

Religious Persecution in the Sudan: A Call for Action

Introduction

It has been said that more Christians have been martyred in this century alone, than in the previous nineteen centuries combined. Seldom is this attack against Christianity as salient as in the country of Sudan. Yet it is not only the Christians who are suffering. The net has widened to include all who oppose the extremist religious ideology of the ruling National Islamic Front - including moderate, and tolerant Moslems. Indeed most Muslims in Sudan find the activities of the NIF government abhorrent, and contrary to the true teachings of Islam.

The track record of the current government in Sudan provides compelling evidence of a systematic, determined campaign of religious persecution against opponents of Islamic extremism. This is a campaign of gross human rights violations which is widespread, and carried out at the orders of top government officials.

It is a campaign which fits the definition of GENOCIDE as set out in the 1948 Genocide Convention following World War 2. Just as Hitler had his "final solution", so do the Islamic extremists have their "final solution" to the "southern problem". (See resource materials listed at the end of this report)

The Crisis in Sudan

Sudan is a country of vast resources. It has long been seen by the Arab world as its future breadbasket. There are those who believe that Sudan, if properly developed, could feed all of Africa. Along with agricultural wealth, Sudan has vast oil reserves, chromium, uranium, gold, timber, and cattle. The problems in Sudan are NOT because the land cannot produce wealth.

Yet last year, an estimated 200,000 southern Sudanese - mostly southern Christians - died in a preventable and predictable man made famine. It was Stalin who said that "if one person dies, that is a tragedy; if a thousand people die, that is a statistic". Unfortunately, to the world community at large, those 200,000 people - all of whom had names, dreams, friends and families - are now little more than statistics.

Sudan is one of the most serious crisis in the world today. At present, there are over 4 million displaced people; a brutal civil war which targets a civilian population, and a famine which is affecting an estimated 2.6 million people. But it is primarily the "African Sudanese" in the south, (who differ significantly from the "Arab Sudanese" in the north by race, culture, skin colour and often religion), who are suffering the most.

Sudan is a country where human rights are violated regularly, political freedoms are virtually non existent, and power has been concentrated in the hands of an oligarchy of religious extremists, bent on imposing their ideology on the rest of the country, and eventually on the rest of Africa. It is a country where slavery is flourishing, with a wink and nod from the central government; where, according to some human rights

groups, the rape of women is used for political and social ends; where groups such as the Nuba, Ingessena, and various southern ethnic groups are facing daily threats to their lives.

The government of Sudan is a sponsor of terrorist groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, known for its barbaric cruelty to the children it captures and enslaves. It has also supported groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the infamous Osama Bin Laden.

Sudan is a country where civil war has claimed almost 2 million lives over the past 15 years alone, and has reaped untold havoc on a helpless civilian population for almost 40 years. In recent years, this war has turned even more nasty, with Sudan government planes bombing civilian sites such as hospitals, churches, and the feeding centers of NGOs, and has destroyed village after village in slash and burn raids, displacing millions. It is clearly NOT a war between the Sudan government, and the Sudanese rebels. It is a war between the Sudan government, and the PEOPLE of Southern Sudan - most of whom are Christians. Religion has become a weapon of the state. Intense religious persecution of all who oppose its narrow ideology is one of the outcomes. The primary target of this persecution is the Christian population in the south, and Nuba mountains.

Background

Historically, there has always been conflict between the people of northern and southern Sudan. There are a lot of factors which have caused this, including centuries of slave trading, religion, and control of land and resources. The base of power has always rested in the cities of the north, such as Khartoum. The lands of the south have always been seen by these centers of power, as sources of wealth to be extracted for their own benefit.

The colonial rule of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium did little to alter this imbalance of power. At the time of independence, the south was annexed to the north in what can only be called a sell out of the African Sudanese, by the former British colonial administrators. Whatever the motivation of the colonialists, the deal sanctified a de facto "right" for the government in the north to continue to marginalize and exploit the people and resources of the African Sudanese.

Since then, the pattern of exploitation and oppression has continued. During the Anyanya wars of the 1960's and early 70's, missionaries reported that African Sudanese were slaughtered by the hundreds. Pastors and Christian leaders were tied up in sacks and thrown alive to the crocodiles. Others were buried up to their necks in the ground, with honey poured over them so that ants and other insects could devour them. In 30 years, little has changed, other than the intensity of persecution has increased, and the sophistication of methods has been refined.

In 1972 a peace agreement was brokered by the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, which gave the southerners regional autonomy. But in 1983, the regime in Khartoum abrogated that treaty. President Gaafar

Nimeiri, acting on pressure from the National Islamic Front, was quoted at the time saying that the Addis Ababa agreement "was not written in the Koran", and therefore was not binding. The world stood by and watched as the foundations for a just settlement between the north and south crumbled, and war once again ravaged the land.

In 1989, the National Islamic Front took power in a military coup. Soon after, it became apparent that the Islamists were going to embark upon a program of ethnic cleansing, and destruction which would ensure the survival of their religious hegemony, and enable them to make Sudan a model Islamic state.

