

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY INTERNATIONAL AND SUDAN

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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

PREJUDICED AND DISCREDITED Christian Solidarity International and Sudan

Christian Solidarity International (CSI) has for several years been actively involved in what the organisation has termed "slave redemption" within Sudan, whereby the organisation claimed to have been "buying back" large numbers of southern black villagers who had been taken as "slaves" by northern Sudanese forces. These activities have for several years been criticised as lacking credibility and fuelling kidnapping and abduction within war-torn southern Sudan.¹ Perhaps the most devastating criticism of the claims made by Christian Solidarity International was contained in the Canadian Government's **Human Security in Sudan: The Report of a Canadian Assessment Mission**, which was published in February 2000. This report was drafted by the Canadian special envoy to Sudan, John Harker. One of the two missions with which John Harker was tasked was to:

independently investigate human rights violations, specifically in reference to allegations of slavery and slavery-like practices in Sudan.²

While Harker was clearly critical of many human rights abuses in Sudan, he clearly questioned claims of large scale "slave redemption." He specifically touched on the credibility of Christian Solidarity International's claims of large-scale "slave redemption".

[R]eports, especially from CSI, about very large numbers were questioned, and frankly not accepted. Mention was also made to us of evidence that the SPLA were involved in "recycling" abductees...

Serious anti-abduction activists... cannot relate the claimed redemptions to what they know of the reality. For example we were told that it would be hard not to notice how passive these "slave" children are when they are liberated or to realize how implausible it is to gather together so many people from so many locations so quickly - and there were always just the right number to match redemption funds available!

The Harker Report also detailed how fraudulent "slave redemptions" were being used to raise money for the SPLA, money which he also stated is used to purchase arms and ammunition:

Several informants reported various scenarios involving staged redemptions. In some cases, SPLM officials are allegedly involved in arranging these exchanges, dressing up as Arab slave traders, with profits being used to support the SPLM/A, buy weapons and ammunition...

The Harker Report documented the deliberate fraudulent nature of many "slave redemptions":

Sometimes a "redeeming group" may be innocently misled, but other groups may be actively committed to fundraising for the SPLM/A & deliberately use "slave redemption" as a successful tactic for attracting Western donors.

We did speak with an eyewitness who can confirm observing a staged redemption and this testimony conformed with other reports we had from a variety of credible sources. The "redeeming group" knew they were buying back children who had not been abducted or enslaved. The exchange was conducted in the presence of armed SPLA guards. The "Arab" middle man/trader delivering the children for "redemption" was recognized as a member of the local community even though he was dressed up in traditional Arab costume for the event.³

There has long been a history of tribal raiding in several parts of central and southern Sudan, often between tribes competing for water and pastures at given times of the year. A spate of such raids was normally settled at an inter-tribal peace meeting which would traditionally return those

¹ See, for example, 'UN Condemns Aid Group for Buying Slaves', **The Times**, (London), 9 July 1999, 'UNICEF Slams Buying Freedom for Sudan Slaves', New Article by Reuters on 5 February 1999; and David Hoile, 'Sudan, Propaganda and Distortion: Allegations of Slavery and Slavery-Related Practices', The Sudan Foundation, London, March 1997.

² John Harker, **Human Security in Sudan: The Report of a Canadian Assessment Mission**, Prepared for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ottawa, January 2000, available at http://www.dfait-maeci.gc-foreignp-3110186-e.pdf, p. 1. ³ Ibid., pp.39-40.

abducted. In central Sudan traditional rivals have been the Dinka and various Arabised Baggara tribes. These rivalries were exploited and heightened in the 1980s, when both the government and the SPLA armed various tribes with modern, automatic weapons, and encouraged them to attack each other. Since then there has been considerable inter-tribal conflict, in the course of which men, women and children have been abducted and kidnapped. The vastness of Sudan, much of which has always proved difficult to administer - even without the dislocation of civil war - has made it very difficult for effective action against those responsible for such activities.

It is these tribal raids, and the abductions which have occurred during such conflict, that have been presented by Christian Solidarity International and other activists as "slavery".⁴ Despite the fact that the Dinka are overwhelmingly animist, CSI have additionally presented the conflict between the Dinka and the Arabised Baggara as a religious one. These groups have also claimed that the Sudanese government are themselves intimately involved in these "slave raids". It is also a matter of fact that almost identical patterns of inter-tribal raiding and abduction between the Dinka and Nuer, two black southern Sudan tribes, have not been described as "slavery", while the same activity when it is between the Baggara and Dinka is presented as "slavery" and "slave raiding".⁵

Christian Solidarity International's claims of government-backed slave raids in Sudan have been criticised by human rights activists such as Alex de Waal, a former director of African Rights. Despite the fact that there are no "slave markets in the 19th century image", de Waal states that:

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... 'Tens of thousands of Sudanese Christian men, women and children have been kidnapped and sold as slaves by government soldiers.' This despite the fact that there is no evidence for centrally organized, government-directed slave raiding or slave trade.

