

A historical map of Sudan and surrounding regions, including parts of Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa. The map shows major cities like Khartoum, Sennar, and Karkoj, and rivers like the Nile. A black box is overlaid on the map, containing the title text.

# THE DISPLACEMENT OF TRUTH: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, OIL AND SUDAN

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WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

# THE DISPLACEMENT OF TRUTH:

## Amnesty International, Oil and Sudan

On 3 May 2000, Amnesty International published a report entitled **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**. This report claimed to examine human rights abuses in the oil-producing areas of south-central and southern Sudan. It stated that “[t]he pattern of human rights violations includes atrocities and the forcible internal displacement of large populations of local peoples”. The report further stated that it sought to focus on the displacement of populations “living in oil fields and surrounding areas” and to “make clear the link between the massive human rights violations by the security forces of the Government of Sudan and various government allied militias.”<sup>1</sup>

A central flaw of **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** was that the report ignored the pivotal fact that it takes at least two sides to go to war. Given that the conflict in and around the oil producing areas is largely between Sudanese government forces and those of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), the report’s almost exclusive focus on allegations of government involvement in this conflict was evidence of deliberate or unwitting distortion of the reality of conflict in these areas. Amnesty International was seemingly unable to analyse the circumstances in which war has now been visited upon the oil-producing areas and their environs.

The sequence of events is clear. The SPLA identified the oil industry as a strategic target, especially once oil began to be pumped and exported. The SPLA clearly decided to inflict as much damage on the oil industry as possible, and they chose to become militarily active in the oil-producing areas in question. This has led to attacks, including the bombardment of towns in these areas, which has in turn led to military confrontation between government forces and the SPLA. And, as is the case in every war, large numbers of civilians have chosen to leave the war zone. The oil concession areas have been in existence for several years: population displacement was only really reported once these areas became war zones. While the report correctly stated that “[t]he primary cause of the internal displacement in Sudan is direct armed attack, or threat of armed attack on civilian populations”<sup>2</sup> it chose not to examine the SPLA’s central involvement in the war within the oil-producing areas. This omission has fatally flawed the credibility of the report, and reflects badly on Amnesty International.

Amnesty International states that it is “independent of any government, political persuasion, or religious creed...Amnesty International is impartial. It does not take sides in political conflicts.”<sup>3</sup> It also claims “principles of strict impartiality and independence”.<sup>4</sup> However, it is evident that this report has demonstrably undermined Amnesty’s claim to professionalism and “principles of strict impartiality”.

## Amnesty International, Oil and Civil Wars: A Double Standard?

In the first instance, it must be stated that Amnesty International’s focus on the Sudanese oil industry is somewhat jarring given that Amnesty has been remarkably silent with regard to instances where there has been a demonstrable link between oil, civil war and massive, on-going human rights abuses. Angola provides a key example. Both Sudan and Angola have an oil industry. Angola’s is a long-standing business, and Sudan’s has only just begun. While Amnesty International produced this report, focusing on the oil industry’s involvement in Sudan, and the alleged effect that oil have had in exacerbating the Sudanese civil war, Amnesty has shown no such concern about the Angolan oil revenues which do so clearly fund the devastating Angolan civil war. Not one of Amnesty’s six special reports on Angola, nor any of its eleven news releases on Angola have focused on “the human price of oil” in Angola.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Introduction’, **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>2</sup> ‘International Standards on Internal Displacement’, **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>3</sup> ‘AI Works’, Amnesty International at <http://www.amnesty.ca/about/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Facts and Figures About Amnesty International and its Work for Human Rights’, Amnesty International, International Secretariat, AI Index: ORG 10/03/97, London, 13 June 1997.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, ‘Angola (the Republic of) Amnesty International Publications and News Releases 1996-’, at <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/countries/indx112.htm>

It is also a matter of record that while Britain and the international community has not seen any evidence that Sudanese oil revenues are being used to continue the Sudanese civil war, there is abundant evidence that Angolan oil revenues are directly funding the Angolan conflict. In March 2000, in responding to a Parliamentary question about whether the Angolan Government was using oil revenues to acquire weapons, the British Government stated: “There is no doubt that oil revenues are used to fund the purchase of arms”.<sup>6</sup> The Angolan Government receives at least \$10 million per day in oil revenues: eighty percent of its budget is spent on the war. The Bishop of Luanda, Damiao Franklin, has openly stated “Much of Angola’s wealth goes on weapons.”<sup>7</sup>

Amnesty International appears to be deliberately selective as to which oil revenues fuel which conflict. It would appear to turn a blind eye to the Angolan oil industry.

