



**THE DAILY TELEGRAPH
AND COVERAGE OF
SUDAN:
ISLAMOPHOBIA, POOR
JOURNALISM OR BAD
JUDGEMENT?**

**A statement of concern by the
Sudan Foundation and the
British-Sudanese
Public Affairs Council**

**Khartoum's 'holy
southerners turns**

*Sudan has become the Killing Fields of the Streets, Caroline Davis's
Baroness Cus's account of fundamentalist murder, slavery and pillage*

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The *Daily Telegraph*, and coverage of Sudan: Islamophobia, poor journalism or bad judgement?

On 26 May 1998, the *Daily Telegraph* carried on its front page an article with the heading “Baroness accuses Sudan of genocide”. Inside the paper there was an additional half-page article entitled “Khartoum’s ‘holy war’ against Christian southerners turns into bloody genocide’. In these articles Baroness Cox, the president of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, claimed that she had seen areas of Bahr al-Ghazal region which had recently been raided by northerners. These attacks, she claimed, were a “systematic, cynical, brutal policy of slaughter and destruction, which I think add up to the genocide of the Dinka people”. The *Daily Telegraph* carried these claims unquestioningly, without challenge or qualification, and without any commentary by independent commentators or observers.

There are immediate concerns about the independence and objectivity of Baroness Cox with regard to the issue of Sudan, which will be addressed later on in this study. Let us assume, however, that Baroness Cox had indeed been taken into an area and shown the aftermath of an attack by, for want of a better term, “northern” tribesmen. What was not mentioned by Baroness Cox or the *Daily Telegraph* is the clear evidence presented by *Agence France Presse* reports that whatever incident she had seen the result of, had in turn been the end result of similar attacks by the southern SPLA forces with whom she so closely associates. The *Agence France Presse* reporting, which presents one with the clear chronological sequence of events absent from Baroness Cox’s account in the *Daily Telegraph*, is a matter of record:

- **7 May 1998** **‘Sudanese regime blames tribal massacres on southern rebels’**
(News Article by *Agence France Presse* on May 07, 1998 at 15:05:13). This article reported that government ministers in Kordofan state had stated that rebel SPLA forces had carried out several raids between 30 April and 5 May. These raids had resulted in the massacre of 23 members of an Arab tribe, and the theft of thousands of cattle. A Sudanese parliamentary deputy also stated that in one month, the SPLA had killed one hundred people and stolen more than 30,000 head of cattle. The deputy called on the government to allow Arab tribes to form their own army to withstand rebel attacks.
- **12 May 1998** **‘Official warns against rebel raids on central Sudan tribes’,** (News Article by *Agence France Presse* on May 12, 1998 at 10:53:08). This article warned against further raids by southern rebels on civilians in south Darfur and west Kordofan regions. The federal Aviation Minister, Hamid Tourain, from Darfur, stated that “acts of aggression by rebel Kerubino forces on civilians were still going on till yesterday.” Mr Tourain warned against the consequence of “ignoring” raids which he said could “inflame the entire border strip between the south and north”. Civilians had been killed and thousands of cattle stolen in attacks by the SPLA on the Arab Nissairiyah and Rizaiquat tribes in south Darfur and west Kordofan. The Minister stated that the fighting was between civilians and Kerubino’s men and that “information so far available indicates participation by Garang men in the attacks on the unarmed civilians in west Sudan.”
- **29 May 1998** **‘Tribal ‘knights’ wreck Sudanese rebel camps, recover livestock’**
(News Article by *Agence France Presse* on May 29, 1998 at 09:05:34). The commissioner of Ad Daen district in south Darfur, Kamal Sidahmed, stated that 10 000 horsemen from the Rizaiquat tribe have swept through SPLA camps, destroying them and recovering tens of thousands of head of

stolen livestock. AFP reported that Sidahmed said that the tribesmen had attacked SPLA camps in northern Bahr al-Ghazal “in reprisal for rebel attacks and rustling last month”.

