

SUDAN

ERADICATING THE NUBA

Africa Watch calls for the United Nations to Investigate Killings, Destruction of Villages and Forced Removals

At the end of 1991, Africa Watch warned that the Nuba peoples of Southern Kordofan faced the destruction of their ethnic identity, and being reduced to a "subclass of displaced people."¹ They were suffering from the repeated depredations of the government-armed militia forces active in the area, attacks from army patrols, and serious abuses by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). There were ominous signs of a campaign of elimination targeting at the small class of educated Nuba.

As these abuses worsened in 1992, the destruction of Nuba identity seems ever more likely. The Kordofan State Government has declared a *jihad* or Holy War. Outside access to the Nuba Mountains has been tightly restricted, but sufficiently reliable information is available to indicate a stepped-up campaign of horrifying dimensions. There have been numerous incidents of villages being burned and people killed. Disappearances have continued. Most alarming of all, a large-scale campaign of forcible relocation has begun, with the apparent aim of removing the ethnic Nuba population from their ancestral lands, and scattering them in small camps throughout Northern Kordofan. This appears to amount to a systematic attempt to eradicate the identity of the Nuba. Since June, tens of thousands of Nuba have been moved each month.

Although the full scope of the program remains unclear, Africa Watch's information indicates that the Sudan government is responsible for massive human rights violations. The scale of the abuses and the speed of the relocations warrant immediate investigation by the highest international authorities. Ambassador Jan Eliasson, U.N. Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, is due to visit Khartoum on September 13. It is essential that he takes the opportunity of his visit to condemn the Sudan government for the known abuses against the Nuba, and presses for full access to all parts of the Nuba Mountains, including the displaced camps and the camps for people relocated away from the Mountains, to investigate Africa Watch's allegations. The findings of this investigation must be made public.

¹ "Sudan: Destroying Ethnic Identity, The Secret War against the Nuba," *News from Africa Watch*, December 10, 1991.

The Nuba Mountains Jihad

On January 7, 1992, provincial governors in Kordofan State (which encompasses the Nuba Mountains) declared a jihad in the Nuba Mountains. They claimed to be routing the "desperate rebel remnants" in the region. The commander of the regional Popular Defense Forces (PDF)—forces drawn from the Arab militia in the area, which has been responsible for numerous human rights abuses—Colonel Ismail Ahmad Adam, said his force were ready to "cleanse every stretch of territory sullied by the outlaws." In an admission of close cooperation with the local Baggara Arabs, who have been loyal government allies, the colonel also said the PDF had "ensured the safety of the routes used by the nomadic Arabs."² The architect of the jihad is the Governor of Kordofan State, General Hussein Abdel Karim, supported by the former Commissioner for Southern Kordofan, Abdel Wahab Abdel Rahman, currently serving as a state minister.

The government is not, however, united in its efforts. There has been resistance to the jihad from some military and police commanders, and by the Commissioner of southern Kordofan, Mohamed al Tayib. Al Tayib has reportedly tried to slow down the campaign, and to negotiate with some of the SPLA leaders for a truce. He has not been supported by his superiors, however, and his more moderate policy is unlikely to prevail unless strong pressure is exerted on the government.

The SPLA "New Kush" battalion is undoubtedly on the retreat in the face of unprecedented offensives by the army and the PDF. More than 10,000 regular soldiers are stationed in the northern part of the Nuba Mountains alone, together with units from the PDF. The military threat of the SPLA battalion alone cannot explain this scale of military operation.

Arrests and Executions

The widespread arrest and killing of Nuba men has continued and intensified during 1992. Some of these abuses appear to occur in the immediate aftermath of armed conflict with the SPLA, as the army searches for suspected SPLA members and sympathizers; others represent part of a campaign to remove educated people and community leaders.

On June 25, 1992, following a battle between SPLA forces and the PDF near al Faus, Dilling, government forces killed at least sixteen civilians, including two women. Africa Watch has obtained the names of ten of the victims. Some reports indicated that over one hundred civilians were killed. The exact circumstances of the killings remain unclear.