At the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional peace talks in 1994, the NIF government declared openly their stated aim of not only making Sudan a model Islamic state, but also being the vehicle to which their brand of Islam (which includes as one of its objectives, the destruction of the state of Israel) - was to be spread to the whole of Africa.

The Nature of Religious Persecution

Officially, there is religious freedom in Sudan. But even the laws as they stand on paper openly discriminate against non-Muslims.

Islam is clearly the religion of the state, and the government has stated that Islam must inspire the country's laws. By inference, non-Muslims then, are viewed as second class citizens. Practicing religions other than Islam, becomes a privilege which can be taken away - not a fundamental right.

Laws governing what Muslims and non-Muslims may do vary significantly. Non Muslims can convert to Islam, but it is a capital offense for a Muslim to convert to another religion. A Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman. But a non-Muslim man is forbidden to marry a Muslim woman.

Similarly, Muslims may adopt a child of any background. Whereas non-Muslims are forbidden to adopt a child whose parents were Muslims, or any child who was abandoned.

Yet even the provisions which do provide some protection for non-Muslims under Sharia Islamia are applied selectively, and often left up to local security officials for interpretation. The judicial system is not independent of the NIF rulers, and hence abuses, even within the framework of Sharia, are seldom addressed.

Christianity and other religions are allowed as long as they remain irrelevant to political and social life in Sudan. Christians are tolerated so long as they don't claim citizenship as Muslims do.

What is so remarkable about the genocide and religious persecution in Sudan is not so much its unique brutality, or its high casualty figures. Rather, it is the degree to which it is being carried out under the noses of - and at times the consent of - the international community. It is being done slowly and consistently. But it is being carried out with precision. Christianity and other non-Muslim religions have no place in the "ideal Islamic state", as defined by Muslim extremists.

Even in the capital of Khartoum, churches in the shanty areas have been bulldozed and Christians transported by force to the desert outside the town and dumped there with no basic provisions. Christians are constantly denied permission to erect schools and places of worship, while mosques and kalwas are subsidized by the state.

Yet the most serious aspect of the genocide and religious persecution comes in the form of "forced Islamization. This strategy of the Islamic extremists is as clever as it is insidious:

" The strategic use of famine and civil conflict;

" Deflecting attention away from government activities and hiding the truth from the international community through careful manipulation and control of information.

Strategic Use of Famine and Civil Conflict

The creation of displacement and vulnerability among the non Islamic peoples through bombing of civilian targets, combing raids, the arming of local militias, and fueling inter-ethnic and factional fighting has become a major feature of the civil war. Once populations have fled their homes, they have no means of support and become dependent upon outside assistance.

When assistance from the international community is denied (as it is now in the Nuba Mountains and other parts of Southern Sudan), the people are forced to migrate to the government garrisons where they can receive assistance from the government (through the UN and international NGOs who often partner with Islamic groups allied to the government), upon acceptance of Islam.

Those who don't go to the government towns face starvation and death. Others are captured and sold into slavery, while women are routinely raped, and forced to marry soldiers and members of local militia groups.

The Sudan government has employed the term "jihad" (holy war), in the context of the civil war, in order to mobilize the northern Muslim population to take up arms against their non-Muslim countrymen, using the promise of war booty (which includes slaves, concubines, cattle, and land) as incentives;

The first region to feel the effects of this campaign was the Nuba Mountains. This regime has denied humanitarian access to the Nuba Mountains ever since it came to power. The UN, ICRC, and other NGOs have never been able to provide assistance to the more than 300,000 people living in the opposition held

areas of the Nuba Mountains. In 1992-93, the world stood by as tens of thousands of Nuba were deported from the mountains and resettled in other areas of northern Sudan. While these deportations have slowed down, the campaign is still continuing, and humanitarian access is still being denied. Many of these have been sold into slavery, others killed. The women are routinely, and systematically raped, or forced to marry northern soldiers. Human rights groups charge that the purpose of this is twofold: 1. To provide incentives to poorly paid soldiers and government militias; and 2. To destroy the ethnic and familial identities of the Nuba people.

In 1994, this campaign of terror spread into northern Bahr El Ghazal, especially around the Heglig and Bentiu oil fields. Local militias, known as Murahaleen, as well as splinter factions under warlords such as Kerubino Kwanyin Bol, and Paulino Matep, were heavily armed by Khartoum, and given the task of creating havoc in the area. These raiders were (and continue to be) very successful in causing widespread displacement and ethnic cleansing of any ethnic groups in the area considered to be a potential opposition to the government. Thousands of internally displaced people began fleeing the oil field sites, and areas within a 200 kilometer proximity radius, such as Gogrial, and Awiel counties.

Many of these arrived at the NGO sites in areas of Southern Sudan where the United Nations agencies were allowed to operate. For years the increasing numbers of these displaced people were creating a major challenge to relief groups in the area who appealed to international donors to increase levels of support.

In 1998, the militia raids and ethnic cleansing hit an all time high, and precipitated the famine last year, in which an estimated 200,000 people died. Thousands more are living in peril, and are still facing death.