- **26 May 1998** The claims made by Baroness Cox, and published in the *Daily Telegraph*, that she had visited an area in Bahr al-Ghazal which had been the subject of a “raid” by Arab tribesmen.

The Kerubino referred to in the above news reports is Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, an SPLA warlord active in Bahr al-Ghazal, who had defected from the government’s peace process. That Kerubino had caused considerable instability in the region has also been documented by independent sources. CNN reports in April on the recent humanitarian crisis in Bahr al-Ghazal, for example, stated that “aid agencies blame Sudanese rebel who switched sides”:

Observers say much of the recent chaos has resulted from the actions of one man, Kerubino Kwanying Bol, a founding member of the rebel movement.¹

In May 1998 *Newsweek* magazine, also quoting aid workers, found Kerubino’s involvement in destabilising Bahr al-Ghazal clear:

Aid workers blame much of the south’s recent anguish on one man: the mercurial Dinka warlord Kerubino Kuanyin Bol.²

An *Agence France Presse* report in early May documented some of the human suffering caused within northern communities by SPLA raids led by Kerubino Kuanyin Bol. The information minister of West Darfur, speaking in the first few days of May, stated that there had been more than one hundred deaths, and that 68 villages and encampments had been partially destroyed in the raids. In one instance five thousand head of cattle was said to have been slaughtered. Some 4,000 families were said to have been affected with damage said to be in the region of US\$ 2 million.³

There are two important questions which arise out of the *Daily Telegraph* coverage. The first is whether or not the particular snap-shot of circumstances seen and described by Baroness Cox, was in fact the response by northern communities who had themselves been provoked by raids by southern rebels some short time before. If this actually was the case, as it would seem to be on the basis of the *Agence France Presse* reporting, then for the *Daily Telegraph* to have presented these attacks as just coming out of the blue, as it were, allegedly as part of some ‘holy war’, clearly presents a deeply flawed, distorted and unbalanced picture of the circumstances.

The second question concerns the claim of genocide. Given the sequence of events outlined above, Baroness Cox’s claim of genocide appears to be based on retaliatory raids by Arab civilians, with or without government militia or army assistance, on people, camps and villages associated with the SPLA raids some short time before, a regrettable but identifiable cycle of violence. The definition of genocide in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is “deliberate extermination of a race, nation, etc”.⁴ The events above would indicate that the violence reported on, and classified as genocide, by Baroness Cox, and which occurred towards the end of May, was to all intents and purposes a mirror image of “southern” attacks in late April and early May. The question then to asked both of Baroness Cox, but more importantly, of the *Daily Telegraph*, given that as a newspaper of record it would claim a degree of objectivity, is a simple one. Why are the “southern” rebel attacks on Arab civilians in late April and early May, attacks which resulted in considerable deaths and destruction and theft of property, as reported by AFP, not deemed to be “genocide”, while what appear to have been similar attacks in retaliation and response are classified as “genocide”?

If the *Daily Telegraph* accepts that there were several raids by Dinka tribesmen and/or SPLA forces into Arab communities on Bahr al-Ghazal's borders with Darfur and Kordofan in late April and the first week or two in May 1998, as reported by *Agence France Presse*; and if the *Daily Telegraph* accepts that in the course of these raids into Arab communities, a large number of Arab civilians were said to have been killed or "massacred", and tens of thousands of cattle either slaughtered or stolen in these raids, as reported by AFP; and if the *Daily Telegraph* accepts that at the time of these "southern" raids, several local and state officials and community leaders warned of the risk of retaliation by the northern communities who had been attacked, as reported by AFP, does the *Daily Telegraph* not accept that what Baroness Cox may well have seen was a reaction, as regrettable and tragic as it may have been, that saw Arab tribesmen in turn attacking SPLA camps and villages presumably both in retaliation, and in efforts to recover some of the 30,000 head of livestock said to have been stolen a week or two previously?

