



# SUDAN'S CHILDREN AT A CROSSROADS

An Urgent Need for Protection

The protection and well-being of children and youth in Sudan are at a crucial juncture. While children in the South are enjoying increased protection and access to services, those in Darfur and other areas of Sudan are enduring unspeakable acts of violence and abuse.

Humanitarian agencies in Darfur operate in an extremely volatile environment that poses significant operational challenges and threatens the security of civilians and humanitarian personnel. Government policies that restrict the movement of humanitarian workers and attacks and threats by armed forces and groups have stymied aid operations throughout Sudan, particularly in Darfur, in the East and around Khartoum.

Watchlist is concerned about apparent deliberate efforts by the Government to suppress information and prevent agencies from collecting and disseminating details on attacks against children and their protection needs, particularly in Darfur and the East. These efforts

prevented many reliable experts working in Sudan from contributing information to this report, as they expressed concern about the safety of staff and beneficiaries of programs and potential retributive attacks or threats. As a result, some pertinent information related to the well-being of children in Sudan was not included.

In its report, *Sudan's Children at a Crossroads: An Urgent Need for Protection*, Watchlist has included information on violations against children in Sudan in each of the major categories identified by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1612 (2005) on Children and Armed Conflict. These violations include killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, denial of humanitarian assistance, attacks on schools and hospitals, and recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups. In addition, various other violations, such as forced displacement and torture, also continue to be committed against children and their families.



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Megan McKenna/WCROWC

## Killing and Maiming

While most areas of the South have enjoyed improved security, extreme violence and fighting have continued in Darfur, recently escalating since mid-2006. Armed forces and groups operating in Darfur continue to kill and maim children and youth, and humanitarian agencies have documented cases of armed groups shooting, mutilating and torturing children.

## Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence

Prevalence rates of rape and other forms of sexual violence in Sudan are unknown and difficult to determine given fear and stigma that surrounds reporting, retributive action taken against women and girls who do report, customary and statutory laws that penalize the survivor and humanitarian agencies' limited or total inability to provide related services for survivors in many parts of Sudan, particularly in the East and Darfur. However, it is widely believed that rates of sexual violence throughout Sudan are high.

In Darfur, incidents of sexual violence are reportedly perpetrated by all armed groups in the region and are often extremely brutal. Sexual violence is used by Arab militias in Darfur and Chad as a tool to subjugate and humiliate non-Arab girls and women, and acts of sexual violence are often accompanied by racial epithets and other degrading comments.

## Denial of Access to Humanitarian Aid

While the delivery of humanitarian aid has improved in some parts of Sudan, humanitarian agencies operating in Darfur continue to face challenges in providing much-needed assistance to civilians. Bureaucratic obstacles and complicated administrative procedures imposed by the government further impede the delivery of humanitarian goods and services, while armed forces and groups in Darfur have repeatedly attacked aid agencies. Attacks have included looting property, car-jacking humanitarian vehicles, stealing and/or destroying humanitarian goods, confiscating vehicles, harassing expatriates and national staff and levying illegal taxes on humanitarian goods. These attacks have forced some agencies to withdraw from some parts of Darfur or from the region altogether, leaving hundreds of thousands without access to life-saving support and assistance.



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## Attacks on Schools and Hospitals

Although attacks on schools have waned in the South, southern Sudan continues to have the lowest school enrollment rates in the world, with an estimated 25 percent of primary school-age children enrolled in school. Attacks on schools in other areas of Sudan, particularly Darfur, have increased. Schools, students and teachers in Darfur have been attacked by various armed groups and many schools have been forced to close, contributing to the limited education opportunities for children in Darfur.

Reports of recent attacks on hospitals and healthcare facilities in the South are sparse. However, despite the relative abatement of attacks, the South still lacks an adequate health infrastructure and qualified health personnel, with only one doctor for every 100,000 people and one primary healthcare center for every 79,500 people. Attacks on hospitals, medical facilities, medical staff and humanitarian agencies are frequent in Darfur. These attacks have severely hampered access to healthcare, and aid agencies estimate that only 40 to 50 percent of people in Darfur have access to health services.



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## Abductions

Armed groups operating in Sudan and in border areas have abducted children to serve as combatants. The LRA is estimated to have abducted over 16,000 Ugandan and Sudanese refugee children, while refugee children in Chad have been abducted by Chadian and Sudanese armed groups and forces.