Amnesty International’s unprofessional approach in **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** was also demonstrated by its methodologically questionable attempt to link oil revenues to arms purchases. The report stated that:

There is a clear connection between the new-found oil wealth and the government’s ability to purchase arms. On the first day of the export shipment of the first 600,000 barrels of oil, and import shipment of 20 Polish T-55 tanks arrived in Port Sudan.<sup>8</sup>

This is an extraordinarily crass statement for a supposedly reputable group such as Amnesty to have made. One would have expected a somewhat more rigorous examination of any claimed linkage between oil revenues and arms. The above claim by Amnesty would be more at home in a third-rate newspaper. Other bodies clearly apply more rigorous standards and criteria. In March 2000, the British Government, for example, in reply to a Parliamentary question about whether the Sudanese Government had used oil revenues to purchase weapons, publicly stated that they did not “have any evidence of such expenditure at present”.<sup>9</sup> The British Government has also stated that the Khartoum authorities have promised transparency with regard to how the oil revenues are spent. The British Government has made several such responses to similar Parliamentary questions. It should also be noted that the British Government is no friend of the Khartoum authorities.

### **Amnesty International: An Accessory to American Foreign Policy?**

Amnesty International must also be careful to not be seen as an accessory to United States foreign policy. It is very clear that the Clinton Administration has pursued a very hostile policy towards Sudan. It is also clear that the fledgling Sudanese oil industry has been a particular target of this hostility. The timing of the publication of this report was poorly chosen, almost coinciding with similar anti-oil campaigns and activities by American government bodies, anti-Sudanese coalitions and Christian fundamentalist organisations. Amnesty’s oil report was published on 3 May. Shortly afterwards, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, a federally-funded organisation identified with American foreign policy objectives, also publicly focused on the Sudanese oil industry in hearings before the United States Senate.<sup>10</sup> And, later that same month, a major anti-Sudanese campaign was launched in the United States with a national focus on Washington-DC.<sup>11</sup> It would be difficult to persuade some observers that Amnesty International was not in some way party to a broader anti-Sudanese agenda.

## **Amnesty International and Sudan: Very Questionable Methodology**

### **Amnesty International: Why No Official Visit to Sudan?**

The first point which should be made regarding the methodology of its report is that while Amnesty International chose to visit Sudan illegally, at least in part to interview SPLA commander Peter Gadet, it chose not to accept several Sudanese government invitations to visit Sudan officially.

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<sup>6</sup> House of Lords **Official Record**, Written Answer, 16 March 2000, column WA230.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Angola: War without End’, News Article by BBC on 5 May 2000 at 01:49 GMT 02:49 UK.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Oil Companies and Their Responsibilities’, **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>9</sup> House of Lords **Official Record**, Written Answer, 22 March 2000, column WA28.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, ‘Sudan Listed as Religious Rights Abuser’, News Article by Associated Press on 17 May 2000.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Capitol Hill Rally Kicks Off Anti-Sudan Campaign’, News Article by CNSNews.com on 23 May 2000.

Following the publication of the Amnesty International report, the Sudanese government disclosed that Sudan has on several occasions invited Amnesty International to visit Sudan “to see for itself”.<sup>12</sup> The Government stated that Amnesty was first invited two years ago and then most recently again in September 1999 at a meeting between the Sudanese Minister of Justice, Mr Ali Yassin, and the Acting Deputy Secretary-General of Amnesty International, Mrs Ann Burly. The question asked of Amnesty by the Sudanese Government, “Why has it turned down repeatedly the invitation of Sudan government to visit the country, while it keeps reporting negatively about it?” is a valid one. The question is all the more relevant given the fact that Amnesty International chose to visit Sudan illegally, at least in part for its interview with Gadet.

### The use of questionable sources

It is of immediate concern with regard to the report’s methodology that the report uses terms such as “allegations” or “allegedly” ten times and “reportedly” twice. When dealing with such serious issues it is simply inappropriate to merely repeat “allegations”. This tendency is made all the worse by the report’s choice of sources.

It is very surprisingly indeed, for example, that Amnesty International chose to unreservedly and unquestioningly cite SPLA rebel commander Peter Gadet as a source for the alleged forced displacement of civilians from the area of the oil fields. The report states that “shortly after he split from the forces of Paulino Matip, Commander Peter Gadet confirmed that the government had arranged for Paulino Matip’s forces to clear the local population from the area of the oil fields”. Given that Gadet was a rebel commander, who had recently defected from the forces of Paulino Matip, he would hardly be the most reliable source to use as “confirmation” of claims made by the SPLA. He would have a vested interest in presenting the worst possible picture of his enemy, the Sudanese government. Common sense would dictate considerably more caution in examining partisan allegations from one side in a war than that exercised by Amnesty.