There is little doubt that Baroness Cox was taken by her SPLA associates to visit an area which may well have been the scene of a retaliatory attack by Arab tribesmen. What is unclear is how that scene would have differed from the scenes of devastation, death and destruction that had been visited upon several Arab communities two weeks or so previously by the SPLA. What is also unclear is how, in that case, what Baroness Cox claims to have seen amounts to genocide when she does not appear to regard or define similar raids by "Christian" southerners on northern Muslim communities within the same two or three weeks as such. Leaving Baroness Cox and the *Daily Telegraph's* dubious and questionable definition of genocide aside, it would appear on face value that Baroness Cox and the *Daily Telegraph* only consider such behavior to be "genocide" if it is directed towards "Christian" communities, and not if such behavior is directed at Muslim communities.

Baroness Cox's lack of objectivity, and support for the rebel movement in Sudan.

Baroness Cox is a supporter of the rebel movement in Sudan. Baroness Cox, as president of the British branch of Christian Solidarity International (as Christian Solidarity Worldwide was then known), for example, has hosted two international conferences for the rebel National Democratic Alliance, which incorporates the SPLA. One was held in Bonn, in the Federal Republic of Germany, in June 1994, and another was held in the House of Lords in November 1995. On both occasions she played a pivotal role in convening these conferences. Baroness Cox chaired the 1995 conference in London. The final resolutions of both conferences commended Baroness Cox's close involvement. The resolution of the 1995 NDA conference, for example, contained the following: "This Conference thanks Lady Cox for making this meeting possible" and "This Conference thanks and commends the efforts of CSI for convening this conference and the 1994 Bonn Conference".

The Secretary General of the NDA in his speech at the London NDA conference stated that he "would like to pay tribute to Christian Solidarity International, its international president, Reverend Hans Stuckleberger, and the Honourable Baroness Cox for convening this conference...I should also like to extend my thanks to Dr John Eibner for his dynamic organizational skills and efforts in bringing us here today". John Eibner is close CSI associate of Baroness Cox in her Sudan activities.⁵

It is also a matter of record that the support by the then British chapter of Christian Solidarity International, headed by Baroness Cox, for the Sudanese rebels, its "association with men bearing arms", has caused considerable disquiet within other chapters of CSI. The Swiss French branch of CSI has stated, for example, that it, and other Christian organisations "cannot give any support to the demands of (CSI UK) because CSI decided, in August 1996, that 'some Association with men bearing arms (SPLA) might be necessary'".

Independent criticism of other claims made by Baroness Cox about the government of Sudan

Allegations of slavery

Baroness Cox and Christian Solidarity International have repeatedly claimed that the government of Sudan is pursuing a policy of slavery in Sudan. It is a matter of record that independent, professional human rights groups such as African Rights and Anti-Slavery International, themselves very hostile to the Sudanese government, have been very critical of these claims by Baroness Cox and CSI.

Alex de Waal, as co-director of African Rights, for example, clearly addressed this concern about the claims made by Christian Solidarity International. He stated that although there were no “slave markets in the 19th century image”:

Nonetheless, overeager or misinformed human rights advocates in Europe and the US have played upon lazy assumptions to raise public outrage. Christian Solidarity International, for instance, claims that “Government troops and Government-backed Arab militias regularly raid black African communities for slaves and other forms of booty.” The organization repeatedly uses the term “slave raids”, implying that taking captives is the aim of government policy...This despite the fact that there is no evidence for centrally organized, government-directed slave raiding or slave trade.⁶

In May 1997, an Anti-Slavery International report clearly stated that: “the charge that government troops engage in raids for the purpose of seizing slaves is not backed by the evidence.” Furthermore, the report stated that a rigorous enquiry into allegations that the Sudanese government is engaged in a slave trade: “would not be able to demonstrate a policy of slave trading.”⁷