A large number of arrests have been reported. Some of those detained during the last few months include:

- Al Amin Rabka, teacher, Dilling Teachers' Training Institute;
- Al Kheir Hussein Walkaz, court clerk, Dilling;
- Ahmad Adlan, clerk in boys' higher secondary school;
- Hussein al Mek, teacher, Dilling Teachers' Training Institute
- Mohamed Hamid, former secretary to commissioner, Dilling.

It is feared that these people will "disappear" like many have done before. They represent only the small tip of a very large iceberg of systematic arrest, detention and disappearance in the Nuba Mountains.

² National Unity Radio, Omdurman, January 7, 1992, quoted in *Sudan Update*, January 13, 1992

Africa Watch has learned of a series of incidents in and around Lagowa, in the western Nuba Mountains. Lagowa was the scene of a well-documented massacre by pro-government militia in 1989. This latest round of atrocities followed SPLA activities south of Lagowa in August 1991, and the assassination of an officer from the military judiciary in October.

The army carried out reprisals against the civilian population, particularly those it suspected of sympathizing with the rebels. In August 1991, a Nuba man named Mukhtar Musa was executed in Lagowa garrison, and Hamza Furgalla was killed by soldiers escorting him on the road from el Obeid to Lagowa. Africa Watch has the names of nineteen others who were then arrested and executed in the early hours of November 27. An additional sixteen were also arrested, of whom seven were taken to el Obeid to be tried for crimes under the state of emergency.

Destruction of Villages

The army and PDF have destroyed numerous villages in the Nuba mountains. Sometimes this has been in the context of military action. For example, there have been repeated assaults on SPLA bases in the southern Nuba Mountains and at Jebel Tuleishi, often using helicopter gunships. In other instances, they are part of a general counterinsurgency strategy.

In the vicinity of Lagowa, the army burned the three villages of al Amara, Ladmi and Karagadi. The Kamda Nuba residents were removed to school buildings near Lagowa, and prevented from returning. Meanwhile, their crops were harvested by the PDF. In late 1991, the army tried to relocate the Kamda Nuba to Northern Kordofan, but abandoned the attempt in the face of strong local opposition. At the end of year, the Kamda had been evicted from the school buildings where they had taken temporary refuge, and had been forced to build flimsy shelters.

In March 1992, the destruction campaign spread north of Lagowa. The people of Jebel Abu Januq were given seventy-two hours to evacuate their villages. "Security reasons" were cited but no specifics were given.

In the central Nuba Mountains, the army destroyed dozens of villages in a campaign that began in November 1991 and continues unchecked until the present. Among the villages burned were: Denba, Koholyate, Mira Bara, Miri Gowa, Um Duja, Kududu, al Akhwal, Loya, Kufa, Kanagha, Lima and Abu Sunon. The residents of these villages were forced to flee to camps on the outskirts of Kadugli, including Tafri, Haj el Nar, Kula and Murta. Further south, the village of Karalaj was destroyed on March 30.

In the northern part of the mountains, military action forced residents to abandon villages in the Kowalib-Um Heitlan area at the end of 1991. There are reliable reports that as the refugees from this fighting arrived at Kurgol, on the Dilling-Kadugli road, the army and Popular Defence Forces separated out young men from the group and selectively executed them.

Together with the destruction of villages, there has been a systematic closure of social services. Many clinics have been directed to provide treatment preferentially to members of the army and PDF, in effect ensuring that local people have no medicine. Churches have also been targeted. Precise information about the closure of churches inside the Nuba Mountains is not available, but it is known that in nearby en Nahud, the Roman Catholic church was closed at gunpoint on May 14, and three priests and several nuns expelled.

Relocation Outside the Nuba Mountains

At the end of 1991, reports began to trickle out of Sudan of the abduction of Nuba children and their internment

in training camps in Northern Kordofan.³ There they were allegedly subjected to indoctrination from Moslem Brothers. However these reports remained unsubstantiated.

Reliable evidence of a far larger and more systematic campaign of dispersal has begun to emerge since June 1992. This is the most frightening development of the Nuba Mountains campaign. The relocation typically has three phases.