Yet Amnesty International cites Gadet on three separate occasions as a source for serious allegations made against the Sudanese government and oil companies. The SPLA’s reputation for disinformation is well known. Dr Peter Nyaba, a SPLA national executive council member, described the SPLA’s “sub-culture of lies, misinformation, cheap propaganda and exhibitionism” vividly:

Much of what filtered out of the SPLM/A propaganda machinery...was about 90% disinformation or things concerned with the military combat, mainly news about the fighting which were always efficaciously exaggerated.<sup>13</sup>

It is all too obvious that this Amnesty International publication had more in common with journalism than any rigorous human rights reporting. The report chose as sources for its claims, journalists such as Julie Flint. Amnesty’s reliance on journalism rather than human rights methodology was noted by the Reuters news agency, which stated that

Amnesty was apparently citing a report in the London **Observer** newspaper for its information on the alleged atrocities.<sup>14</sup>

The article in question was written by Julie Flint. She is footnoted in the report.<sup>15</sup> However, Ms Flint’s reporting on Sudan has consistently indulged in sensationalist and unproven allegations. These have included claims that the Sudanese government has used chemical weapons in contested areas of Sudan. The sum of her evidence for such serious allegations was that the SPLA said that a pig fell down a crater and died. One would have expected Amnesty International to have chosen its sources for equally serious claims somewhat more carefully.<sup>16</sup> Flint’s articles have also been remarkably selective about which abuses

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Amnesty International Has Never Been Honest on Sudan’, Press Release, Embassy of Sudan, London, 17 May 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Nyaba, **The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan: An Insider’s View**, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 199, p.55.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Sudan Rejects Amnesty report of oil impact on war’, News Article by Reuters on 17 May 2000 at 14:49:46 EST

<sup>15</sup> Footnote 4, ‘Human Rights Violations Committed in the Name of Oil’, **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Such claims were independently scientifically investigated by the United Nations in 1999 and found to be baseless. On 17 October 1999, the United Nations revealed that several tests conducted by the laboratories of the internationally-renowned Center for Disease Control in Atlanta on medical samples taken by Operation Lifeline Sudan staff in areas in which chemical weapons were said to have been used “indicated no evidence of exposure to chemicals” (Note by the Spokesman of the United Nations Secretary-General handed to the Sudanese Ministry of External Relations by the UN Resident Coordinator in Sudan, Philippe Borel). The British Government also confirmed that tests “indicated no evidence of exposure to chemicals” (House of Lords **Official Report**, 16 March 2000, col. WA 230).

she deemed worthy of attention. There was no mention of rebel human rights outrages, despite the fact that these systematic abuses are all too well documented.<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International appear to have closely followed Flint's lead.

## **Amnesty International: Turning A Blind Eye to Human Rights Violations**

### **Amnesty International and Child Soldiers**

Of particular concern is that Amnesty International's report appears to have turned a blind eye to human rights violations amounting to war crimes. Amnesty devotes a considerable section of its report to "reports" that local Sudanese forces defending the oil pipeline were using child soldiers. Amnesty states

There is increasing evidence that those who provide security to the oil companies have child soldiers in their employ. A former commander in the forces of rebel leader Paulino Matip, which were employed by the government to protect oil installations, informed Amnesty International that child combatants are commonly used as fighters.<sup>18</sup>

Despite mentioning "increasing evidence", it is clear that the "former commander" is the best source that Amnesty can provide. Once again, such claims from such sources are innately questionable. Amnesty should have exercised considerably more caution before citing this above, unnamed, source. On the basis of this "evidence", the report takes up one page in addressing the issue of the government, oil companies and child soldiers. The report also goes on to include the issue of child soldiers in its concluding section. Under Amnesty International's Recommendations, the report calls on the Sudanese government to "bring an immediate halt to the deployment of child soldiers".<sup>19</sup>

Given this level of interest in child soldiers within the oil areas, it is very surprising, therefore, to note that Amnesty makes no mention whatsoever of clear, independently-documented instances of child soldiers within the ranks of the very SPLA commander Amnesty has chosen to use as a source.