Baroness Cox and Christian Solidarity International have also been party to regularly flying in journalists for visits to alleged “slave markets” in Bahr al-Ghazal. Claims by CSI, and these journalists, that these “markets”, which are located in SPLA-held areas of the province, and whereby kidnapped southerners are bought back from their kidnappers via a third party, somehow prove that slavery exists in Sudan have also been criticised by human rights groups as “supporting...sensationalist stereotypes”.⁸ African Rights is clear: “They were not in a slave market”.⁹

Not only are such claims at best a distortion, but they also run the risk of encouraging prejudice against Muslims and Arabs. Anti-Slavery International’s representative, for example, in its June 1997 submission to the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, stated:

There is a danger that wrangling over slavery can distract us from abuses which are actually part of government policy - which we do not believe slavery to be. Unless accurately reported, the issue can become a tool for indiscriminate and wholly undeserved prejudice against Arabs and Muslims. **I am worried that some media reports of “slave markets”, stocked by Arab slave traders - which I consider distort reality - fuel such prejudice.**¹⁰

Allegations that Sudan possessed weapons of mass destruction technology

Baroness Cox claimed in the House of Lords on 17 February this year. that Sudan had access to chemical and biological warfare weapons, and that in addition four hundred Scud missiles had been secretly transferred to Sudan from Iraq since the end of the Gulf War, quite an accomplishment given the no-fly zones over Iraq, given strict United Nations sanctions and supervision of the one international

port allowed to function, given the unprecedented level of allied intelligence surveillance on Iraq, and given the fact that Iraq only possessed 200 to start with, most of which were used during the Gulf War itself.¹¹ It did not come as a big surprise, therefore, when Reuters reported on the very same day that the White House, an implacable enemy of the government of Sudan, flatly denied such claims:

We have no credible evidence that Iraq has exported weapons of mass destruction technology to other countries since the (1991) Gulf War.

Baroness Cox's claims were also repeatedly contradicted by the British government, another opponent of the Khartoum government. Tony Lloyd MP, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, stated in the House of Commons on 10 March 1998 in connection with Baroness Cox's claims, that the British government "cannot validate those reports, and is not aware of any fresh or substantiated evidence on the matter". On the 19 March 1998, Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, the Foreign Office minister in the Lords, in replying to a question about a source cited by Baroness Cox in her weapons of mass destruction technology claims, stated that the government was:

unable to corroborate many of the details. Moreover, we know that some of the claims made in the paper are untrue.

This points once again to poor judgment on behalf of Baroness Cox in publicly repeating very serious claims which were unfounded and untrue.

Why no coverage in the Daily Telegraph of massacres of Muslim civilians by the SPLA?

The simple question that must be asked is why there was no coverage by the *Daily Telegraph* of the raids on Muslim communities which so clearly appear to have provoked similar raids on southern communities in Bahr al-Ghazal? There are several possible answers to this particular question.

One possible answer may be that the *Daily Telegraph* and its reporters were aware of the massacres and raids carried out on Muslim communities by SPLA raiders, but chose not to report on these raids and massacres because the northern communities were Muslim, and not "Christian". It is well-known that the *Daily Telegraph's* distinguished editor Charles Moore is a devout Christian, as are many of his colleagues on the paper, and ultimately the *Daily Telegraph* can of course choose only to report on allegations of violence towards Christian communities in Sudan and elsewhere. That is their prerogative. If this is the option which the *Daily Telegraph* has chosen to pursue, it should make this clear and abandon any claim to objectivity, independence or balance in its coverage of Sudan and the Sudanese conflict. Reporting on civil wars is always difficult, but is made all the more difficult if one appears to have taken sides.

