

Tim Atiep Times

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Fergus's bit
As usual the British media has not been reporting a great deal on the events in Sudan. There have been very few items about the progress of the peace talks, the situation in the South and Darfur or the fighting that is still going on in the oilfield areas. I try to follow the news from Sudan through the Internet, but, as I don't always watch the TV news nor do I regularly buy a newspaper, there are items that I miss. Last week there was a report on the BBC news about a mystery disease, which has been dubbed the "nodding disease". It affects children in the Amadi and Lui areas of Western Equatoria and causes the children to nod their heads uncontrollably whilst they
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Abduction & Slavery Research

Towards the end of May this year, the Rift Valley Institute (RVI), an independent research and education association, based in Britain and East Africa, launched the results of an eighteen-month field investigation into abduction and slavery in Sudan. The results come in the form of a searchable database, which gives detailed information about all of those recorded as having been abducted from Northern Bahr el-Ghazal by Government backed tribal militias from Northern Sudan.

"In the worst affected village.....101 adults and children were abducted in a single week."

The research was carried out by 48 locally recruited and trained Sudanese researchers, covering an area larger than the entire United Kingdom, by foot and bicycle and armed only with a bag of pen and papers, a torch and a mosquito net. The researchers interviewed community leaders and relatives of those abducted and recorded details including clan affiliations, age, the circumstances of the abduction and the names of surviving relatives. A great deal of detailed information was required as so many of the abductees were young children, who may not, now, even remember their own names, having been renamed by their captors. Former slaves were also in-

terviewed and were able to give valuable information regarding the whereabouts and circumstances of some of those still missing.

The project was designed and managed by two Sudan specialists, John Ryle and Jok Madut Jok. John Ryle is Chair of the Rift Valley Institute and was a member of the US State Department-sponsored Eminent Persons Group whose report on Slavery and Abduction in Sudan was published last year. Dr Jok Madut Jok is a professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and author of War and Slavery in Sudan.

Save the Children UK is currently using the database in both their southern and northern sector tracing and reunification programmes.

Fergus as RVI Field Coordinator

I was recruited as RVI's Field Coordinator for the Abduction and Slavery research and spent the best part of four months in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal recruiting, training and equipping the researchers and then monitoring their progress during the research period. The researchers varied greatly, ranging from retired former government officers to students on holiday from the schools they have been able

to attend in Uganda. I spent a lot of time just sitting and talking to people, officials, chiefs, NGO staff, both expatriate and local, and the children when I could. All had personal stories to tell of how their families had been affected by the militia raids over the years and of the children, and relatives who are still missing. Some have never been heard of again despite desperate searching, but news of the where-

abouts of many filters back to Bahr el-Ghazal every so often and occasionally the family is able to negotiate a release or assist in an escape. One story tells of a woman who managed to escape her captor, but was forced to leave her children, who had been separated from her. A year later she recognised her captor in a market in the south and he was arrested. He was then forced to write a letter

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 are eating. It also appears to stunt the growth of the children. Another programme which I did see was Channel 4's "The Lost Boys". This programme followed some young Sudanese as they were taken from Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and "resettled" in America. The clash of cultures was painful to watch and I would be interested in hearing the thoughts of anyone else who watched the programme. I'm not sure that knowing how to use a flush lavatory is the first and most important thing when being introduced to such a vastly different world. Anyhow, I suppose that, as now seems more and more likely, some sort of peace treaty is signed, Sudan will be a "hot topic" for a while. The big question is "Is any peace better than no peace?" We'll see.

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 home telling his family to release the children and send them back south in return for his own release. Sadly, there were many other tales of boys who were killed whilst trying to escape or who drowned or starved to death on the journey to the North, of girls being raped and forced to become concubines and of abductees having their own names and cultural identities taken away from them. In the last couple of years, and particularly during this period of cease-fire, raiding into Bahr el-Ghazal by northern militias has reduced slightly, but it does still go on. An official peace treaty may not stop the practice of raiding altogether and for the, at least, 11,000 people still missing, a peace treaty may not be enough for them to be released and allowed to go home.

Fundraising efforts and events

Christmas Cards

A couple of weeks ago, Fergus went to Skelmorlie Primary School and showed the children a short video and gave them a short talk about the Shading Tree's work with the Women's Development Centre in Akon. Some of the children had been doing a project on Sudan for their classwork and had been shown the original Shading Tree video and some interesting questions were posed. The school has decided to help the Shading Tree this year with the design of Christmas cards. The chosen designs will be printed and the cards sold as in previous years and the proceeds given to the charity. More information will be

Statistics

The key statistical findings of the research are as follows:

11,105 victims of abduction were recorded 1983-2002

There were 1,862 raids during that twenty-year period

5,148 people were recorded as killed in the raids

Of the 11,105 abducted, 528 are known to have returned home

60 % of abductees were 18 or under at the time of abduction

The majority of abductees recorded are male

In the worst affected village - Ajok in Aweil West County - 101 adults and children were abducted in a single week.

RVI Talks

John Ryle, Jok Madut Jok and Fergus Boyle, Fellows of the Rift Valley Institute, will be giving a talk entitled "Abduction, Slavery and the Search for Peace in Sudan" in London and Oxford on the following dates. All are welcome to attend.

Wednesday October 15th at 6pm in the Main Lecture Theatre of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Thornhaugh St, Russell Square, London. The meeting will be chaired by Richard Dowden, Director of the Royal African Society.

Friday October 17th from 2-5pm in the Nissan Theatre, St. Anthony's College, 62 Woodstock Road, Oxford. The meeting will be chaired by Dr Douglas Johnson, author of The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars.

sent out in October. The sale of last year's cards raised £200.

Hogmanay Ceilidh

Two years ago the Shading Tree put on a very successful Ceilidh in Millport for Hogmanay. A total of £1400 was raised during the evening and this year the Ceilidh is back! Again, it will be held in Millport Town Hall on the night of December 31st, with a live ceilidh band, some disco music and a raffle. More details will be sent out later and if there are any members from outwith the Island who would like to be there, please let Fergus know and he will advise about accommodation etc. Ticket numbers are limited and it should be noted that

there are no ferries to or from the island on New Year's Day. So you would be stranded until the 2nd.

All proceeds will be put towards continuing the STTA's support of the Women's Development Centre in Akon and other new projects yet to be developed.

Project Proposals

A project proposal is being prepared for submission to Comic Relief for funding for the Akon Centre and schools support and to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for funding for a small rice cooperative in Aweil South. The requests for funding submitted to various trusts and foundations last year were unfortunately unsuccessful.