In February 2000, for example, Reuters correspondent Rosalind Russell was one of a group of journalists who visited SPLA positions on the periphery of Sudanese oil-producing areas. She interviewed Peter Gadet, the SPLA commander in the area, and the person cited in Amnesty International's report. Ms Russell personally observed that the ranks of the rebel forces had been "swollen by shy boy soldiers".<sup>20</sup> Even if for some reason Amnesty Canada had not been following international coverage of the reporting central to their report, **The National Post**, the Canadian national daily, also reported the presence of SPLA child soldiers. Reporting from Tabanga in southern Sudan, **National Post** journalist Charlie Gillis unambiguously stated that most of the SPLA "soldiers" in one location he visited were:

adolescent boys, carrying...machine guns too big for their hands.<sup>21</sup>

The dictionary definition of "adolescent" is "between childhood and manhood".<sup>22</sup> Anyone interested in balance must ask why it was that Amnesty chose to go public with claims of "child soldiers" "defending" oil installations, unproven claims made by clearly questionable sources, why ignoring the credibly reported presence of child soldiers amongst forces "attacking" oil-producing areas?

The absence of any comment on the above clear evidence of child soldiers can be explained in one of two ways. Either Amnesty International was not aware of the above prominent international and Canadian press coverage of issues central to their report **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, or Amnesty was aware of these independently verified reports of child soldiers and chose not to address them in the report. If the former is the case, then Amnesty International can only be seen as an ill-informed and ill-prepared organisation clearly unable to produce such a report. If on the other hand, they knew about the above reports of SPLA ranks "swollen by..boy soldiers", and chose not to address this issue, then Amnesty

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, **Questionable Sources, Questionable Journalism: The Observer Newspaper and Sudan**, The British-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, London, May 2000.

<sup>18</sup> 'Companies' Security Arrangements', **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>19</sup> 'Amnesty International's Recommendations', **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>20</sup> 'Rag-tag Rebels Fight for Sudan's Oil Riches', News Article by Reuters on 14 February 2000 at 14:24:21.

<sup>21</sup> 'Meeting the Victims of Sudan's Oil Boom', **The National Post**, Canada, 27 November 1999.

<sup>22</sup> **The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English**, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p.12.

International's reputation for impartiality and accuracy in its reporting is clearly undermined. One can even claim that this issue is a clear example of how skewed Amnesty's **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** report actually is.

It must be further documented that Ms Russell also took photographs of the child soldiers she had seen. One photograph appeared with the following caption: "Sudanese Child Soldiers Guard Rebel Military Headquarters". The report and the photograph were distributed around the world by the Reuters news agency. It is inconceivable that Amnesty International would not have seen them. Why did Amnesty then ignore the contents of an article containing material central to its **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** report?

It should also be pointed out that the Statute of the International Criminal Court makes it clear that the use of child soldiers is a war crime:

Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces or using them to participate actively in hostilities.<sup>23</sup>

Amnesty International states that it visited Wicok village in October 1999 and interviewed Peter Gadet.<sup>24</sup> One must further ask why Amnesty sought out a man guilty of keeping child soldiers? To what extent does Amnesty International normally rely upon claims made by a war criminal? What is Amnesty International's policy on meeting with war criminals and relying on them as "evidence"? Why did Amnesty seek out and choose to cite as a source, a man actively engaged in waging war on civilians, of bombarding towns in southern Sudan? Why did Amnesty International not mention the child soldiers, despite there being clear photographic evidence of this abuse of children? Did the Amnesty International interviewing team see any child soldiers? Does Gadet's use of child soldiers within oil-producing areas not deserve to be considered as "human rights violations committed in the name of oil"? Why turn a blind eye to independently documented accounts of child soldiers as reported by Reuters while choosing to accept unverified "reports" by rebels with a vested interest in presenting negative images?

### **Amnesty International: Double Standards and Hypocrisy**

While itself turning a blind eye to ample first-hand evidence that the very people it was interviewing and citing as sources were guilty of war crimes including the use of child soldiers, the Amnesty report states that Amnesty "believes many foreign companies tolerate violations by turning a blind eye to the human rights violations committed by the government security forces or government-allied troops in the name of protecting the security of the oil producing areas."<sup>25</sup> Amnesty returned to this theme, stating:

Silence on the part of companies implies a tolerance of human rights violations and fosters a climate of impunity.<sup>26</sup>

Such a position on the part of Amnesty, given its uncritical use of Gadet, can only but be described as deeply hypocritical. To paraphrase Amnesty International, silence on the part of Amnesty International implies a tolerance of human rights abuses and fosters a climate of impunity. Amnesty International has turned a blind eye to war crimes involving young children.

