

ACTION ALERT: CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT NUBA WOMEN AND CHILDREN

We are writing to alert you to the tragic humanitarian situation of the people, especially the women and children, of the Nuba Mountains of southwestern Sudan. The catastrophic human rights situation in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan has been highlighted for nearly a decade. From independent human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the United Nations and the United States Department of State, various international groups and observers have presented one piece of gruesome evidence after another. These evidences demonstrate how the aggression and violence of the Sudanese Islamist government (the National Islamic Front, NIF) and its local and national militias are part of a concerted effort to purge and thereby subdue the Nuba. This is made clear by the fact that the government of Sudan (GOS) and its armed militias do not differentiate between Nubas who are sympathetic to the armed opposition, Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and those who are innocent civilians.

In fact, the term "genocide" adequately describes the situation of the Nuba vis-à-vis the GOS. Though the GOS has increasingly unleashed its brutality on the Sudanese people more generally, "regardless of their race, religion, language, ethnic or social origin and status" (UN Special Rapporteur's Report), the Nuba re-

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main a focal target of the GOS' policy of ethnic purging. Religion, ethnicity, class, and gender have been and remain salient features of the NIF regime's campaigns in the Nuba Mountains, as in other areas of the Sudan. In the eyes of the GOS, the Nuba and other ethnic minorities are "expendable" people. The UN Special Rapporteur, for example, "cannot but conclude that the abduction of persons, mainly women and children belonging to racial, ethnic and religious minorities from southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and the Ingassena Hills area, their subjection to the slave trade, including traffic in and sale of children and women, slavery, servitude, forced labor and similar practices are taking place with the knowledge of the Government of the Sudan" (Special Rapporteur's Report [SRR] to the Commission on Human Rights resolution 1996/73, at its 60th meeting 23 April 1996).

The instruments of the ethnic cleansing in the Nuba Mountains by the GOS and its local militias include murder, rape, abduction, slavery, orchestrated famines as political weapons and the banishment of civilians to so-called "peace camps" where they are abused and pauperized under concentration camp-like conditions. Such banishment often occurs after the GOS has burned NUBA villages to the ground. At the same time, forced conversion to a particular kind of fundamentalist Islam (the Nuba are already heavily Islamicized), the bulldozing and blazing of

Christian churches, Islamic Mosques and schools, and the execution of "apostates" by the GOS all indicate a strategy of cultural genocide.

Despite increasing international scrutiny, the GOS remains openly defiant. It ignores all the reports and demands of United Nations organs and UN-affiliated international NGOs. The Special Rapporteur's Report states that "the official position of the Government of the Sudan with regard to the provisions of the resolutions adopted by the [UN] Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly on reported human rights violations can be summarized as unequivocal rejection. At the same time, calls upon the Government of the Sudan to bring an end to the violations and to hold the perpetrators responsible have consistently been ignored."

The GOS has also failed to ensure the access of humanitarian relief groups to needy civilians, whether they are in GOS- or SPLA-occupied areas. In fact, the GOS has deliberately obstructed humanitarian assistance (by direct military targeting of relief efforts and representatives) to the people of the Nuba Mountains. As in southern Sudan, the NIF regime has persistently refused to authorize the extension of the UN Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) relief programmes and those of other humanitarian organizations to SPLA-held areas of the Nuba Mountains. This denial by GOS of humanitarian assistance is a blatant breach of the

joint UN and GOS statement of 15 September 1992, affirming "... critical importance of access of all people in need of humanitarian assistance wherever they may be."

Though the worst offender, the GOS has not been the only perpetrator of human rights abuses in the Nuba Mountains. According to the SRR, "[m]embers of different parties to the conflict in southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, other than the Government of the Sudan [GOS] and those affiliated with it, have committed a series of abuses and atrocities against the life, liberty and personal security of Sudanese citizens in the areas under their control." Nevertheless, the GOS has been the least self-critical party toward the human rights abuses perpetrated by its members. For example, in "Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan" (1996), African Rights cites more determined (though imperfect) efforts by the SPLA to curtail and punish human rights abuses by its members in the Nuba Mountains (and elsewhere), as compared to a total lack of such efforts by the GOS.

Clearly, the situation in the Nuba Mountains is extremely complex. General war symptoms and targeted ethnic cleansing are often misleadingly lumped together by both local and international observers. Ironically, the same sort of confusion occurred in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and even Nazi Germany—a state of confusion (or political evasion?) which obscured

genocide and justified international passivity until far too late in each case.