Peter Verney, the author of an official 1997 Anti-Slavery International report on allegations of Sudanese slavery, has also commented on allegations of government involvement in slavery:

[T]he charge that government troops engage in raids for the purpose of seizing slaves is not backed by the evidence.

The head of Save the Children (UK) in Sudan, Sir Robert Ffolkes, has also stated: "I do not believe the government in involved in slave-taking."⁶

Any examination of Christian Solidarity International's activities can only but reach disturbing conclusions. The Harker Report points to the fact that CSI's claims about mass "slave redemptions" are simply not believable. On the other hand, assuming that CSI has been involved at least in part in paying for the release of tribal abductees, the evidence is that CSI 's involvement has grotesquely interfered with the traditional, long-established inter-tribal mechanism for returning abductees. The vast amounts of American dollars that CSI has introduced has seen something approaching a fifty-fold increase in the usual fees for such reunification. This may well have led to the deliberate abduction and kidnapping of civilians for the specific purpose of being "sold" to CSI. And, as the Harker Report mentioned, fraud and corruption may also have become a feature of such CSI activities.

Christian Solidarity International: Creating its Own Market in Abductions?

⁴ See, for example, 'Devastating Slave Raids in Sudan, Christian Solidarity International, Zurich, 19 March 1998.

⁵ See, for example, "Slavery" in Sudan. When is a "Slave" not a "Slave": An Examination of the 1999 Wunlit Accords,

The British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, London, December 1999, available at http://www.espac.org

⁶ 'Anti-Slavery Drive in War-Torn Sudan Provokes Response Critics Say Buyback Boost Market', The Washington Times, 25 May 2000.

Writing in 1998, de Waal publicly placed on record what would come to be very justified concerns about the process of "buying back" slaves. He stated that:

It is easy to envisage how this could be manipulated by traders and local officials, and could even create incentives for kidnapping children for ransom. 7

It is a sad fact that everything warned about by de Waal, and Anti-Slavery International has come to pass. Peter Verney, the author of the 1997 Anti-Slavery report on Sudan has stated:

It is not clear what impact hundreds of dollars are having. Maybe it's even maintaining the set-up. Market forces mean that you can probably buy a child if you want one. ⁸

Even journalists who have sensationalised the allegations made by groups such as Christian Solidarity International by taking most "slavery" claims at face value, have raised the question of whether the activities of these groups in effect encourages the abduction of civilians specifically to then be "sold" to Christian Solidarity International. David Orr, a London **Times** correspondent who went on one of CSI's carefully organised "slave" purchasing visits in early 1998, certainly had some doubts:

CSI claims to have bought the freedom of 1,400 enslaved Sudanese. But its programme prompts disturbing questions. Does it encourage the taking of slaves by creating a lucrative market in an otherwise shattered economy? This and other questions must be answered. 9

Christian Solidarity International Has Pushed Up the Price of Redeeming Captives

David Orr himself provides evidence of how the price of Sudanese captives has increased as a result of Christian Solidarity International's "redeeming" of "slaves". He raised his concerns with CSI's John Eibner:

Is CSI not worried it is inflating the prices for slaves, making Dinka communities dependent on Western largesse? 'We pay 50,000 Sudanese pounds per slave, the equivalent of five cows,' says Eibner. The rate was agreed between Dinka and Arab elders before we arrived'... I remember my conversation with Ahmed, the trader, who after selling 386 slaves to CSI could hardly get out of his chair, so great was the pile of cash on his lap. Ahmed, enjoying a celebratory cigarette, had confided to me that he used to get just a few cows. CSI were paying him three times as much now, he said with pride. ¹⁰

That Christian Solidarity International has misrepresented itself on this issue is clear. The figure given in Sudanese pounds is meaningless given Sudanese inflation. The dollar figure is the crucial one. It has been established that Christian Solidarity International pays some US \$50 per "slave" in their dealings with the people they term "middlemen".¹¹ Groups other than Christian Solidarity International pay \$100.¹² De Waal has unambiguously stated that prior to Christian Solidarity International's intervention, the "great majority" of those abducted were released:

¹² Richard Miniter, The False Promise of Slave Redemption', **The Atlantic Monthly**, July 1999. The article was published in two parts in **The Atlantic Monthly** and is also available online in two parts. Part one is available at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jul/9907sudanslaves.htm and part two at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jul/9907sudanslaves2.htm. Miniter's work has previously appeared in **The New York Times**, **The Wall Street Journal** and **Reader's Digest**. Miniter's article was hostile to the Sudanese government and also confirmed that Christian Solidarity International enjoyed a special rate of US \$50 per "slave". Christian Solidarity International itself states that it pays "at the present time... \$35 (US) per slave" - this in May 2000 (See, CSI's website at http://www.csi-int.ch/csi-redemp-program.htm).