Girls in Darfur have also been specific targets of abduction by armed groups. Many girls in Darfur are abducted during attacks on their villages and once abducted, may be gang-raped, often multiple times by each perpetrator. Many girls are held in these conditions for a period of a few days and then released, often naked, to find their own way. Some abductions last for months or result in forced marriages.

## Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups

Reports indicate that most armed groups in Sudan, particularly the Janjaweed, Justice and Equality (JEM), South Sudan Unity Movement (SSUM), Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), recruit and use children. While the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) continue to deny the presence of children in their units, SAF representatives have acknowledged that there are children in other armed groups that have recently been incorporated into their forces. Recruitment of children has declined in southern Sudan, although militias that were not party to the CPA initiated recruitment drives prior to their incorporation into the SPLA or the SAF to bolster their negotiating power. Sudanese militias have also recruited children and other civilians amongst refugee populations in Chad.

## Other Violations

In addition to the six egregious violations identified by the United Nations Security Council, Sudanese children continue to face a spectrum of other violence and abuses. These include forced displacement, forced labor and trafficking for labor and sexual purposes. Sudanese girls have been trafficked within and out of Sudan to serve as commercial sexual workers while others have been trafficked to work as domestic servants. Boys as young as four or five years old have been trafficked to Arab Gulf countries to work as camel jockeys and beggars. Children and young people are further threatened by violence and insecurity due to the presence of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) and the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons throughout Sudan.



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The **Watchlist** on Children and Armed Conflict strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national and international non-governmental organizations, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

Watchlist works within the framework of the provisions adopted in Security Council Resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539 and 1612, the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols and other internationally adopted human rights and humanitarian standards.

General supervision of Watchlist is provided by a Steering Committee of international nongovernmental organizations known for their work with children and human rights. The views presented in this report do not represent the views of any one organization in the network or the Steering Committee.

## URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS

In its report, Watchlist makes urgent recommendations to the authorities of the Government of National Unity (GoNU), the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) and the Government of the Republic of Chad; all armed groups operating in Sudan; the UN Security Council; the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS); the humanitarian community in Sudan; and donors. Of primary importance, Watchlist calls on all armed forces and groups operating in Sudan to immediately halt violations against children. Additionally, all actors must take immediate action to protect children and young people in Sudan from further abuse and to find ways to assist and support those who have suffered the consequences of decades of armed conflict.

The following are key recommendations from Watchlist's report:

- **All signatories to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement** should fully comply with all provisions and commitments outlined therein.
- **Authorities of the GoNU and GoSS** should increase socially-oriented spending in the budget, with a focus on programs that target youth, and utilize oil revenue to support education efforts and the provision of social services for children and young people. These governments must also ensure that policies to protect the security and rights of children in Sudan are an integral part of all government institutions.
- **Authorities of the GoNU** must provide humanitarian actors with unrestricted and secure access to all areas of Sudan, and guarantee all civilians safe, unimpeded and sustained access to humanitarian assistance, including emergency relief supplies. This includes ensuring that human rights defenders are protected and their efforts to bring to public attention information about violations of human rights supported.
- **Authorities of the GoNU** must immediately halt all forced relocations of IDPs, particularly those living in and around Khartoum. Cease all attacks on displaced communities by government actors and others, and ensure that those who attack civilians are punished.
- **All member states of the United Nations** should use all available means to ensure that the Government of National Unity upholds its commitments and obligations outlined in relevant Security Council Resolutions and international law.
- **Members of the humanitarian community, including donors**, should strengthen and expand programs that protect and assist children in Sudan, particularly unaccompanied and separated children, out-of-school youth, girls and others who may face higher risks of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. This includes formal and nonformal education and vocational training initiatives for young people which help prepare them for productive futures.
- **Donor countries and agencies** should increase and sustain human and financial resources to adequately protect children in all parts of Sudan. This includes providing major contributions towards the humanitarian and recovery components of the 2007 Work Plan for Sudan.
- **Key trading partners and allies of Sudan**, notably the People's Republic of China and members of the League of Arab States, should use all available means to ensure that the Government of National Unity upholds its commitments and obligations outlined in relevant Security Council Resolutions and international law.

This report primarily reflects information from secondary sources available in the public domain. All sources that are not confidential have been compiled at the end of this report. Information is collected through an extensive network of organizations that work with children around the world. Analysis is provided by a multidisciplinary team of people with expertise and/or experience in the particular context. Information in the public domain may be directly cited in the report. All sources are listed in alphabetical order at the end of this report to protect the security of sources.

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