

Tim Atiep Times

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Fergus's bit
2004 is looking more and more likely to be the year in which the government of Sudan and the SPLA/M sign a peace treaty. It has been a long time coming and the talking has been sporadic and, at times, almost moribund. However, the Americans and the international community in general have kept up a steady pressure on the two parties and General Sumbeiywo has, somehow, kept his sanity and eased each side back to the negotiations after the breaks. It has been nearly two years since Machakos and, at least in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, the people have enjoyed a similar period of relative peace. However, peace is not just the end of war, and the hard part of keeping
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War & Peace: Sudan - 1977-2004

In January 1977 I had just left school and had nine months to fill before starting at University. I managed to arrange to go to Sudan as a general dog's-body for Huntings Technical Services, which ran various agricultural projects in Darfur. After a few days in Khartoum, I flew to Nyala via Zalingei and by the end of January was settled into the Huntings Rest House in Nyala. At that time Nyala was still a relatively small town, and, though the

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Americans were in town setting up a huge communications satellite dish and radio mast for the government of President Ga'afar al-Nimeiry, it was still mostly undeveloped. After four months I transferred to Zalingei over Jebel Marra by suq lorry (the tarmac road had not been laid by then) and spent a night sleeping under the stars on the mountainside beside the lorry and its other passengers. By then I was firmly struck down with "Sudanitis" and for the next five months I was based in Zalingei and for the final six weeks I travelled south to a tiny village called Dango. I lived in Dango, alone apart, of course, from the villagers, and travelled back to Zalingei every fortnight by



PRESIDENT NIMEIRY VISITS NYALA IN EARLY 1977. THE PRESIDENT IS UNDER THE CANOPY ON THE LEFT OF THE PICTURE, A VAGUE SHADOW!

Landrover to get some supplies. I was nineteen and let loose in Africa with no radio, minimal food, no first aid kit and the few clothes I had with me, a mosquito net and a camp bed. Not for one second did I think this was a strange state of affairs, nor did I think about what would happen if I got sick or was bitten by a snake,

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Comic Relief Funds

Comic Relief are one of the few funding bodies, which will make small grants to small charities for doing some detailed research into planning projects. The Shading Tree (Tim Atiep) had hoped to take advantage of this opportunity and an application was submitted in March. It is very unfortunate that I received a letter the other day, rejecting the application. The reasons for rejection concentrated

mainly on the fact that the application did not show how local partners would benefit and how their capacity would be developed. Perhaps I should have lied a bit and include all the usual buzz words; but it seems to me that the fact that a project is simply trying to identify in detail what the communities want to do for themselves, and which we can support, is not really important. I am at a loss. Any ideas?

Please...

I have to admit that I am really struggling to fill these two sides of paper each quarter. I am going to reduce the number of newsletters by one from the next issue and so they will be sent out every four months, April, August and December. I hope that you will all understand, but please let me know if you have any objections. I would also be very pleased if anyone would like to contribute any small articles or reminiscences for publication.

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the peace will be almost as taxing and not only for the Sudanese themselves. The international humanitarian community will have to adjust as well and the transfer from responding to a chronic complex emergency to responding to the huge development requirements of a region devastated by twenty years of war will be highly complex itself. I spent a month, this year, in northern Sudan, after a gap of 26 years and I talked to many southerners who have been living in the north as well as northerners. Most of them expressed a great deal of optimism about the prospects of peace, but at the same time many were wondering how the divisions of so many years of conflict were to be healed - not only the divisions between north and south, but as importantly, the divisions within the two sides. Winning the peace has always been as difficult a struggle as winning the war.

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 let alone wonder whether it was safe for me to be wandering about the remote bush 200 kilometres away from the nearest help and the nearest European. This was a time of peace throughout Sudan and Darfur and the south were quiet. Now, twenty seven years later, Darfur is aflame and in a very short space of time the region has been devastated by war. The humanitarian aid agencies have very little, if any, access and thousands of people, including internally displaced people from the south, have fled the fighting, mostly into the neighbouring country of Chad. Near Nyala itself, there is a large displaced camp in the village of Abu Jura, which is home to about 200,000 Dinka displaced from Bahr el-Ghazal in the 1980s. At the end of March the Janjawid, a government militia, attacked the village

and the camp and there followed a period of widespread looting and burning. Many of the Dinka displaced fled to Nyala town followed by the Janjawid, but they have been told by the Nyala authorities that they must return to Abu Jura. (The Janjawid are another of the many pro-government militias which spring up in insecure areas and which are, according to Human Rights Watch, recruited, paid and armed by the government of Sudan). The accounts of the atrocities and activities of these militias will be very familiar to those who know what went on in Bahr el-Ghazal throughout the late 80s and 90s. Now, most of the Dinka feel that they would be safer back in Bahr el-Ghazal, but have no means of reaching their former homes without the help of the UN and other agencies.

I have not been to Darfur

since 1977 and cannot imagine how different things must be now. What is certain is that since the early 1980s it would have been impossible to do what I did in Darfur or anywhere else in Sudan. Even in the south, as a humanitarian aid worker, one is not allowed to travel alone nor to stay in a place without at least one other foreign aid worker (though I have to confess that I did on many occasions). Radio contact has to be made, at the very least, twice a day, and compounds separate one from the local people. My "Sudanitis" has not been, and probably never will be, cured, but one day I hope that I will be able to travel freely around the country again and one day, perhaps, I will go back to Nyala, Zalingei and Dango and see for myself the changes that 27 years have brought about. I remember meeting one or two Dinka men in Nyala all those years ago...now 20,000?

A Tale of Two Towns - Wau and Aweil

For nearly five years the towns of Wau and Aweil were just out of reach to me. Several times I flew over them and a number of times I was only a few miles walk away. This year I had the opportunity to see them from the inside. Wau is a large bustling town – somewhat run-down and shabby. The roads are potholes surrounded by a little old tarmac or are merely dusty tracks and most of the buildings are needing some repair. But there are telephone lines, water on tap and some sanitation systems still working. The market is busy and full of all sorts of wares – the usual food and local produce, but also a great deal of hardware and consumer goods, such as ghetto blasters, TVs and videos and associated pe-

ripherals and bicycles. There are also many small eating places serving up a standard fare of ful, ta'amia and meat stews all served up with freshly baked bread, salad and a little dish of shatta - ground chilli. The cathedral stands in its central position, near the relatively newly built mosque, in its slightly higher position, and the government offices are as grand and imposing as they must have been fifty years ago. Outside the town there are a number of displaced camps and, though the town is almost completely surrounded by SPLA controlled territory, it seems to have an air of openness. Aweil on the other hand is a great deal smaller in size and a lot more claustrophobic. The town is surrounded by SPLA territory and the train

has not been able to move to the town for the last two years. Most of the population, including the displaced, do not move out of the town into the SPLA areas, but there is quite a traffic of goods and people from the outside into the town. In the old FAO rice scheme compound the hulks of combine harvesters, tractors and other farming machinery are guarded by a single elderly man and Save the Children are settled in the FAO rest house. In both towns there are functioning schools and hospitals or clinics and I found it quite odd to see neatly uniformed children wandering along to school in the mornings and no crowds of people waiting for treatment at the clinics. What a difference a few miles, either way, can make.