⁷ De Waal, 'Exploiting Slavery: Human Rights and Political Agendas in Sudan', op. cit., p.145

⁸ 'Indecent interest in genocide', **The Observer**, (London), 26 July 1998.

⁹ 'The Price of Freedom', **The Times Magazine**, (London), 23 May 1998.

¹⁰ 'The Price of Freedom', The Times Magazine, (London), 23 May 1998.

¹¹ William Finnegan, 'The Invisible War', The New Yorker, 25 January 1999.

through the intervention of their relatives on payment of a fee normally between LS 8,000-13,000, equivalent to US \$1-4. $^{\rm 13}$

Christian Solidarity International would seem to have increased the amount paid for tribal abductees by several thousand percent from between US \$1-4 to \$50 There is perhaps little wonder that CSI would have found a willing market for its monies.

Christian Solidarity International's Misrepresentation about the "Middlemen" They Deal With

That Christian Solidarity has also mislead observers with regard to the people they term "middlemen" is also apparent. This particular misrepresentation was laid bare in a lengthy article on Sudan by William Finnegan entitled 'The Invisible War', which appeared in the **New Yorker** magazine in January 1999. The article was hostile to the government of Sudan, and it probed the slavery issue. In SPLA-held territory, Finnegan came across a group of captives at the Nyamlell airstrip in the custody of someone who introduced himself as 'Ibrahim', although he admitted that was not his real name. 'Ibrahim' said he was waiting for Baroness Cox, and that her organisation paid US \$50 for every "slave".

Back in Khartoum, Finnegan discussed this meeting with Ushari Mahmud, a widely respected Sudanese UNICEF official working on abduction issues who had written extensively about "slavery" in Sudan. It should also be pointed out that Mahmud has been a vocal critic of the past two Sudanese governments. He identified 'Ibrahim' as Doka Awut, who also went by the name of Adam Ali, and that he had direct dealings with Christian Solidarity International and Baroness Cox. He further stated that Doka Awut personally participated in raids on Dinka communities and he then sold those taken in these raids. Several months later, in May 1999, Christian Solidarity International spokesman John Eibner was still maintaining the untruth, telling **Newsweek** that "the retrievers and raiders are not the same".¹⁴

In the light of the independent evidence presented above, it can safely be stated that Christian Solidarity International's statement with regard to whether it deals directly with those who abduct Sudanese men, women and children has been shown to have been untrue.

Christian Solidarity International: Out of Step with Southern Sudanese Wishes

In a July 1999 article entitled 'The False Promise of Slave Redemption', published by **The Atlantic Monthly**, an article fiercely critical of the Sudanese government, American journalist Richard Miniter reported at first hand how out of touch groups like Christian Solidarity International are with regard to the wishes of local southern Sudanese on the issue of "slave redemption". Miniter's reporting echoed the concerns of the Dinka communities as outlined by Anti-Slavery International in 1997.

On the issue of "redeeming" captives, Miniter interview local southern tribesmen at first hand about the issue of buying captives abducted during raids.

[T]he Dinkas I spoke with, all of whom live in villages that have been victimised by the raiders, strongly oppose redemption altogether on the grounds that it promotes raids.

Miniter interviewed Machar Malok Machar, a tribesman from Akoch who had escaped from captivity during a previous raid, about "redemption":

It is bad. They do these terrible things to put shillings in their pockets. They are crazy for the money. Why would you give it to them?

In conclusion, Miniter also interviewed Manase Lomole Waya, a representative of Humanitarian Assistance for South Sudan, based in Nairobi, about his view on "redemption":

¹³ Alex de Waal, 'Exploiting Slavery: Human Rights and Political Agendas in Sudan', **New Left Review**, (London), Number 227, 1998, p.142.

Where does the money go? It goes to the raiders to buy more guns, raid more villagers, put more shillings in their pockets. It is a vicious circle.