The first phase starts with the destruction or encirclement of a village. Many villages were destroyed in the nine months before June 1992 in the context of military operations, and the displaced former residents were prime candidates for relocation. Other villages appear to have been destroyed purely for the purposes of relocating the population. This appears to have happened recently in the Lagowa area. In other instances, the population is confined to their village, prevented from travelling, and subjected to a curfew. This appears to be the case for the villages of Karkara, Tital, Tendiya, Sirara and Kurmuti, south of Dilling.

The second stage occurs in transit camps within the Nuba Mountains. Most of these camps are located around the regional capital Kadugli, but others exist near Dilling and Lagowa. At least six camps near Kadugli contain 25,000 displaced people. The camps are run by the government, in close coordination with Islamic aid agencies, such as Dawa al Islamiya and Islamic African Relief Agency. No western relief agencies are permitted access. Conditions are poor but the transit camps are reported to be run efficiently. Visitors to Kadugli describe being physically sickened by the stench of disease in the vicinity of the camps.

The third phase involves the removal of the Nuba from the mountains altogether. This started in June, with truckloads of people being taken from the camps to small towns in Northern Kordofan. Convoys of trucks leave the Nuba Mountains daily, heading north. They travel with a military escort. The trucks are grossly overcrowded and no provisions are made for the undernourished and diseased condition of the travellers. Medical care has been denied on several occasions at least. One convoy of six trucks arrived in el Obeid in July carrying 635 people, whereupon two people died almost immediately.

About 2,500 people were deposited at the secondary school of Khor Taggat, north of el Obeid, in June. According to witnesses, they were in very poor physical condition, without adequate food and water. No provision has been made for their accommodation when the school reopened. Others were taken to the towns of Bara, en Nahud, Um Ruwaba, and er Rashad, and preparations have been made to receive relocated people in other towns such as Sodiri. At the camp in Um Ruwaba in July, ten displaced people were reported to be dying each day from the effects of hunger, disease and exposure. The largest number of people has been taken to el Obeid, the state capital, where truckloads of people were regularly arriving during July and August. A total of over 40,000 people have been relocated to Northern Kordofan to date.

³ *El Sudan*, November 28, 1991; *Al Wafd*, December 29, 1991.

According to Kordofan government sources, a screening procedure is due to be introduced in the transit camps. This will ensure that "productive" people (almost entirely young men), will be separated from the "non-productive" women, children and old people. The men will later be taken to "productive sites"; these are large farms owned by wealthy merchants, where the men will form the labor force. Africa Watch has learned that several sites are being prepared to receive these relocated people. There is a recent precedent for this in the relocation of southern Sudanese from Khartoum to "production" sites that are mechanized farms near Renk in Upper Nile State,⁴ though the segregation by sex is a new development. Women and children will be sent to stay with "hospital" families in Northern Kordofan. Here the women—and probably the children too—will have no option except to work as domestic servants. This aspect of the plan has ominous parallels with the pattern of resurgent slavery in Kordofan.⁵ So far, this plan does not appear to have been implemented systematically, though recent visitors to Kadugli report that some segregation of men from women has occurred in the camps.

Many residents of Northern Kordofan are opposed to the relocation program. In part this is a principled stand; they have no desire to see their southern neighbors forcibly uprooted. It also stems in part from self-interest; they do not want to have destitute people deposited on their already impoverished communities, further burdening the social services.

No outside access to the relocation program has been permitted, save for two brief and curtailed visits by diplomats and U.N. officials in June. However, government officials and army officials in Kordofan have been quite explicit about the aims and method of the relocations. They are reported to have told residents of Northern Kordofan the current removals represent only the beginning of a far larger program. The Sudan government has recently relocated by force over 700,000 squatters, displacing them from the environs of Khartoum, and plans to remove another 500,000 in the coming months—so expelling one million Nuba from their homeland is quite within its capacity.