It remains a puzzle and a travesty of justice that the Sudanese government's cleansing campaign against the Nuba (and other minorities) has earned it only a slap on the wrist by the international community. There has been an embarrassing lack of political will to act. The civil conflict and the attendant human rights disaster in the Sudan remains, to the embarrassment of humanity, "an internal affair" that even the Organization of African Unity (OAU) shamefully brushes off as something to be taken care of by the Sudanese government. Such international indifference is especially troublesome in light of the fact that the Sudan conflict is currently the longest, and perhaps most atrocious, civil war in the world. And we fear the fact that the main sufferers are women and children may be an important cause of this indifference. Continued international silence on the Sudan, however, will in our opinion only serve to prolong the war and the inhuman situation faced by the women and children of the Nuba Mountains. The international community must take action now, before it is too late for the people of the Nuba Mountains.

The campaign to help stop the atrocities to the Nuba calls on the United States government and its allies to stop collaborating in the genocide through its support of the Sudan government's suspect

"peace accord" of 21 April 1997. (The April 1997 accord is suspect because, among other factors, the GOS itself does not take it seriously: it continues to militarily target innocent civilians in the Nuba Mountains and the South.) We also call upon you to demand for your governments to pressure the UN to promote the establishment of relief corridors (General Assembly, res. 45/100) that facilitate the immediate free access of humanitarian organizations and UN relief programmes to the Nuba Mountains. WE call on you to demand for your governments to pressure the UN Security Council to make use of the instruments in Chapter VII of the Charter (S.C. res. 688) in order to ensure the right to life of the Nuba people (art. 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; art. 12, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966; art. 6, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).

Finally, and most importantly, we call on the international community to acknowledge the state of genocide in the Nuba Mountains and therefore to take the appropriate actions required by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. International silence on genocide is utterly inexcusable in the twentieth century. Please, let the people of the Nuba Mountains and all of Sudan know that they are no less human than those in other areas of the world where the

international community has interfered to protect civilians and to punish the culprits who committed atrocities against them. In short, show the people of the Nuba Mountains and all of Sudan that the phrase "never again" is not an empty slogan.

The International Women's Committee to Support Nuba Women and Children

The Women's Committee will send this letter, along with all of your signatures, to various government officials and committees, UN and other international bodies.

To support the campaign, reply to this message. (Please do not include the original message in your reply, for reasons of space). Keep the same subject heading. In your reply, state that you are replying to support the efforts of the Women's Committee, and include your full name or initials or the name of your group if you are an organization. Address your reply to: Actnsudan@aol.com Distribute the petition and instructions as widely as possible.

Source: E-mail from Nathalie Bruguera <wluml@mnet.fr>

LEGAL SEX WORKERS IN TAIPEI DECLARED ILLEGAL

On 6 September 1997, the Taipei City Council and Taipei City Mayor Chen Shui-bian decreed 128 legal prostitutes of Taipei illegal. Overnight, these 128 prostitutes became the target of police arrest, daily surveillance and harassment; whereas before 6 September,

they had been the only prostitutes able to seek recourse from the police and demand legal protection in case of client harassment and abuse.

The Taipei City Government had been planning to phase out legal prostitution by not giving out new licenses to end prostitution in Taipei within the next two decades. In order to show that it is determined in its anti-obscenity campaign (*sao huang*), the mayor has decided to declare illegal the work of 128 women, most of whom are semi-literate single mothers in their mid-forties. Many of the women are supporting extended families. The city government has promised temporary subsidies for these prostitutes, but the women say they do not want charity funds from the government. We can work for a living, let us do that, they say.

Government subsidy funds come with strings attached and stringent conditions, which not all the women can meet. It also demands that women stay away from hotels, bars and all such places for a year of subsidy to avoid being suspected of continuing sex work. The 128 women have been placed on parole awaiting the allocation of subsidy funding.

The women have formed a group to demand a reasonable two-year grace period before the new law making their jobs illegal takes effect. Several local labor groups and women's groups, pointing to how the situation of prostitutes is similar to the sudden closures

of factories in Taiwan without government provisions for women workers' security, have rallied behind the 128 women.

We urge you to sign your name in support of these 128 prostitutes. We urge you to support their demand for a two-year grace period, which will be discussed at the opening of the next city council meeting in October. Your signature will certainly add to the pressure. Please E-mail: hsinchi@ms10.hinet.net.

Please forward this message to all concerned. Please post this message on all relevant networks.

*The Awakening Foundation
Center for the Study of
Sexuality and Difference,
National Central University*

*Solidarity Front of Women
Workers*

*Alliance of Pink Collar Workers
Research Center of Gender and
Space, National Taiwan University*

*Research Center for the
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Sandra Torrijos