

Tim Atiep Times

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Fergus's bit

Over the past couple of months I have written to the four MPs who had been to the South and have received replies from all of them. It is encouraging that some of our elected representatives do seem to have some interest in what is going on in Sudan. One of the letters enclosed a copy of a debate from 13th March this year on a motion proposed by Robert Key the MP for Salisbury. The debate aimed to establish that the UK has a moral responsibility to work for peace and the restoration of stability and prosperity in Sudan, to establish who in the government is in the lead on Sudan policy and what is proposed and to make the case for self-determination for the people of Sudan, both

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A Dinka schoolboy's dilemma

Whilst in Sudan this year, I met up with Ayuong. He is now about 15 or 16 years old and I have known him since he was 6 or 7. His father was a watchman in the SCF compound in Akon and Ayuong used to hang around and would take my goats out in the morning. At that time, he did not go to school and did not seem too interested. Besides, with Kerubino around there was not much opportunity. When I left SCF, I tried to persuade him that he

"...he would rather spend any cash on clothes than save it for a seemingly unattainable dream."

go to school and, at the age of 11 or so he did. Now he speaks quite good English and reads and writes quite well. However, although he protests to me that school is important and that he is going to continue at it, I get the impression that he wonders what it is all for. If he finishes primary school (at the age of 17), what does he do then? There is no secondary school to go to, except the one in Rumbek, which is far away and requires quite a financial commitment from his father. However, Ayuong has three younger

brothers and a younger sister, still dependent on their parents and his father has a second wife with very small children. With little income apart from the sale of the odd goat and some tobacco, the family need any possible supplementary income. So, in the last year or so, Ayuong has spent much of his spare time and the school holidays trading in a small way. For example, he will buy a small goat for £S15,000 or so and keep it for about six months and then sell it for 25,000. Or he will travel to an area where chickens cost, say 1000 each and bring them back to another area where he knows he can sell them for 3000 or 4000 each. The problem is that he would rather spend any cash that he keeps for himself on clothes than save it for a seemingly unattainable dream. And these clothes are his pride and joy. He will spend hours carefully hand washing them and then, once they are dried, more time folding them neatly or, if he can find a charcoal iron, he will press them carefully. I fear that he is already being seduced by the prospect of earning over continuing his education. And in Sudan, education, of course important in itself, is also important if one wants to be sure that one is not



AYUONG LEADING THE SINGING AT HIS LOCAL CHURCH IN MAJAK GOL ACOL. A CHURCH IS BEING BUILT BY THE COMMUNITY.

dragooned into the military. A few years ago, whilst attending the local school, run by the Comboni Fathers, he decided to get baptised. He now introduces himself as Luka and he will attend church services wherever he can find them. During the 8 weeks I was in Sudan, Ayuong (or Luka I should say) and I travelled around together and I attended church more often than I have done in the last 8 months. At his home village of Majak Gol Acol, the church services are held under a large tree and Ayuong is the choir-master. The young man who conducts the services cannot be much more than a couple of years older than he. The community, this year, decided that they wanted to build a church and so the young men and girls walk to an area two or more hours away to buy the poles and materials they need. Then they carry them home, singing as they go. This building is being done entirely on

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(Continued from page north and south. It makes interesting reading, but I am not sure what the outcome of the debate was. I have posted my letter to the MPs and their replies on the website. If anyone does not have access to the internet and would like copies and/or a copy of the debate, please let me know. I really think it is important that we all continue to try and keep the issue of Sudan to the fore, so please do try and write to your MPs.

Something to ponder over when no-one seems interested in the children of Southern Sudan. I did an internet search, which came up with a story about 5 orphaned leopard cubs found in the oilfields area of Western Upper Nile, where much of the fighting is going on. The story touched many hearts and a special airlift was organised to save them and take them to a wildlife park in Southern Africa!

(Continued from page 1) their own initiative and without any help from NGOs or the local authorities.

I have to say that I worry for Ayuong's future and for those like him. He is fairly typical of the children of Southern Sudan, who have had little or no opportunity. I know of many others, who have walked hundreds of miles to the north and to the borders in the south looking for some sort of opportunity, whether it is to train as a mechanic, to trade or to find a place where it is relatively secure and where he (or she) might have a relative, with whom to stay while he attends school. What prospects have any of them and where can they go even if they do finish their primary schooling? The MPs, to whom I wrote, all indicated that they agreed that education (and peace) are the most important issues to tackle and it seems that the Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, has made a commitment to education in Sudan. But the commitment must be long term and serious and should include the establishment and development of secondary education facilities, so that there is something for children like Ayuong to look forward to.

Other news and misc.

NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is now also being posted on the website. If you have an e-mail address and would be willing to be notified by e-mail rather than receiving a hard copy by post, please let Ferguson know.

ZIPLINE

Jackie Mutch, who organised the Movie Stars Ball and the Hogmanay Ceilidh, raising over £2400 for the

Eminent Persons Group

Sometime late last year former US Senator John Danforth persuaded the Sudan Government and the SPLA/M to agree to a mission which would investigate abductions, slavery and forced servitude. The Eminent Persons Group was established and was made up of experts from France, Norway, Britain, America and Italy. John Ryle, a member of the Shading Tree (Tim Atiep), was one of the Group. Their report has recently been published and a copy is currently in the Shading Tree archives.

The following are extracts from the introduction of the report:

Our purpose on this mission was to find practical ways to advance peace in Sudan, where nineteen years of civil war and associated famine and displacement have produced one of the worst human disasters of modern times. Our mission was invited to Sudan by the two parties through an agreement mediated by former United States Senator John Danforth. The agreement may be considered an acknowledgement by those di-

rectly involved that the problems we have addressed are an important factor in the conflict that divides their country. This itself is an important step forward.

Our Group found a wide array of grave human rights violations in Sudan. Among those that fall under our terms of reference, we found that abduction of civilians and forcible recruitment by the armed forces of all sides in the war was commonplace. Of particular concern are incidents of abduction and associated abuses that occur in conjunction with attacks by pro-government militias known as murahaleen on villages in SPLA-controlled areas near the boundary between northern and southern Sudan. The Group concluded that the Government of Sudan and its predecessors have been responsible for arming murahaleen groups, for using them as auxiliary military forces and for allowing members of such forces to enjoy impunity for a wide range of serious crimes committed in the course of attacks.

The Group concluded that in a significant number of cases, abduction is the first stage in a pattern of abuse that falls under the definition of slavery in the

International Slavery Convention of 1926 and the Supplementary Convention of 1956. The Group was unable, however, to establish the scale of abduction and enslavement. Responsibility for the lack of reliable information on this subject lies with the government and the SPLA, both of which have obstructed the necessary research by independent investigators.