

## **Background on abductions for forced labour in Darfur**

### **Background to the conflict**

In 1916, the last sultan of Darfur Kingdom was killed and Darfur annexed to British colonised Sudan. Darfur has historically been a multi-ethnic society, inhabited by indigenous people and migrants from west, central and northern Africa.

Nomadic cattle herders exist in the south and north of Darfur, whilst the south and west are inhabited by farmers cultivating subsistence and cash crops as well as owning livestock. Tensions have existed between farmers and nomadic groups in Darfur largely as a result of competition over water and fodder especially during droughts. In the mid 1980s, droughts and desertification forced nomads to migrate to the south in search of food and water for their animals. This situation increased existing tensions between the farmers and nomads in the region over access to resources.

One of the factors contributing to the emergence of opposition movements and armed insurgency against the Government of Sudan was the feeling that the national government had neglected and marginalised the south, east and western regions in terms of national development programmes. Many felt that central government had not allocated sufficient resources to allow development or even provide essential services such as education, health care, access to clean drinking water and transport.

### **The emergence of political movements**

Darfur Development Front (DDF) - was established in the mid 1960s was established to call for regional development and proper political participation at the national level. The DDF was mainly made up of what are referred to as African based ethnic groups like the Fur, Massaliet and Meidob.

Arab Congregation – formed in the mid 1980s to advocate for official and financial backing from both the central government and the national political parties in support of the cause of the Arabic speaking groups in the region.

Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) – formed in 2003 followed by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Both armed movements predominantly made up and supported by African based ethnic groups.

The Government rejected dialogue with leaders of the rebel movements and instead mobilised some Arabic speaking nomadic groups into militias named the Janjaweed against the African groups in Darfur. This meant that existing tensions in the region became consolidated into a conflict with clearly defined ethnic and racial lines.

Unstable political situations in neighbouring countries, especially Chad, has also fuelled the conflict resulting in the crossing of weapons and people across both borders.

2003-2005 marked the intense period of the Darfur conflict where the Janjaweed and Sudanese Armed Forces carried out a wide range of human rights violations against civilians in order to drive them from their homes. This resulted in the displacement of nearly three million people who were subjected to massacres, abductions and destruction of villages.

## **Slavery in Sudan**

### **Pattern of abductions in Darfur**

When the conflict began in 2003, abductions of individuals increased (abductions took place prior to the conflict but were limited and quickly resolved through administrative powers) as the Janjaweed and other militias were directly supported by the Government and given a free hand to commit abuse with impunity, and local authorities no longer had the powers to resolve conflicts at an administrative level. The victims of abductions are reduced to a situation of slavery as abductors exercise powers of ownership over them and compel them to provide work or service under the threat of some form of punishment.

### **Abductions, sexual slavery and forced marriage**

A report of the UN International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2004) found that Janjaweed militiamen and government soldiers were responsible for the abduction, confinement and rape of women in several regions of West and South Darfur. The Darfur Consortium research found that women and young girls were vulnerable to abduction when they leave IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps to search for water and firewood, but also in some cases the militias entered the Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps to carry out abductions.

Women and girls are reported to have suffered multiple rapes, forced to perform unpaid domestic work such as collecting firewood, cooking and cleaning for the militias. In some cases, abducted women and girls were coerced into forced marriages with their abductors, their abductor's relatives or were trafficked IDP into forced marriage to men in different regions of Sudan.

### **Abductions and forced agricultural labour**

Abducted men, women and children were forced to provide free agricultural labour in areas controlled by the Janjaweed in West and South Darfur. They were forced to farm land, tend animals and harvest crops for the benefit of the militias and their families. The Janjaweed have little knowledge of farming or tending farm animals and were therefore dependent on local expertise.

### **Child abductions**

Girls were abducted for sexual slavery and boys for agricultural work – in both cases children were obliged to carry out domestic work for their abductors. Children were abducted and trafficked into cities to work as domestic workers.

The children carried out household work and were not allowed to leave the houses, did not receive an education and were not paid for the work they did.

Most of the armed groups in Darfur have been involved in recruiting and sometimes abducting children in order to use them as child soldiers. combatants.

### **Issues behind abductions in Darfur**

Ethnicity, human rights violations and land.

The issue of land ownership is an integral part of the conflict in Darfur. Many regions of Sudan have traditionally been populated by certain ethnic groups and this is reflected in the names of these regions. For example Darfur, Dar Hamar and Dar Massaliet – Darfur literally means home (Dar) of the Fur.

The government of Sudan provided the Janjaweed with political and military support to allow them to seize control of land and other natural resources that belonged to African ethnic groups. Once the local population had been displaced from their land, it was then occupied by the Janjaweed and nomadic Arabic speaking groups.

### **The absence of civilian protection**

IDP camps in Sudan are 'designated areas' which have been chosen by the Sudanese government and are often located near militia strongholds Those fleeing to Chad as refugees are also still vulnerable as Sudanese militias operate in Chad and the Chadian armed insurgency has a presence in Darfur.

Those most vulnerable to human rights violations were those abducted and still detained in areas controlled by the militias, These civilians were subject to forced labour and sexual slavery and had no access to protection or humanitarian assistance from international agencies.

The United Nations and African Union passed various resolutions with the intention to disarm the militias in Darfur, but the Government of Sudan did not take any action

### **Ineffective legal procedures**

Sudan signed numerous international and regional laws which prohibit slavery and had numerous domestic laws which prohibited slavery and protect citizens against abductions. However because immunity from prosecution was extended to all members of the security forces, including the Armed Forces, the Popular Defence Forces and the Police, those breaking the laws were not prosecuted.

There was also a law which allowed victims or their guardians to pardon those accused of forced labour – this means that victims can be intimidated into granting pardons to abusers.

There was not a single successful prosecution brought against anyone for abducting someone during the conflict at that time.

There are several reasons for these:

Women and girls abducted and subjected to rape and sexual slavery are reluctant to report these cases because of the trauma of having to describe what has happened to them and the fear of being rejected by their own communities because of the shame attached to rape.

Victims also fear for their safety in taking their cases forward as they believe that the Janjaweed have a cooperative relationship with many police officers and some members of the militia have been directly absorbed into the police as part of the Border Guard Forces.