Tragedy of International Response: Ignoring Reports of Famine

Yet it is the response of the international community which is the most baffling in this whole scenario.

Ignoring Reports of Famine

Since the time of independence, the assault from successive regimes in Khartoum against the people of the south has been well known to the international community. Since 1994, the internally displaced people from the oilfields, Nuba Mountains and other areas where the genocide was taking place, have been telling their stories to the UN, and NGOs working in Sudan. Yet no action has been taken on the part of the international community. Reports of slavery and genocide have been around for years, yet it was only recently (last month) that a UN agency (UNICEF) finally acknowledged it publicly - and only then to slam the activities of Christian agencies who were redeeming slaves.

The former UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Gaspar Biro, reported extensively on the human rights abuses in the Sudan, but quit in frustration when after years of hard work, absolutely no action was

taken to stop the carnage. When the famine hit its peak in the beginning of 1998, Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), the UN agency which had the mandate to co-ordinate relief activities in Sudan, had less than 40% of the funding needed to maintain even the most basic emergency programs.

CIDA's own response to the growing number of accounts of internally displaced people, famine, ethnic cleansing, slavery and genocide that was taking place was to suspend all funding to OLS for two years (from 1996 to 1997) for emergency programs in the famine area over administrative issues. It was not until images of starving children once again filled our TV screens that emergency assistance was finally resumed in 1998.

Canadian Commercial Enterprises Assisting Khartoum Government

One of the most tragic responses of the international community has been the failure to curb the activities of foreign transnational corporations, especially Canadian oil companies, from aiding and abetting the Khartoum government.

For several years, the Calgary based oil company, Arakis Energy Corp, had been partnering with the Sudanese government, in a business consortium which also includes the governments of China and Malaysia. By Arakis own admission, they were providing, over 10,000 barrels of oil per day to the Sudan government refinery in El Obeid, a city in the middle of Sudan which has very few civilian vehicles. El Obeid is, however, a major air force base and center for military operations against the Sudanese people in southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains.

In August of 1998, Talisman Energy Inc., another Calgary based oil company, took over the shares of Arakis and pumped in some badly needed capital to the whole enterprise. At a meeting at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in September, 1998, Jim Buckee, Talisman Energy's CEO acknowledged that approximately 250 million dollars from this initial oil investment would directly benefit the Sudan government.

These oil executives have become a major source of misinformation to the international community. In a form letter which was sent out to Canadians who had written in to Talisman Energy's head office in Calgary citing their concerns about human rights abuses in Sudan, Jim Buckee stated upon his return from Sudan: "...certainly, I did not see anything that would lead me to believe that we are propping up a malign regime."

At a recent rally in Port Sudan, Sudanese Vice President, Ali Osman Mohamed Taha stated that "with the start of the oil exportation, (scheduled to begin the end of June, 1999), we will score a decisive victory by liberating all positions and spreading peace and stability in all parts of Sudan".

It is clear from these remarks that the Sudanese government is counting on the development of the oil industry to aid them in their war against the Sudanese people. This is clear evidence that Canadian oil companies, are directly aiding the Khartoum government in their war efforts. We can also infer, with reasonable probability, that Canadian oil companies are unwittingly supporting a campaign of genocide against the people of southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains.

Giving Tyrants "The Benefit of the Doubt"

There is no question that the government of Sudan is making a concerted effort to dupe the international community into believing that it is not engaged in brutal and inhumane activities, and is simply trying to work for peace. Churches are left open in Khartoum and a few other main cities. There are even Christians and other with government portfolios. If one does not speak Arabic, travels only to Khartoum and other areas where the government allows, and speaks only with government officials and their supporters within the UN community, one could come away with an entirely different understanding of the suffering of the Sudanese people, and the reality of religious persecution and genocide.

Many have been fooled.

Yet this is not unusual. One only has to remember the disbelief of the international community to reports coming out of Germany during World War 2, to know how easy it is for dictators to dupe the world community. Similarly, during the days of Stalin, highly respected people such as Bernard Shaw, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and even PM Herriot of France, visited the Ukraine during the early 1930's and proclaimed that reports of the famine and mass killings of Stalin's campaign against the Kulaks to be false. Later, by Stalin's own admission, over 10 million Kulaks had been "liquidated".

The same thing appears to be happening in the Sudan today. Despite all the evidence from numerous human rights groups, independent journalists and NGOs, the international community is still reluctant to take any action against the despots in Khartoum. Time after time, the world has given the ruling junta the "benefit of the doubt".

When Khartoum finally opened up some areas of Bahr El Ghazal to emergency relief flights last year, they received accolades of praise from the international community, rather than criticism for closing those areas off in the first place.

Despite compelling evidence of Sudan government involvement in the slave trade, international diplomats consistently refer to the "alleged slave trade", and never make a direct link between it and the regime in Khartoum - this in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary - evidence which anyone can gather for themselves by interviewing the redeemed slaves.

The Nuba Mountains have been sealed off from outside observers for over 10 years. Yet there has never been any serious attempt to force Khartoum to open up this area for humanitarian assistance and investigation into the reports of genocide.