A second possible answer for the absence of coverage by the *Daily Telegraph* of the raids on Muslim communities which in turn provoked the raids it did chose to report is perhaps the result of somewhat poor, undemanding journalism on behalf of the *Daily Telegraph*. A ten minute search on the internet by even the most inexperienced *Daily Telegraph* journalist would have been sufficient to bring up the *Agence France Presse* reports which provide such a crucial chronological background to the claims made by Baroness Cox, and unquestioningly reported by the *Daily Telegraph*. The reports by *Agence France Presse* show a pattern of systematic devastation, over a hundred murders, 68 villages and encampments partially destroyed, two millions dollars worth of damage. One would have thought that such an elementary review of very immediate and current news items on Sudan would have been an elementary procedure before publishing a major news item on the country, and particularly one which contained claims of genocide.

A third possible answer may be because the *Daily Telegraph* accepted at face value the claims made by Baroness Cox. If this is the case then the *Daily Telegraph* has quite simply shown bad judgment. Baroness Cox may well be a friend of Charles Moore and his associates, but she is in no way an independent observer of events in Sudan. Indeed, she is a supporter of the Sudanese rebels who are waging war in that country, and directly responsible for provoking the very actions she then calls genocide. Additionally, several of her previous claims, and claims of groups she heads, regarding the Sudanese government have been criticised, challenged or contradicted by, amongst others, Anti-Slavery International, African Rights and the British and American governments, organisations and governments hostile to the government of Sudan.

At the very least the *Daily Telegraph* has demonstrated poor research skills and somewhat undemanding journalism, a disturbing combination given the claims of genocide it chose to feature on its front page.

As mentioned above, it is of course the absolute prerogative of the *Daily Telegraph* to form its own opinion on Sudan, even if that means ignoring the devastation of Muslim communities while deeming similar raids on Christian communities, as provoked by, and in response to the attacks on Muslims, to be “genocide”. What is somewhat disturbing is that what is presented as the *Daily Telegraph*’s in-house perspective on Sudan appears to be based on inaccurate and flawed information. The *Daily Telegraph*’s Foreign Editor, for example, has stated that:

The Daily Telegraph, in common with other newspapers, tends to believe the war is perpetuated by the government’s efforts to impose Islamic custom and sharia upon an African population in the South who are largely Christian and Animist.¹²

In outlining this rationalisation of the *Daily Telegraph*’s stance on Sudan, the Foreign Editor provided a prime example of the lazy assumptions that have characterised attitudes towards Sudan. The *Daily Telegraph* is clearly unaware, or chooses not to be aware, of the fact that southern Sudan has been exempt from Islamic *sharia* law since 1991. The ten states that make up southern Sudan are governed by their own laws. Once again, this is a matter of record and is documented by the American State Department in their definitive *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Southern Sudan’s position with regard to Islamic *sharia* law is clearly stated in these reports:

Sudan’s 1991 Criminal Act, based on Shari’a law, (prescribes) specific “hudud” punishments...The Government officially exempts the 10 Southern States, whose population is mostly non-Muslim, from parts of the 1991 Criminal Act. But the Act permits the possible future application of Shari’a law in the south, if the local state assemblies so decide.¹³

Even the American government has admitted that *sharia* law is not applied in the south. It must also be stated that the *Daily Telegraph*’s recent coverage of Sudan, even before the claims of genocide which it chose to carry, has been less than accurate. While one can always understand and even expect a degree of subjectivity in the reporting of a journalist, what is less forgivable are blatant untruths. The *Daily Telegraph* claimed in May 1998, for example, that southern Sudan is “largely Christian”.¹⁴ This is a crucial inaccuracy. Christians account for less than one-fifth of the southern population, and there appear to be marginally more Christians than Muslims. The *Economist Intelligence Unit* country profile of Sudan 1994-95, for example, records that Christians account for 15 percent of the southern population. This figure is carried in Human Rights Watch/Africa’s 1996 report on Sudan.¹⁵ *Sudan - A Country Study*, the definitive United States government guide, published by the Federal Research division and Library of Congress, states that:

In the early 1990s possibly no more than 10 percent of southern Sudan's population was Christian.¹⁶