There is clearly evidence, therefore, that the very people Christian Solidarity International have dealings with are themselves directly involved in the kidnapping and abduction of civilians. These are the very people Christian Solidarity International presents as well-intentioned "retrievers". There is also evidence that CSI has repeatedly misrepresented the nature of its relationship with the men of violence who would appear to raid villages to provide captives for the growing Christian fundamentalist propaganda market. And, there is also evidence that CSI, and other similar groups, continue to be out of touch with grass roots Dinka opinion on the issue.

Systematic Fraud within "Slave Redemption"

Miniter's July 1999 article also provided unambiguous first hand evidence that there was fraud and corruption in the process of "slave redemption" in Sudan. This evidence confirmed precisely the concerns about fraud in the process of "slave redemption" previously expressed by Anti-Slavery International and Alex de Waal.

Miniter documented at first hand how SPLA officials were fraudulently presenting local villagers as "slaves" to be "purchased" or "redeemed" by Westerners. Miniter and an accompanying American Christian activist were offered children from a neighbouring village as "slaves", would-be stand-in "slaves", for purchase.¹⁵ Miniter records that the price per person was US \$100. He also stated that CSI "bought" "slaves" at a special rate of US \$50 each.

Miniter was accompanied during his visit to southern Sudan by James Jacobson, the president of Christian Freedom International. Jacobson, a former Reagan Administration official, had previously served as Christian Solidarity International's Washington representative. In 1998, the American branch of Christian Solidarity International USA went its own way as Christian Freedom International, with Jacobson at its head. He had been an enthusiastic supporter of "slave redemption" until he actually visited southern Sudan to see the "slave redemption" situation for himself. Jacobson subsequently publicly disowned "slave redemption" because the financial incentives involved encouraged both the taking of captives as well as fraud and corruption. Jacobson has publicly stated that "[i]t had become a cottage industry" and that the money paid to redeem purported slaves was used "to buy more guns, hire more people, to abduct more innocent people."¹⁶

Miniter clearly set out the way SPLA officials are involved in "slave redemption":

[They] set themselves up as bankers and insist that redeemers exchange their dollars for Sudanese pounds, a nearly worthless currency... The officials arrange by radio to have some villages play slaves and some play slave-sellers, and when the redeemers arrive, the Sudanese pounds are used to free the slaves. When the redeemers are gone, the pounds are turned back over to the corrupt officials, who hand out a few dollars in return. Most of the dollars stay with the officials, who now also have the Sudanese pounds with which to play banker again.¹⁷

A Reuters report in July 1999 has also confirmed the "massive corruption" reported by Jacobson:

Local aid workers... say that they have seen children who they have known for months passed off as slaves... And Reuters interviewed one boy in Yargot who told a completely implausible story of life in the north, a story which he changed in every respect when translators were swapped. ¹⁸

¹⁵ The article was published in two parts in **The Atlantic Monthly** and is similarly available online. Part one is available at http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jul/9907sudanslaves.htm and part two at

http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99jul/9907sudanslaves2.htm. Miniter's work has previously appeared in **The New York Times**, **The Wall Street Journal** and **Reader's Digest**.

 ¹⁶ 'Anti-Slavery Drive in War-Torn Sudan Provokes Response Critics Say Buyback Boost Market', The Washington Times, 25 May 2000.
¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 'Aid group tries to break Sudan slavery chain', News Article by Reuters on July 11, 1999 at 23:40:58.

In May 1999, the Christian Science Monitor also clearly stated:

There are increasingly numerous reports that significant numbers of those 'redeemed' were never slaves in the first place. Rather, they were simply elements of the local populations, often children, available to be herded together when cash-bearing redeemers appeared. ¹⁹

It is apparent that the SPLA is very supportive of the "work" of the very people who apparently abduct people from their own communities in order to sell them to Christian Solidarity International. The Harker Report clearly points to the financial gain to the SPLA of staged slave redemptions. There is also a definite propaganda advantage to any such encouragement of kidnappers and abductors such as Doka Awut or Adam Ali. These are questions which Christian Solidarity International does not appear to have spent much time thinking about.

Other Christian Solidarity International Claims Challenged

Christian Solidarity International's claims of tens of thousands of people "enslaved" in Sudan have also been challenged by human rights professionals, and experts on the issue of "slavery". Anti-Slavery International, in its 1999 submission to the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, for example, stated that

A representative of Christian Solidarity International spoke at the beginning of this year of "tens of thousands" of people in slavery in Sudan, and of "concentration camps" for slaves. At Anti-Slavery International, we know of no evidence to justify an assertion that 20,000 people or more are currently held as captives and slaves in these areas of Sudan.

