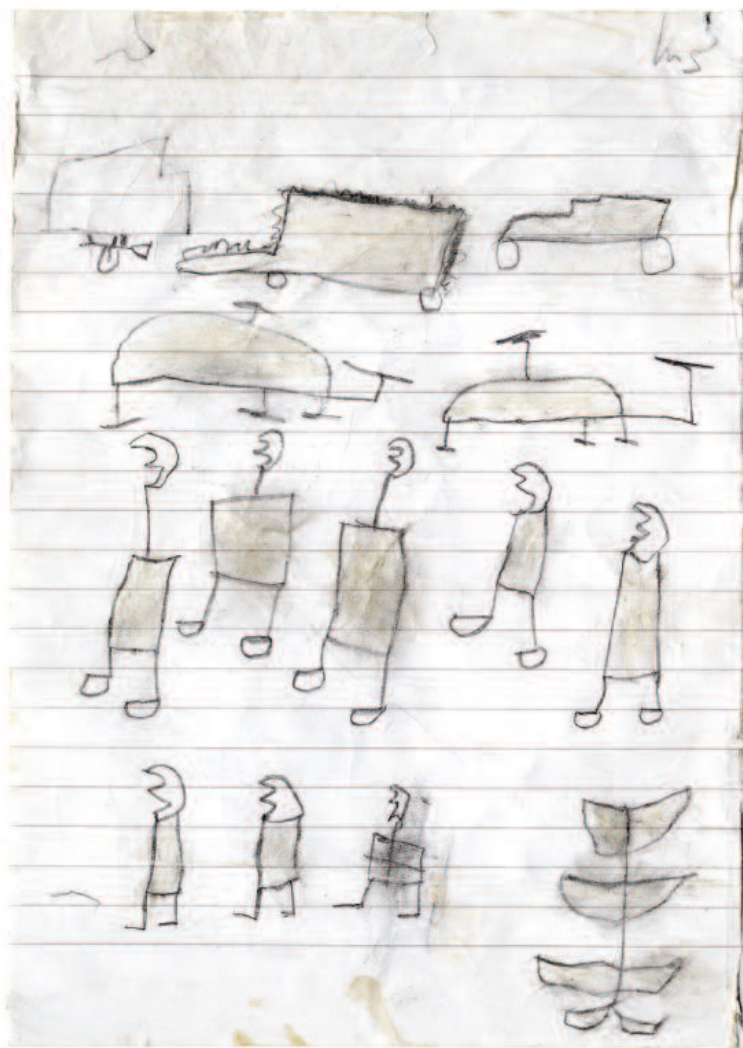
The displacement of the civilian population shall not be ordered for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian

population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition.

... Civilians shall not be compelled to leave their own territory for reasons connected with the conflict.

**Civilians shall not be compelled to leave their own territory for reasons connected with the conflict.**

*“We were running. From soldiers.  
Janjaweed. Planes. They were chasing us. These are men. These are women. We ran to the wadi [riverbed, or oasis]. Then we ran to Chad.”*

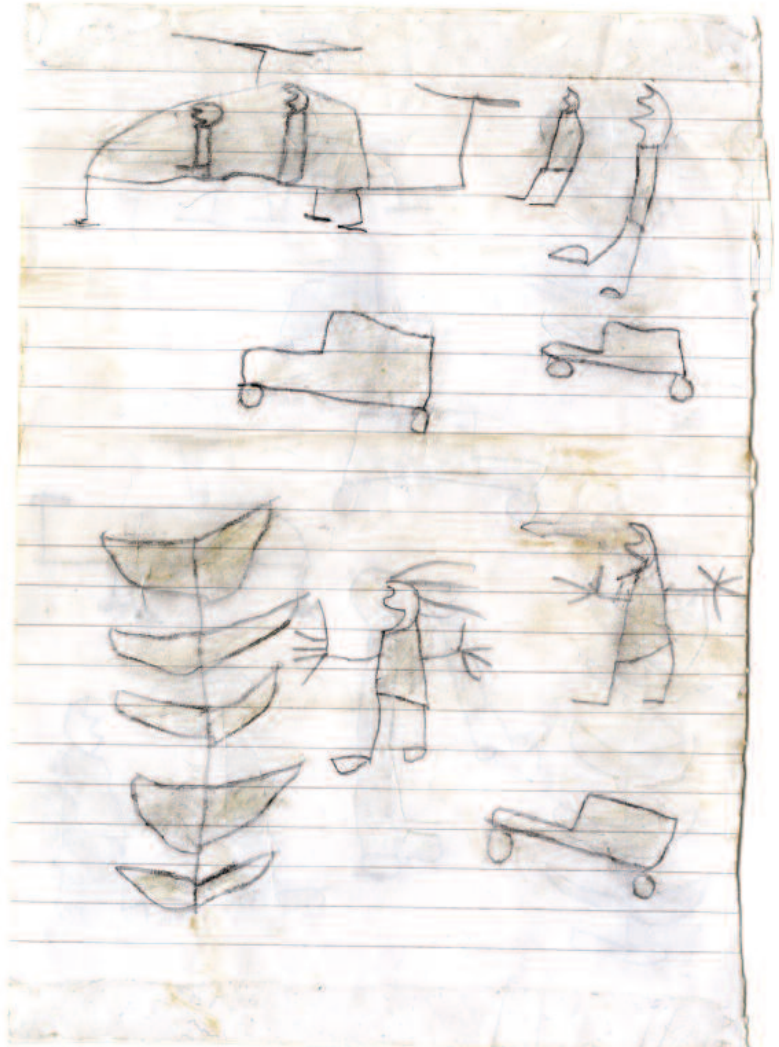


**Mostafa, Age 8**

**Protocol I, Article 52 on the General Protection of Civilian Objects**

“Civilian objects shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals.... Attacks shall be limited strictly to military objectives.... In case of doubt whether an object which is normally dedicated to civilian purposes, such as a place of worship, a house or other dwelling or a school, is being used to make an effective contribution to military action, it shall be presumed not to be so used.”

**Civilian objects shall not be the object of attack or of reprisals**



# CONCLUSION

**Children’s drawings of the human rights abuses they have witnessed during wartime are not new. But what makes the drawings from Darfur’s children so important is that they stand as graphic testimony of the ongoing atrocities committed in Darfur.**

**To hear and read the testimony of victims of a killing campaign is very powerful. Yet it is even more so to see such atrocities literally through the eyes of Darfur’s children, uncoached, and often uneducated—but clearly exposed to ethnic cleansing at its most brutal. As they stand alone, each single drawing is shocking. As a whole, they form a collective and comprehensive condemnation of the government of Sudan in the ethnic cleansing of Darfur.**



**Leila, Age 9**

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *What is going on here?*

LEILA: *My hut burning after being hit by a bomb.*

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *And here?* [Pointing to the drawing of what looks like an upside-down woman] *Leila: It's a woman. She is dead.*

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *Why is her face colored in red?*

LEILA: *Oh, because she has been shot in the face.*

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: *What is this vehicle? Who is this in green?*

LEILA: *That is a tank. The man in green is a soldier.*





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**Human Rights Watch** is dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world.

We stand with victims and activists to bring offenders to justice, to prevent discrimination, to uphold political freedom and to protect people from inhumane conduct in wartime.

We investigate and expose human rights violations and hold abusers accountable.

We challenge governments and those holding power to end abusive practices and respect international human rights law.

We enlist the public and the international community to support the cause of human rights for all.