



**CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY
INTERNATIONAL,
SUDAN AND
WAR CRIMINALS:
A QUESTION OF
JUDGEMENT**

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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

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On 23 March 1999, Christian Solidarity International, an organisation which describes itself as a “human rights organisation” helping those “suffering repression, victimised children and victims of disaster”, attempted to allow John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the Sudanese rebel movement, to speak as its representative, at the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva. Despite warnings, however, Garang, began his speech in the name of the SPLA, and began a political diatribe against the government of Sudan. The chairman of the session stopped Garang from speaking, and dismissed him from the podium.

Christian Solidarity International was one of many non-governmental organisations that enjoyed consultative status within the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which allowed its representatives to speak during Commission on Human Rights meetings.

In contriving that Garang would appear as a Christian Solidarity International member and spokesman, Christian Solidarity International clearly abused its consultative status for political ends. This resulted in CSI having its United Nations accreditation withdrawn by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.¹

That Christian Solidarity International displayed a chronic lack of judgement in attempting to abuse the clear conventions and procedures of the Commission on Human Rights is clear. Even more stark, however, is the simple fact that Christian Solidarity International, given its claim to be a human rights organisation, has so closely and willingly associated itself with John Garang and the SPLA given their clear involvement in what can only be described as war crimes and other gross abuses of human rights in Sudan.

The SPLA has had a long record of wide-scale terrorism in Sudan. This has included the widespread murder of Sudanese men, women and children, indiscriminate mortaring and rocketing of urban areas in southern Sudan, resulting in hundreds of further civilian deaths, ethnic cleansing, extensive pillaging and shooting of civilians along the Sudan-Ethiopian border, the abduction and murder of international relief workers, and the laying of landmines. The SPLA has also admitted the shooting down of civilian airliners within Sudan, incidents involving considerable loss of life. The Catholic Church has also accused the SPLA of stealing up to 65 percent of the emergency food aid supplied by relief agencies to starving and sick communities in southern Sudan.

In his 1996 report, Dr Gaspar Biro, the then United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights in Sudan, documented an incident which had taken place on the evening of 30 July 1995. SPLA forces had attacked two villages in the

¹ See, ‘Christian human rights group expelled from U.N.’, News Article by Reuters on October 26, 1999 at 21:11:25; ‘UN breaks ties with Christian human rights group’, News Article by Reuters on June 18, 1999 at 10:15:58; ‘Christian rights group told to cut ties with UN’, News Article by Reuters on June 19, 1999 at 00:22: 52.

Ganyiel region of southern Sudan. SPLA gunmen killed 210 villagers, of whom 30 were men, 53 were women and 127 were children.²

The Special Rapporteur stated that:

Eyewitnesses reported that some of the victims, mostly women, children and the elderly, were caught while trying to escape and killed with spears and pangas. M.N., a member of the World Food Programme relief committee at Panyajor, lost four of her five children (aged 8-15 years). The youngest child was thrown into the fire after being shot. D.K. witnessed three women with their babies being caught. Two of the women were shot and one was killed with a panga. Their babies were all killed with pangas. A total of 1, 987 households were reported destroyed and looted and 3, 500 cattle were taken.³

This is precisely the sort of war crime the world witnessed in horror during the Kosovo tragedy in 1999. In its 1994 report **Civilian Devastation: Abuses by all Parties in the War in Southern Sudan**, a 279-page study, Human Rights Watch/Africa devoted 169 pages to "SPLA Violations of the Rules of War". Human Rights Watch/Africa reported that the SPLA was guilty of, amongst other things, summary executions, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, the deliberate starvation of civilians, abducting civilians, mainly women and children, torture, forced recruitment and force labour, theft of civilian animals, food and grain, and the holding of long-term political prisoners in prolonged arbitrary detention. African Watch has also placed on record that the SPLA has murdered government soldiers taken as prisoners of war.

