

Slavery Report: Sudan

Most Recent Developments

The capture and enslavement of black Africans was a significant feature of the decades-long civil war in Sudan, waged by the Muslim-dominated north against the mostly non-Muslim south. The conflict was, in the eyes of the northern Muslim leaders, a *jihad* — one which cost the lives of perhaps [2.5 million](#) blacks.

For the duration of the conflict, Arab militias, armed by the Islamic government in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, stormed African villages in the south, killed the men and captured the women and children who were then enslaved. Tens of thousands of these slaves were redeemed in a massive and well-[publicized](#) emancipation campaign by [Christian Solidarity International](#) (CSI). The war ended in 2005 when the south seceded and became the world's newest nation: South Sudan. There are, consequently, no more slave raids. By the end of the war, however, perhaps as many as [35,000](#) slaves remained in the north.

History and Background

Sudan is one of the oldest centers of inter-racial slavery in Africa. When Arab armies conquered Egypt in 642, Muslim warriors quickly began seizing control of the rich trade along the Nile into the territory of the ancient black civilization of Nubia. Securing ivory and then gold from Nubia's legendary mines rapidly progressed into enslaving large numbers of the native black population. It took centuries, however, for the rulers of the Islamic caliphates based in Egypt to progress from merely capturing slaves to using slavery as a tool to Islamize the Christian and animist south. Arab policy towards Islamization reached a turning point, however, when in 1317 Saif ad-Din Abdullah Barshambu seized the crown of the Nubian kingdom of Makuria and ordered that the population accept Islam. As the centuries passed, Muslims ruling from Cairo and (since 1822) Khartoum pursued the *jihad* policy of forcing Islam and Arabic culture on the black natives of the south — using slave raids as their principal weapon.

Slavery was so extensive just before the period of European colonization that an 1894 study commissioned by the French [revealed](#) that between 30 to 50% of the population of the western Sudan was enslaved, with as much as 80% in the more prominent trading towns.

With the British conquest of the territory in 1899, slavery was banned immediately. Though it took many decades, the British largely [managed](#) to stamp out slavery for the better part of the following century, including after the country's independence in 1956.

Slavery only came to prominence and returned on a [large](#) scale in the [1980s](#) with the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983 – 2005). With the accession to power of General Omar al-Bashir and the ruthless cleric Hassan at-Turabi in 1989, the war combined its older economic objectives with those of a full-scale conflict of cultural identity and religion. With the

government's declaration of *jihad*, it was an Islamic obligation to not only rob the black south of its oil and fertile land, but also to subjugate and Islamize what most Arab Sudanese thought of as the country's "racially inferior" people, through both [bombings](#) and slave [raids](#). Slaves also served as compensation for the unpaid Arab militiamen of the *Murahilin*, the government's paramilitary organization.

Arab enslavement of southern blacks, largely from the Dinka tribe, peaked between around 1990 to 2000. A 2002 U.S. State Department [report](#) estimated that anywhere between 14,000 and 200,000 blacks had been abducted into slavery since the beginning of the war. Actual slave raids are believed to have [stopped](#) by 2002, coinciding with the peace talks which brought about the close of the war in 2005. The hard border created by black South Sudan's independence in 2011 — after years of international pressure from governments and human rights activists — solidified the end of the war-time slave trade.

Still, while slave raids from the north have long ceased, thousands of chattel slaves are believed to remain in the north today. In 2008, it was [estimated](#) that as many as 35,000 black slaves still remain in the north owned by Muslim masters. No reliable subsequent information exists as to the number of those still enslaved today.

What is known is that the Swiss-based human rights organization Christian Solidarity International has purchased the freedom of nearly [100,000](#) slaves since redemption operations begin in 1995.

Experiences of the Slaves

The slaves CSI liberates — mostly women — tell hideous [stories](#) of abduction, beatings, forced conversion to Islam, grueling labor, malnutrition, and rape. One woman, [Amel Dor Manyuol](#), freed by CSI in May of 2014, was the only survivor of six children:

The slave raiders came at night, on horses. I watched them shoot some of my brothers and sisters, and I saw the rest flee into the bush. I assume they're dead. We were four brothers and three sisters: Adup, Akot, Achier, Abuk, Adut, Akuol and me. I haven't seen any of them since....

Mohammed had one wife and two older sons. They were all unkind to me. You can see on my left arm I have a scar from a bite, and a burn-scar. These were given to me by the baby girl I had to take care of, after she grew up. On my left leg is a knife scar, from Mohammed's children. When Mohammed saw these wounds, he said, "She's a jengai [a racial epithet.] It's no problem."

Mohammed's sons raped me. So did Mohammed.

Mohammed had me circumcised. An old man named Abdullah did it. They told me, "If you join us, you have to be like us." At first I refused, but I was terribly beaten until I agreed. Before that, they gave me a new name: Hawa.

Another, [Aguil Mawien Tang](#), was horrendously abused and deprived of her own children fathered by her master:

The slave raiders raped the women. I was raped by two groups of men, first three, then two. They beat me terribly with sticks to get me to submit. I still have the scars on my chest....

[My master, Amoth Akbar] sold slaves to other people, and gave me to other Arab men for sex — any passerby who had a gun. I complained to him about it, saying, “Why do you give me to these other men, when you are the one who took me here?”

I had two children because of this. As soon as they were old enough to start working, Amoth took them away from me. I don't know where they are. I don't even know their names. Amoth gave them Arab names but didn't tell me, and wouldn't let me give them Dinka names.

CSI [continues](#) to liberate slaves with money donated by supporters, often around 400 at a time since the war-time peak of [1,000](#).

Political Developments

In recent developments, the Trump administration has agreed to talks with the Sudan regarding [removing](#) it from the State Department's State Sponsors of Terrorism [list](#) in response to [pleas](#) from Khartoum that the government no longer sponsors terrorism. The administration should be advised to include a condition of Khartoum abolishing slavery and working to free those still enslaved as a condition for granting this request.