Whenever the Sudan government announces that they are serious about achieving peace in Sudan, the international community announces "new breakthroughs" in peace negotiations. Cease-fires come and go, but there has never been a stop to the bombing of innocent civilian targets in the Nuba Mountains. Such agreements only allow the Sudan government to redeploy their forces in strategic areas not covered by the cease-fires.

Consequently, year after year, the population of the Southern Sudanese Christians continues to be decimated, and more and more land is taken over by the northerners.

Manipulation of Humanitarian Aid Agencies

The way that the Khartoum government has used the international aid community to further its campaign of genocide is indeed striking.

During the civil war in Ethiopia, the Communist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam attempted to use famine to starve out the support base for the TPLF and EPLF rebels in northern Ethiopia. When the world community finally figured out what was happening, they were forced to support a cross-border humanitarian operation directly into the rebel held areas, by-passing the Ethiopian authorities, and hence defying the sovereignty of Ethiopia.

These efforts saved the lives of thousands of innocent Ethiopian civilians who otherwise would have starved to death. Yet the humanitarian assistance also increased the popularity of the rebel movements, and was a significant factor in their ultimate victory over the Mengistu regime.

The National Islamic Front in Sudan learned from this experience, and no doubt, was determined not to let it happen in Sudan. Consequently, Operation Lifeline Sudan was allowed to exist in some areas under the control of opposition forces. The UN, however, is unable to operate outside of its mandate, which requires it to abide by the edicts of the "sovereign" state. Hence, the Khartoum government has total control over the activities, location of operations, and programs of OLS, and its partner agencies.

This has enabled them to focus on strategic areas such as the Nuba Mountains. Northern Bahr El Ghazal, and the oil field areas, while still appearing to the international community to be concerned about the people in southern Sudan.

The UN, and other NGOs working in the areas to which they have been granted access by Khartoum, are reluctant to speak out against government atrocities, for fear that it will jeopardize their ability to meet the

needs of the people in the areas where they are working. Consequently, most aid workers are compelled to sign "gag clauses", which prevent them from exposing human rights abuses. Khartoum is thus able to lean on the aid community, and silence open opposition.

The Impact of Oil Development on the Peace Process in Sudan

The country of Sudan is at a turning point in history. The recent commencement of oil sales from Sudan could dramatically change the political and social dynamics in that country. But is this the dawn of a new age of peace and prosperity, or the beginning of the end for many indigenous cultures and people groups who are not part of the National Islamic Front's religious and political agenda?

The rulers in Khartoum have been waging a charm offensive which has convinced many western leaders and foreign observers. Yet the war continues, and human rights abuses have not stopped. The creation of humanitarian need, and subsequent denial of assistance, is still being used as a weapon of war. Despite the fact that this is a clear violation of international law it has gone on and on for more than 10 years!

When one compares the response of the international community to Sudan and to other trouble spots elsewhere in the world - Kosovo, Bosnia, East Timor, and others, the contrast is baffling. More people have died; more people have been displaced; and more suffering is occurring in the Sudan than in any of these other crisis.

Despite the fact that there is virtual consensus among Sudan observers that the suffering is man - made, the result of conflict and human rights abuses - not overpopulation, drought or lack of skills or resources, there is an inexplicable lack of focus on the causes of the suffering. What little action has been taken is, at best, token.

The world continues to dole out approximately a million dollars a day in humanitarian aid to deal with the effects of the problem, but when it comes to addressing the root of the suffering, the response is far less sterling. The continuing habit of the international community to find excuses for not tackling the status quo of injustice in Sudan strongly suggests that there is an unwritten policy of "strategic indifference" at play.

Since 1994, the internally displaced people from the oilfields, Nuba Mountains and other areas where genocide is taking place, have been telling their stories to the UN and NGOs working in Sudan. . There have been calls for safe havens; for corridors of tranquillity; for independent human rights monitors; and peacekeepers. But concrete action is not taken.

Reports of slavery and crimes against humanity have been around for years. Yet it was not until a few months ago that a UN agency (UNICEF) finally acknowledged it publicly - and only then to slam the activities

of some small Christian agencies and fifth grade students in Colorado who were paying money to set slaves free. (This stance of UNICEF is quite baffling since they, along with the ICRC, have both paid ransom to NIF backed militias to free their own personnel when taken captive in the past).

Nor can UN officials and western diplomats claim ignorance of Khartoum's widespread human rights abuses. The collective data over a long period of time, painstakingly gathered by unbiased researchers, from a variety of religious and political backgrounds, points to a consistent pattern of human rights abuses which amount to crimes against humanity. The documentation is readily available for any who care to study.

Those in power in countries like the UK, Canada, France, Netherlands, Germany, and Italy are well aware of the man-made causes of last years' famine in which over 200,000 people may have died. They know that there are millions of people who have been forcibly displaced by the conflict. They know that the NIF is waging a "jihad" against its own people, and embarking upon a program of forced Islamization and Arabization.

The problem is not that these reports are not believed by those who have the power to do something about them. The problem is clearly a lack of political will to act.

There are two reasons for this:

1) There is no political price for indifference!