Christian Solidarity International's claims of mass "slavery" in the Nuba mountains has also been firmly questioned by human rights experts. Alex de Waal, for example, states that CSI has "also alleged that there is mass enslavement in the Nuba mountains, which is contested by Nuba human rights activists". De Waal states that "African Rights' monitors in the Nuba Mountains have come across two incidents of possible - but unconfirmed - enslavement in two and a half years". ²⁰

Christian Solidarity International's Support for "War Criminals"

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", nominated John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, 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. Its deeply questionable attempt to have Garang, a man described by the **New York Times** as one of Sudan's "pre-eminent war criminals"²¹, speak on its behalf as a Christian Solidarity International member and spokesman, was a clear abuse of its consultative status for political ends. This resulted in CSI having its United Nations accreditation withdrawn by the United Nations Economic and Social Council.²²

¹⁹ "Slave 'Redemption' Won't Save Sudan", Christian Science Monitor, (New York), 26 May 1999.

²⁰ Alex de Waal, 'Exploiting Slavery: Human Rights and Political Agendas in Sudan', **New Left Review**, (London), Number 227, 1998, p.145.

²¹ Ibid.

²² 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.

A clear picture of CSI's SPLA associates emerges from the eight US-based humanitarian organisations working in Sudan, including CARE, World Vision, Church World Service, Save the Children and the American Refugee Committee, no friends of the Sudanese government, who, at the end of November 1999, felt it was their responsibility to publicly state that the SPLA has:

engaged for years in the most serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, beatings, arbitrary detention, slavery, etc. 23

Human Rights Watch, similarly no friend of Khartoum, stated in December 1999 that "The SPLA has a history of gross abuses of human rights and has not made any effort to establish accountability. Its abuses today remain serious."²⁴ The **New York Times**, also a vigorous critic of the Sudanese government, states that the SPLA "[H]ave behaved like an occupying army, killing, raping and pillaging."²⁵ The **Economist** also summed up the general image of the SPLA when it stated that: "[The SPLA] has... been little more than an armed gang of Dinkas... killing, looting and raping. Its indifference, almost animosity, towards the people it was supposed to be "liberating" was all too clear."²⁶

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Sudan, for example, documented an incident in which John Garang's SPLA forces attacked two villages in Ganyiel region in southern Sudan. SPLA personnel killed 210 villagers, of whom 30 were men, 53 were women and 127 were children. 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.²⁷

The SPLA has also murdered dozens of humanitarian aid workers from the mid-1980s onwards. In one attack alone, for example, SPLA gunmen killed 23 relief workers, drivers and assistants.²⁸ In 1998, the SPLA murdered relief workers in the Nuba mountains, and in 1999 the SPLA murdered four aid workers assisting with a Red Cross project in southern Sudan.²⁹

It is all too obvious that Christian Solidarity International has been guilty of the most appalling naivety and bad judgement in its activities in Sudan. Its claims with regard to "slave redemption" in Sudan have been totally undermined by the Canadian Government's Harker Report which outlined serious concerns about fraud and corruption in CSI-staged "redemptions". It has been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Even assuming CSI claims about abduction and "redemption" were remotely accurate, CSI's cash-rich officials have probably created their own market in kidnapping and abduction. And despite their studied claims to the contrary, CSI is clearly dealing with those who are directly engaged in kidnapping and abduction. Christian Solidarity International's propagandistic blundering with regard to inter-tribal raiding in Sudan has been of deep concern to other, less partisan, organisations. CSI's "slave redemptions" and its claims about the numbers of "slaves" in Sudan and the Nuba Mountains have also been challenged by reputable human rights groups and activists. Perhaps of equal concern has been Christian Solidarity International's close and willing association with the SPLA. CSI's over-identification with men clearly guilty of systematic and deliberate crimes against humanity makes a mockery out of out its claims to be a "human rights organisation" helping those "suffering repression".

²⁶ The Economist, March 1998.

²³ 'Humanitarian Organizations Oppose Plan Providing Food to Sudanese Rebels', Press Release by InterAction, the American Council for Voluntary International Action, Washington-DC, 30 November, 1999.

²⁴ 'Rights Group Warns US Against Feeding Sudan Rebels', News Article by Reuters on 14 December, 1999 at 11:34:40.

²⁵ 'Misguided Relief to Sudan', Editorial, **New York Times**, 6 December, 1999.

²⁷ Situation of Human Rights in the Sudan, UN Special Rapporteur Gaspar Biro, E/CN.4/1996/62, 20 February 1996.

²⁸ Denying "The Honor of Living": Sudan A Human Rights Disaster, Africa Watch, London, 1989, p.116.

²⁹ See, 'Sudan Aid Workers Executed', News Article by BBC World on 3 April, 1999 at 03:25 GMT.