In its study, **Sudan: The Ravages of War: Political Killings and Humanitarian Disaster**, Amnesty International recorded that the SPLA had lined up 32 women from the village of Pagau, 12 kilometres from Ayod in southern Sudan, and then shot each once in the head. Eighteen children were reported to have been locked in a hut which was then set on fire. Three children who attempted to escape were then shot. The rest burnt to death. These are clearly war crimes. In Paiyoi, an area north-east of Ayod, Amnesty International reported that 36 women were burnt to death in a cattle byre. Nine others were clubbed to death by SPLA forces. As an example of a war crime with genocidal overtones, in its 1994 report, Amnesty stated that in April 1993, the largely Dinka SPLA forces "massacred about 200 Nuer villagers, many of them children, in villages around the town of Ayod. Some of the victims were shut in huts and burnt to death. Others were shot." These were ethnically-motivated murders in no way different from the murder of ethnic Albanian women and children by Serbian gunmen in Kosovo.

The SPLA's war crimes have even been admitted to by serving SPLA leaders. Dr Peter Adwok Nyaba is currently a member of the organisation's National Executive Council. Dr Nyaba joined the SPLA in 1986, served as a SPLA military commander inside Sudan, and has a first-hand knowledge of SPLA behaviour on the ground. He can therefore be described as an inside source and the picture he presents of the SPLA is a disturbing one:

² **Situation of human rights in the Sudan**, UN Special Rapporteur Gaspar Biro, E/CN.4/1996/62, 20 February 1996.

³ *Ibid.*

It was not uncommon to find an SPLA trail littered with serious and horrendous human rights abuses and violations: murder, rape, looting and irrational waste of resources, mainly grain and livestock. The arrogance and power of carrying an AKM rifle made them wasteful and brutal to the civilian population.

Nyaba described a typical incident in which SPLA forces were initially welcomed into a village, whose inhabitants “lavishly served the soldiers with beef, grain, sorghum beer, alcohol and tobacco”. The SPLA men then “went on a drunken looting and raping spree which resulted in several murders.” It is chilling to note that Nyaba described this incident as representing “a common feature of the initial interaction between the SPLA and the civil population... .This unfortunate incident repeated itself in many other places in South Sudan wherever the SPLA ventured to set foot, without being corrected or the perpetrators punished.”⁴

The **Economist** also summed up the general image of the SPLA when it stated in March 1998 that:

The rebels have always, in theory, been a political movement as well as an army. In practice, the army was the movement. Led by John Garang, a former colonel in the national armed forces and a man with strong dictatorial tendencies, it has, at its worst, been little more than an armed gang of Dinkas (Mr Garang’s ethnic group), killing, looting and raping. Its indifference, almost animosity, towards the people it was supposed to be “liberating” was all too clear.

It is clear that had Garang committed even one hundredth of the atrocities that the SPLA has been party to in southern Sudan in Bosnia or Kosovo, he would have been on a war crimes list and hunted down by war crimes investigators. It would appear that Christian Solidarity International, while declaring itself to be a human rights group, is remarkably selective about which human rights abuses are of concern to them, and considerably less selective about the company they keep.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from Christian Solidarity International’s close association with people who can so clearly be termed war criminals is that it is an organisation with only a tenuous and superficial regard for human rights. The expulsion of Christian Solidarity International from the United Nations has served to highlight the contradictions in CSI’s declared aims and the reality of the violent and questionable people it so clearly and unreservedly supports in Sudan.

It should also be noted that shortly after Garang’s disastrous visit to Geneva as a guest of Christian Solidarity International it was revealed that the SPLA had murdered four aid workers involved in an International Committee of the Red Cross project in southern Sudan.⁵

⁴ Peter Nyaba **The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan: An Insider’s View**, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 1997, p.36.

⁵ See, ‘Sudan aid workers executed’, BBC Africa, BBC Online Network, Saturday, April 3, 1999 Published at 03:25 GMT 04:25 UK and ‘Sudanese aid workers killed’, BBC World, BBC Online Network, Thursday, April 1, 1999 Published at 22:47 GMT.