It is obvious that there is, at present, no political price to pay for allowing, or even facilitating, the preventable deaths of African people.

In Rwanda the world stood by while more than 800,000 innocent people were hacked to death by machete wielding Interahamwe militias in front of CNN cameras. Recent reports reveal that the head of the UN peacekeeping force in that country, General Romeo Dallaire, had alerted the UN authorities well in advance of the impending apocalypse as early as January of 1994, and had devised a plan to pre-empt it. Had this plan been put into action, much of the slaughter might have been prevented, and hundreds of thousands of lives might have been saved.

Yet due to orders from his superiors at the UN, this plan was never put into action. Most of the peacekeepers who were there were withdrawn, and the slaughter was allowed to go ahead. Only a handful of troops remained to witness the resulting genocide.

Yet was there even one politician or bureaucrat in any western nation who lost his or her job or even received a demotion because of what happened in Rwanda? President Clinton, who is largely believed to have been behind this policy of "strategic indifference" was re-elected to a second term, and the UN official who nixed the peacekeeping plan is now the Secretary General.

While the US led the way, there was virtual consensus among western democratic countries to "do nothing" in Rwanda. Not one country was bold enough to use the "G" word, even though it was obvious to everyone that Genocide was occurring. That might have forced the international community to act!

Similarly, now in Sudan, apart from continuing to make benign platitudes about the need for both sides to make peace and the ongoing provision of humanitarian band-aids, this de facto policy of "strategic indifference" is in full play.

Thus it is dangerous to assume that when it comes to Africa, authorities in international circles will act on the basis of "moral imperatives" or with the welfare of the innocent in mind.

But in the case of Sudan, there is a second, equally disturbing reason why there is no political will to act:

2) Profits are given more importance than human rights!

History has demonstrated that when human life is measured against the corporate bottom line, it is easy to lose sight of justice. We've seen this throughout the colonial legacy, and in the many wars which have plagued humanity this past century. .

It is a tragedy that Canada - a country which has championed the cause of human rights, is not an exception.

2.1. Control of Resources: A Major Cause of the Conflict The civil war has been described in many terms: as black Africans against Arabs; Northerners against Southerners; Muslims against Christians; to name a few. Yet one of the least recognized factors which is fundamental to the conflict is the issue of control over resources: Including water, agriculture, cattle, and most recently, OIL!

Most of the vast resources of Sudan lie in the lands of the people of the south. Yet power has always rested in the north. For years, various juntas in Khartoum have coveted these lands and resources, and seen them as essential for their successive visions of Arab and Islamic "development". Yet this "development" has seldom made room for the cultures and lifestyles of the Southern Sudanese people.

2.1.1 Colonial Legacy - Legitimizing the Imbalance of Power

The colonial rule of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium did little to alter this imbalance of power. At the time of independence, the south was annexed to the north in what can only be called a sell out of the African Sudanese, by the former British colonial administrators. Whatever the motivation of the colonialists, the deal sanctified a de facto "right" for the government in the north to continue to marginalize and exploit the people and resources of the south.

Northern encroachment and exploitation of the resources of the south is one of, if not the most important, factors in the civil conflict in Sudan - a conflict which has now lasted over 40 years and cost over 2 million lives.

2.1.2 Strategic Plan of the N.I.F:

Use the Resources of the South to Set up the Ideal Islamic State, and Export Political Islam to the Rest of Africa

At the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional peace talks in 1994, the NIF government declared openly their goal of not only making Sudan a model Islamic state, but also of being the vehicle to which their brand of extreme Islam - was to be spread to the whole of Africa.

In order to accomplish this, the NIF needs the resources of the south at its disposal, as well as the technical assistance and unquestioning complicity of the west. While the world community has been focused on the humanitarian catastrophe in the south, and the day to day logistics of feeding hundreds of thousands of displaced and victimized people, the NIF has been quietly, yet persistently, developing their plan of consolidating their hold on the vast resources and wealth of the south.

2.1.3 Arakis Energy Corp.

For over 5 years, oil companies have been working in the Sudan to develop the oil industry there. The first Canadian company to get involved was a little known Calgary based oil company, Arakis Energy Corp. This corporation had been partnering with the Sudanese government, in a business consortium which also includes the state owned oil companies of China and Malaysia; the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC). By Arakis own admission, they were providing over 10,000 barrels of oil per day to the Sudan government refinery in El Obeid, a city in the middle of Sudan which has very few civilian vehicles. El Obeid is, however, a major air force base and center for military operations against the Sudanese people in southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains.

2.1.4 Forced Displacement

In order to ensure that production went ahead as planned, the area had to be secured against any possible threats from the opposition. In 1994, a campaign of terror spread into northern Bahr El Ghazal, especially around the Heglig and Bentiu oil fields. Local militias, known as Murahaleen, as well as splinter factions under warlords such as Kerubino Kwanyin Bol, and Paulino Matep, were heavily armed by Khartoum, and given the task of creating havoc in the area. These raiders were (and continue to be) very successful in causing widespread displacement of any ethnic groups in the area considered to be a potential opposition to the government. Thousands of internally displaced people began fleeing the oil field sites and areas within a 200 kilometer proximity radius. Areas such as Gogrial, and Awiel counties were devastated!