A Campaign of "Ethnic Cleansing"

Many facts point to a systematic campaign aimed at the eradication of Nuba ethnicity from Kordofan. This amounts to "ethnic cleansing." The language used, especially by the Kordofan State Government, is very militant. The Sudan government is certainly capable of dispersing hundreds of thousands of people by force in the space of a few months. The plan to separate men and women is very ominous. In labor camps or in the households of Sudanese Arabs, the Nuba will be forced to adopt northern Sudanese customs, take Arab names, and conform to the strictures of the Moslem Brothers' religious orthodoxy. If the separation is long-term, the women will undoubtedly be taken on as junior wives or concubines by Sudanese Arabs, and their children will lose all Nuba identity. The people will be dispersed. Thus, the culture and society of the Nuba will become obliterated.

Meanwhile, the rich farmland traditionally inhabited by the Nuba will be reallocated, either to wealthy mechanized farmers from the northern cities, or to the local Bagara Arabs who form the PDF.

There is a chance that the more moderate policies followed by the Commissioner of Southern Kordofan will prevail. However, that would require a reversal of the state policy of the Kordofan State Government, and this is very unlikely unless strong external pressure is brought to bear.

The International Reaction

The eradication of the Nuba is being hidden from the world's attention. There are no pictures. No journalists or western aid agencies are given access; there have only been a handful of brief visits by diplomats. In the absence of

⁴ See "Sudan: Refugees in Their Own Country," *News from Africa Watch*, July, 20, 1992.

⁵ See Africa Watch, *Denying "The Honor of Living", Sudan: A Human Rights Disaster* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), chap. 5, "Slavery".

reliable information, the international reaction has been very mute. In January, European Community ambassadors made a demarche to the Sudan government following reports of the use of helicopter gunships against villages in the Nuba Mountains. The U.S. government has also raised the question. However, there have been no public condemnations. Most importantly, the United Nations has remained silent. Though U.N. staff in Khartoum have expressed their concern about the Nuba campaign, these worries have not been endorsed at a senior level of the U.N. in New York.

The Sudan government has a disturbing record of manipulating international organizations, notably the U.N. For example, during the last year it has kept up a dialogue with the U.N. concerning the program of forced relocations from Khartoum, making a succession of promises to halt the program or to make it less abusive. Meanwhile, the demolitions and relocations have continued regardless. By the time the U.N. finally realized that the consultations were merely a facade, the demolitions were a fait accompli. There is an acute danger of the same happening in the Nuba Mountains. The government will claim that the Nuba are being relocated for security reasons, and will promise to slow the program, or allow western relief agencies to help care for the displaced. While negotiations continue, the campaign will also continue; and by the time the U.N. realizes that the government was never negotiating in good faith, the campaign will be complete and Nuba society will have been irrevocably destroyed.

Ambassador Jan Eliasson, U.N. Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, is due to visit to Khartoum in mid-September. This is an unparalleled opportunity for the plight of the Nuba to be brought to the attention of the world's conscience. Ambassador Eliasson must, first, publicly condemn the Sudan government for the catalogue of known abuses against the Nuba, and second, demand to visit the Nuba Mountains, including all the camps for the relocated and displaced Nuba, accompanied by diplomats and journalists. If indeed it is true that the Sudan government is contemplating or even implementing a campaign of ethnic eradication against the Nuba, it must be halted immediately and unconditionally. The U.N. must act now, it must not wait.

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Africa Watch was established in 1988 to monitor and promote the observance of internationally recognized human rights in Africa. The chair is William Carmichael; the vice chair is Alice Brown; the executive director is Rakiya Omaar; the associate director is Alex de Waal; the research associates are Janet Fleischman and Karen Sorensen; and the associates are Barbara Baker, Urmi Shah, and Ben Penglase.

Human Rights Watch is composed of five regional divisions—Africa Watch, Americas Watch, Asia Watch, Helsinki Watch and Middle East Watch—as well as the Fund for Free Expression. The chair is Robert Bernstein; the vice chair is Adrian W. DeWind; the executive director is Aryeh Neier; the deputy director is Kenneth Roth; the associate director is Gara LaMarche; the Washington director is Holly J. Burkhalter; the California director is Ellen Lutz; the press director is Susan Osnos; and the counsel is Jemera Rone.