By far the majority of southerners are neither Christian nor Muslim, and are adherents of native animist religions. Was the *Daily Telegraph's* claim, in this instance, simply poor journalism, bad research or wishful thinking? It is disappointing that the *Daily Telegraph*, as a newspaper of record, would make such a basic mistake in its coverage of Sudan. Together with the confusion of the *Daily Telegraph's* foreign staff over the exemption of *sharia* law in southern Sudan, it is perhaps a clear example of the mythology that appears to have replaced objective coverage of Sudan and its problems. Claims of a "Christian south", forced to live under *sharia* law, with all the implications for religious conflict, merely perpetuate an inaccurate stereotype of Sudan, and an equally inaccurate and superficial context for the Sudanese conflict.

However much some groups may wish it to be, the Sudanese civil war is not in essence about religion. The Sudanese civil war, for example, predates the present Islamic government by 34 years. The conflict is, and has always been about the political status of southern Sudan. Despite its stated concern about southern Sudan, the *Daily Telegraph* appears to be unaware that in 1997 the present Sudanese government guaranteed an internationally-supervised referendum whereby the people of southern Sudan, for the first time ever, can choose whether to stay within a united Sudan or opt for independence.

Returning, in conclusion, to the *Daily Telegraph* and the claims of genocide made by Baroness Cox, it is a matter of record that the human rights organisation African Rights, for example, has described previous, and equally grave, claims by Baroness Cox about slavery in Sudan, as "overeager or misinformed", and that such claims have "played upon lazy assumptions to raise public outrage". We would suggest that her claims about genocide in Bahr al-Ghazal province are equally "overeager or misinformed", and have also "played upon lazy assumptions to raise public outrage". What is disturbing is that the *Daily Telegraph*, one of Britain's finest newspapers, has provided Baroness Cox with front page coverage of her claims.

What is perhaps even more worrying is that this incident is only the latest manifestation of an anti-Sudanese standpoint bordering on Islamophobia. The *Daily Telegraph* may well detest the government of Sudan, and may well support the rebel war against the government, based it would seem on lazy, and equally inaccurate, assumptions of its own. By its deafening silence on the issue of the repeated southern rebel raids on Muslim civilian communities, however, the *Daily Telegraph* is in danger of appearing to turn a blind eye to those massacres, and other gross abuses of human rights, simply because they were carried out against Muslims.

¹ CNN, '1 million people face famine in Sudan, Ethiopia', April 10, 1998. Web posted at: 6:04 p.m. EDT (22:04 GMT)

² *Newsweek*, May 18 1998.

³ 'Khartoum press accuses SPLA of massacring 18 in west Sudan', Agence France Presse, 5 May 1998.

⁴ *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁵ Details of these conferences are available for inspection on the homepage of the National Democratic Alliance at its internet address, <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/2884/nda/bon94.html>.

⁶ Alex de Waal, 'Sudan: Social Engineering, Slavery and War' in *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring 1997.

⁷ *Slavery in Sudan*, Anti-Slavery International and Sudan Update, London, May 1997, p. 20.

⁸ See, for example, Alex de Waal, *op cit.*, p.63.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ This reference number of this submission is TS/S/4/97, and is available to view on the Anti-Slavery International web-page at <http://www.charitynet.org/asi/submit5.htm>.

¹¹ *Military Lessons of the Gulf War*, Greenhill Books, London 1993, p.154. This was produced by, amongst others, US intelligence analysts.

¹² Letter by Mr Stephen Robinson, Foreign Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, dated 4 June 1998 to David Hoile, director of the British Sudanese Public Affairs Council.

¹³ *Sudan Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 1995*, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Washington-DC, 1996.

¹⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, May 22, 1998.

¹⁵ *Behind the Red Line: Political Repression in Sudan*, Human Rights Watch/Africa, New York, 1996, p.193.

¹⁶ This study is available on the internet at [cstidy:@\[DOCID+sd0056\]atlcweb2.loc.gov](http://cstidy:@[DOCID+sd0056]atlcweb2.loc.gov).