2.1.5 Displacement Leads to Famine

By 1997 and early 1998, the militia raids and forced displacement hit an all time high, and was a major factor in precipitating the famine last year, in which an estimated 200,000 people died. Thousands more are living in peril, and are still facing death.

Yet while the militia raids, and subsequent denials of humanitarian relief to northern Bahr El Ghazal and the Nuba Mountains served its purpose of securing the oil fields, there was still one problem. Arakis Energy Corp. had little credibility in western stock markets. The shadowy connections between that company and various Pakistani business associates - some of whom were implicated in the BCCI scandal a few years back, scared away investors. The result being that Arakis was unable to raise the capital to complete the oil development - especially the 1500 kilometer pipeline from the oil fields to Port Sudan.

2.1.6 Talisman Energy Inc.

This problem was overcome in the summer of 1998, when Talisman Energy Inc., another Canadian oil company, bought out Arakis for over 270 million dollars and pumped in large amounts of capital to the whole enterprise. Talisman Energy Inc. is the largest Canadian based independent oil and gas producer.

Talisman's main areas of operation are Canada, the North Sea, Indonesia, and the Sudan, with smaller ventures in Algeria and Trinidad. This a well respected company - the darling of the Canadian business community; an influential, blue chip corporation with plenty of capital.

The decision to buy out Arakis was made with very little thought given to the impact on the human rights situation or peace process in the country. Talisman CEO, Jim Buckee admitted that neither he, nor anyone from the company had spoken to anyone connected with any of the opposition parties. They had gathered their information solely from the Sudan government, the Canadian government, the UN, and a few small NGOs working in government held areas of Sudan.

According to Talisman, Canadian officials gave them the green light to go ahead with the project, expressing concerns only for the safety of the oil workers in a civil war context. The Canadian government has denied this, but has yet to make any public statements distancing themselves from the corporate activities of the oil company.

It is unfortunate that at the very time when Talisman was reviewing the decision to link up with the Khartoum government, President Bill Clinton ordered the cruise missile attack on the El Shifa pharmacy. Assuming (incorrectly) that the spurious information which prompted the attack on El Shifa was typical of all reports critical of the NIF government, Talisman closed the partnership deal with the NIF.

Talisman also argued that the project would go ahead whether they were there or not. If the Canadians weren't there, the Germans, or Dutch, or Italians, or someone else would be. So Canadian companies may

as well cash in on the deal - an argument which could be used to justify the participation of companies in any number of illicit and immoral business activities.

3) Effect of Talisman's activities on Sudan

Talisman's entry into the Sudanese arena is having a dramatic impact on that country.

3.1 Talisman's Presence is Cloaking Khartoum's Brutality With "Canadian Respectability"

In response to a myriad of letters written by human rights groups and churches across Canada, Dr. Buckee stated categorically that he had "seen nothing to lead him to believe that his company was propping up a malign regime". Clearly the company, for obvious reasons, is working its hardest to present the Sudan regime in a very positive light. They have even hired a former Canadian career diplomat - the former ambassador to the United Arab Emirates - to be their public relations official.

The company argues that the criticisms of the Khartoum regime are exaggerated or false, and come from either the US government, or neighbouring states which are hostile to the Sudan; or else from Christians waging another crusade against Islam. They say that Talisman will be the "eyes and ears" of the western world, and that, in itself, will be a force for good in the country, encouraging the regime to behave itself.

Yet Talisman's eyes are blind to the atrocities of the NIF, and their ears deaf to the cries of the Sudanese people.

Last November, a shareholders group, the Task Force on Churches and Corporate Responsibility (TCCR), comprising of eleven churches from Canada and the US - all with shares in Talisman, sent a proposal to the company requesting that they be provided with written assurances that the company's operations in Sudan will not aid Sudan's military government in its civil war - nor in its repeated violations of internationally accepted standards of human rights. The group also asked for an independently verified report of its compliance with this commitment.

But this proposal - which given the context of Sudan is entirely reasonable - was turned down by Talisman management.

Two months ago, several Canadian NGOS, submitted a joint letter to Talisman, asking them to:

Operate with more transparency, allowing independent observers to monitor their activities;

Use their influence to accelerate the peace process;

Co-operate with an independent commission which would study the aspect of forced displacement in the areas in close proximity to the oil fields; and

Set up a mechanism which would ensure that the profits from the oil production would go to development and humanitarian activities - not for war.

To date this request has not yet been addressed.

Talisman officials have never visited the areas of Sudan affected by the humanitarian flight bans, the man-made famines, the slave trade, and acts of genocide. Clearly they are operating on a "see no evil - hear no evil" policy.

Yet since they are on the ground, many perceive them to be knowledgeable about the facts. Their presence in Sudan is serving to cloak the regime with a veil of legitimacy and is paving the way for a plethora of other companies and countries to pour investment capital into the hands of the NIF - each wanting to get a piece of the economic pie in Sudan.