## **Amnesty International: Further Contradictory Positions**

### **The Presence of Foreign Forces?**

The Amnesty report states that the Sudanese government has been recruiting forces from local ethnic communities:

The pursuit of control over the oil territory provides a powerful incentive for assembling forces based on ethnic origin.

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<sup>23</sup> See, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, at <http://untreaty.un.org/English/notpubl/rome-en.htm>

<sup>24</sup> 'Human Rights Violations Committed in the Name of Oil', **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>25</sup> 'Introduction', **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>26</sup> 'Companies' Security Arrangements', **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

It would clearly make a lot of sense for the government to recruit local Nuer and Dinka forces to defend the oil areas from rebel attack. Any yet, while having mentioned this “powerful incentive”, Amnesty then proceeds to contradict itself. It can be said that Amnesty appeared to be desperately seeking any allegations, however questionable, for inclusion in the report. One example of this “shotgun” approach involves claims that there was a foreign military presence in the oil-producing areas. Amnesty was seemingly unable to resist throwing in some second or third hand claims that “Mujahedin fighters from Afghanistan and Malaysia have been reportedly used to protect the staff and property of companies involved in building the oil pipeline.”<sup>27</sup>

Quite what use Afghan and Malaysian “mujahedin” would be in a Nuer or Dinka area is a question Amnesty seemingly did not bother to ask itself. Any such foreigners would not be Arabic speakers, and they would certainly not be able to speak Nuer or any of the dialects spoken within the oil areas. Amnesty then cites allegations that “Iraqi” soldiers are also active in the oil areas.<sup>28</sup> Amnesty provided not the slightest shred of evidence for such claims. One can only but point to previous examples of claims of foreign involvement in the Sudanese civil war. Donald Petterson, a former American ambassador to Sudan, commented on

Reports...in the media that hundreds, even thousands of Iranians, many of them Revolutionary Guard military and security police advisers, had come to Sudan...The reports were based in part on information provided by Egyptian intelligence sources, which were conducting an assiduous disinformation campaign against Sudan.<sup>29</sup>

Given that Amnesty International was unable to present any evidence whatsoever for its claims, there is every chance that Amnesty has repeated similarly fanciful claims with regard to Afghans, Malaysians and Iraqis, claims made as part of an equally assiduous disinformation campaign. In any instance there would appear to be no shortage of Sudanese citizens willing to fight in southern Sudan.<sup>30</sup>

## Displacement within War

Allegations of displacement are central to the Amnesty International report. In the chapter of the report entitled ‘Human Rights Violations Committed in the Name of Oil’, Amnesty states

Tens of thousands of people have been terrorized into leaving their homes in Western Upper Nile since early 1999. Government forces have used ground attacks, helicopter gunship and indiscriminate high-altitude bombardment to clear the local population from oil-rich areas.

Amnesty also states that “[t]here have been reports that government troops clear the area around the town of Bentiu using helicopter gunships.” Amnesty does not provide any sources for these general claims.

The Amnesty report also devotes a whole chapter to ‘International Standards on Internal Displacement’ What is very noticeable is that Amnesty does not mention any SPLA activity whatsoever in these chapters. Yet Reuters provides reliable, first-hand reporting of precisely the sort of activity by the SPLA which leads to people being “terrorized” and leaving their homes. A Reuters correspondent visiting SPLA positions personally witnessed

a pillar of smoke rising from the besieged town of Mayom, subject to daily bombardments by rebels as they try to advance eastwards to the oil development.

Similar daily bombardments of Juba by the SPLA in the early 1990s resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians.<sup>31</sup> One must ask Amnesty whether or not the daily bombardment of Mayom, presumably one of

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<sup>27</sup> ‘The Human Price of Oil’, Amnesty International (London), 3 May 2000.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Human Rights Violations Committed in the Name of Oil’, **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil**, Amnesty International (Canada), AI Index: AFR 54/01/00, Vanier, 3 May 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Petterson, **Inside Sudan: Political Islam, Conflict, and Catastrophe**, Westview Press, Boulder, 1999, pp.42-43.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, ‘Thousands of Sudanese Volunteers to Guard Oil Pipeline’, News Article by Associated Press on 27 May 1999 at 18:07:05, and ‘Official Media: Thousands of Civilians Joining War in south Sudan’, News Article by Associated Press on 29 September 1999 at 09:27:39.