In one fell swoop, the NIF has been able to regain lost ground from years of human rights advocacy by concerned groups. Those concerns are now minimized since - after all "the Canadians are there - it can't be all that bad"?

3.2 The Oil Revenues, and Accompanying Capital and Credit Will Provide the NIF With the Resources It Needs to Win the War and Continue Its Campaign of Human Rights Abuses

Historically, oil has been a strategic weapon; and fascist dictators and oil are a lethal mix.

This has been demonstrated over and over again throughout history. In the recent war in Kosovo, NATO warplanes specifically targeted Serbian oil facilities due to this fact. The provision of oil and oil revenues to the NIF will assist that regime in winning the war against its own people, and facilitate more human rights abuses, regardless of what rhetoric comes from Khartoum and their supporters.

Up until recently, conventional wisdom has been that no side could win the civil war. Now, thanks in part to these Canadian Oil Companies, this may no longer be true.

At a meeting at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in September, 1998, Jim Buckee, Talisman Energy's CEO acknowledged that approximately 250 million dollars from this initial oil investment would directly benefit the Sudan government. Yet this is only the tip of the iceberg. Add to this the credit which the NIF can gain from mortgaging future oil shipments; and the good name it has already achieved from the IMF and it becomes increasingly apparent that Khartoum is fast acquiring the capital it needs to achieve its military objectives against the south.

When confronted with the issue of Talisman's provision of support to a regime accused of genocide, Talisman officials point to an appendix in the NIF fabricated constitution which provides that 40 % of oil revenues will go to Unity State, and 35 % to the southern people (meaning the UDSF party). They argue that the Sudan government has given them assurances that all this oil revenue is going to benefit the south by providing hospitals, roads, and humanitarian assistance.

Recently, when asked by a CBC radio interviewer if they really believed the NIF government, Buckee replied: "I see no reason not to"!

Never mind that the NIF:

Was the force behind Nimeiry's abrogation of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement of 1972;

Pre-empted a peace formula worked out between the SPLA and the elected government of Sadik El Mahdi in 1989, by instigating a coup;

Has backtracked or reneged on agreement after agreement!

The Sudan government has given them their word, and that is all that these Canadian oil companies appear to need to justify their partnership with this regime.

Such blind acceptance of NIF government assurances in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary is the corporate equivalent of selling an automatic weapon to a teenager wearing a trenchcoat. Yet it is on these flimsy assurances, with no corresponding action, or even a pretense of a guarantee, which Talisman, the Canadian government, and much of the world are risking the lives and human rights of millions of innocent Sudanese.

3.3 The Oil Revenues are Obstructing the Peace Process

This is not just a case where a Canadian company is working in Sudan. It is a case where a Canadian company is in a formal, business partnership with one of the parties to the conflict - the party which has committed the lion's share of human rights abuses. Talisman, as well as the Canadian government - through corporate taxation - has a pecuniary interest in ensuring that this present regime survives. Neither the oil company, nor the Canadian government, can be said to be neutral.

It is disingenuous for a country like Canada to be on the one hand talking about the need for peace in the Sudan, pressuring the warring parties to stop fighting; when their other hand is dipped in the till of oil revenues - revenues which can only be maintained if the NIF remains in power.

But more importantly, what incentive does the NIF have now to come to the peace table and agree to a just peace? Why would a brutal junta, which has violated virtually every human right in the book, make peace with its adversary if it has the resources to be victorious and impose its own final solution? Dictators are not known for their magnanimity. Or are we to assume that there has been some form of collective epiphany? And that the NIF rulers have all "repented" and purified themselves in the waters of the Red Sea?

In March of this year, the Sudanese Vice President, Ali Osman Mohamed Taha addressed a rally in Port Sudan saying "With the start of the oil exportation, we will score a decisive victory against the rebel forces." This, and other statements made by government officials clearly show that the Sudan junta is counting on the oil revenues to help them win the war against their own people.

For years, the NIF has kept the international community on a "peace process" wild goose chase, running from Abuja, to Nairobi, to Egypt and Libya. It has involved African diplomats, Jimmy Carter, IGAD authorities, Hosni Mubarak, and even Colonel Ghadaffi! There has been a lot of talk: Cease-fires! Reconciliation! the April 97 Agreement! Peace from Within! and on and on. But it has remained just talk. All the while, the NIF has been waiting for the oil to flow.

In the end, the "peace" which the NIF is talking about, means surrender: It is the "messy peace" which comes from the total subjugation and defeat of its opponents. With the oil revenues, the NIF clique believes it can achieve "peace" on its own terms - and its own terms alone.

Thanks to a myopic international community, its strategy so far appears to have worked. Victory could very well be within the NIF's reach.

Had the oil companies and the international community collaborated at the beginning, the oil issue could have been an important incentive for all parties to come to the peace table. But there is no more "stick", and the "carrot" clearly has been given away. We can no longer expect the NIF to give up its power for altruistic reasons. Nor is it reasonable to ask the opposition forces to make peace with the people who are exploiting what they consider their land and resources. A just peace for the Sudan remains more elusive than ever.