<sup>31</sup> The United States Department of State 1990 **Sudan Country Reports on Human Rights Practices** reported that the SPLA “conducted indiscriminate mortar and rocket attacks on the southern city of Juba, killing more than 40 civilians and wounding many others. These attacks...seemed intended to terrorize the inhabitants.” In November 1991 the SPLA again shelled Juba, killing 70 civilians. In 1992, the SPLA continued the random shelling of Juba, killing over 200 southern civilians.

several towns subject to this sort of action, did not result in large numbers of civilians being “terrorized”. Would such daily bombardment not result in hundreds if not thousands or tens of thousands of civilians leaving their homes as the rebels “clear the area around” the towns and villages in which they live? If so, and Mayom would provide a clear example of daily bombardment of a town, would this not qualify as a “human rights” violation? If so why was there not the slightest mention of this or numerous other examples of such activity and behaviour by the SPLA? The Reuters report also clearly states that it is the SPLA that is attempting to “advance eastwards to the oil development”. This would indicate that the SPLA were the aggressors in the particular circumstances described by Reuters. Yet this does not in any way feature in the Amnesty report.

Amnesty International’s second or third-hand “reports” of massive displacement in oil-producing areas such as Heglig are clearly contradicted by reputable journalists who have visited these areas. Canadian journalists and financial analysts who visited the Heglig oil fields found no such displacement. Claudia Cattaneo, of **The Financial Post**, reported:

[A]t Heglig, the site of one of Talisman’s major oilfields and processing facilities, there is no evidence of population displacement. Military presence is low key. Children are playing and going to school near the oil wells. Western and Sudanese workers say thousands of nomads are coming here to look for work, for medical assistance...or for education.<sup>32</sup>

Had Amnesty International availed itself of the invitations to visit Sudan and see the areas in question for themselves, they would have seen, as many independent observers have, that much of the Heglig concession is a flood plain upon which permanent habitation would have been impossible.

Perhaps more than four million Sudanese, the majority of them southern Sudanese, have been displaced as a result of the Sudanese civil war. They have fled fighting between government and rebel forces. More than two million of these southern Sudanese refugees live in and around Khartoum: many more live in other parts of northern Sudan. The simple fact is that displacement is the result of war, war between government forces and the SPLA, and intra-southern Sudanese fighting. To read **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** would leave one with the impression that the displacement of civilians in the oil areas was solely the result of government action. This is demonstrably untrue. Such a skewed picture presents a distorted picture of Sudan and the Sudanese conflict. This in turn distorts international perceptions of the conflict and makes it even more difficult for the international community to assist in the resolution of the conflict.

## Conclusion

It is all too clear that **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** was a hurried, poorly drafted and clearly unprofessional publication. It was a report largely reliant on newspaper reporting. Amnesty International’s choice of those articles and the journalists it then used as sources for allegations cited in the report is questionable to say the least. What is also deeply questionable is that given Amnesty’s decision to rely on journalistic sources for its human rights reporting, rather than conduct its own human rights work in a systematic, professional manner, why Amnesty then chose to totally ignore relevant first-hand, credible, reporting from Reuters, citing instead second and third hand newspaper accounts by partisan journalists.

Amnesty International’s lack of professional was also manifested in other areas. While clearly seeking to bring pressure to bear upon those oil companies involved in Sudan, the report was not able to produce a single piece of evidence that any oil company has been involved in human rights abuses. At the same time Amnesty International chose to ignore ample evidence of serious human rights violations by the SPLA within the oil-producing areas, violations amounting to war crimes. Amnesty also chose both to rely on claims made by a SPLA commander patently guilty of serious human rights abuses including the use of child soldiers and to ignore the fact that he was guilty of war crimes.

It must be asked why Amnesty International chose to ignore reputable, first-hand accounts of events in the oil-producing areas, accounts which included credible reports of child soldiers and the daily bombardment of towns? It must also be asked why Amnesty chose instead to publish claims made by rebel commanders and partisan journalists? And to what extent does Amnesty engage in dialogue with war criminals?

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Analysts Upbeat About Talisman’s Sudan Role’, **The Financial Post**, 17 November 1999.

For any human rights report to be credible the report must go out of its way to be balanced, impartial and even handed, and to be seen to be balanced and even handed. This report was neither. **Sudan: The Human Price of Oil** was demonstrably unbalanced and demonstrably questionable in its content, sources, analysis and conclusions. Amnesty International's reputation as a human rights organisation can only but suffer as a consequence.