4) Recommendations

Today the international community stands at a crossroads. If it does not act quickly and decisively, history will be a cruel judge. All people of good will must work together to ensure that the issue of justice for Sudan does not slip through the cracks of international diplomacy, and that human lives are not sacrificed for the profits of the transnational oil companies, and their respective governments. Specifically this means:

Communicating clearly to our politicians and bureaucrats that there will, in fact, be a very heavy price to pay for allowing the preventable deaths of Africans to occur; and

Communicating to the oil companies where they are most likely to be paying attention - on the bottom line! As happened successfully in the case of the apartheid regime in South Africa, we are calling for a campaign of divestment from any and all companies which provide strategic resources to the Khartoum regime until such time as there is a just peace in Sudan. Until that time - sell your shares, and tell your friends to do the same! Its blood money!

5) A Historic Parallel

On the 3rd of October, 1935, a fascist dictator invaded the African country of Ethiopia. The League of Nations declared the invader the "aggressor" and slapped sanctions on the country.

The African historian, Richard Pankhurst pointed out that these sanctions, which were described by the British economist, Lord Keynes, as comparatively mild, contained several major omissions, which, as many commentators have observed, rendered the whole scheme nugatory. The most notable of these omissions was OIL!

Later, this dictator confided to Adolph Hitler that if the sanctions had included oil, the invading force would have to withdraw from Abyssinia within a week!

During the critical months prior the opening of hostilities the French and British Governments carefully reviewed their interests in relation to the forthcoming conflict. In the evening and night between 6 and 7 January 1935 the French premier, Pierre Laval, held a conversation with the dictator in which he gave him the encouraging information that France was from the economic point of view "disinterested" in Ethiopia.

Five months later, in June, a British Government committee, headed by Sir John Maffey, came to the conclusion in a secret report, leaked to the press, that there were "no vital British interests in Abyssinia or adjacent countries such as to necessitate British resistance to a conquest of Abyssinia". The report added that, 'in general as far as local British interests' were concerned, "it would be a matter of indifference whether Abyssinia remained independent...".

While thousands of innocent Ethiopian victims were falling to the bombs, poison gas, and modern weaponry of the invading army, Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia appealed to the League of Nations for help. In his now famous speech he foretold the rise of world fascism, and warned that the complacent nations in the League would not remain unaffected. No help was forthcoming. Britain and France, with their convenient policies of "indifference and disinterest" continued to sell oil to the dictator. The rest is history.

The failure of the world to address the issue of "Oil and Fascism" in October, 1935, sounded the death knell for the League of Nations, and paved the way for World War 2.

It is our fear, that the current failure of the world once again to address the issue of Oil and Political Islam in the Sudan, could have equally far reaching, and tragic consequences.

Call for Action

For decades, the campaign against Christians in Sudan has continued unchecked by the world. More recently, this campaign has spread to anyone with different religious beliefs from the state, including moderate Muslims.

Almost 2 million people have died - the vast majority of them southern Christians. Millions more are displaced, either internally, or in refugee camps outside the country.

The genocide continues.

Up until recently, the conventional wisdom has been that no side could win the civil war. Now, thanks in part to Canadian Oil Companies, this is no longer likely to be true. With the oil flowing, the NIF could very well, achieve its objectives. Once the oil pipeline starts flowing, (around June 1999) an estimated 150,000 barrels a day will provide sufficient resources for the Khartoum junta to wage its war against its own people successfully

It is said that Confucius was once asked how to solve all the problems in the world. His reply: "to insist on the exact definition of words".

We have all seen what happens when the world community refuses to call genocide by its name. The 800,000 Rwandans who were hacked to death by drunk, machete wielding Interahamwe militia remain a tragic reminder of the price for international indolence.

Why was no country prepared to "insist on the exact definition of words", and use the "G" word in Rwanda, when it was obvious to the world what was happening? There is a growing awareness now that the Rwandan tragedy could have been prevented, or drastically curtailed, if some country had had the courage to use the word "genocide" in time. Imagine the number of lives that could have been saved, let alone the unbelievable expense of dealing with the humanitarian aftermath.

Yet in Sudan, the tragedy in terms of sheer numbers, is even greater than Rwanda. While the people are not being hacked to death in front of CNN they are, nevertheless, dying in larger numbers. It is clearly a GENOCIDE by attrition, with famine and civil conflict as its primary tools.

The 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide outlines the obligations of the International Community when a member state commits genocide. But the experiences of Rwanda and Sudan begs the questions:

"Does this Convention only apply to European countries?

Do black Africans have as much right to the Convention's protection as people in Bosnia and Kosovo? Canada and the Canadian people need to address this issue immediately. Genocide is genocide, and must be stated so when appropriate. We believe that in the case of Sudan, it is appropriate. Enough credible agencies have called our attention to it. The issue must be addressed. If there is any doubt - then by all means, establish an independent, competent commission to investigate all the evidence. But time is running out.

Martin Luther once said: "The greatest sin of our time is not the few who have destroyed, but the vast majority who have sat idly by."

Resources

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