

PREFACE

This book examines the war waged by the Sudan Government against the Nuba people of South Kordofan. After ten years of war, it is the first exposure of the crimes being committed there by the Sudan Government: all-out assault on the rural Nuba, and the nightmare of life in what the government calls "peace camps".

Do the crimes against the Nuba warrant the term "genocide"? They certainly fit the legal definition contained in the 1948 Genocide Convention (see the Conclusion), and if the Sudan Government is able to pursue its programme unhindered for one or two more years, many thousands of Nuba people will have been killed, the majority of women and girls raped, and children separated from their parents and subjected to a forcible change of identity. In addition to the tens of thousands who will have perished, the Nuba people will no longer exist in a recognisable state. They will be politically subjugated and socially dismembered, with their distinctive cultures obliterated.

There is an international responsibility to prevent genocide, for the countries of the region and the western donors. Many Nuba suspect that they are being sacrificed as the acceptable price of an internationally-brokered peace agreement between the government and the SPLA—an agreement that may involve "self-determination" for the South, but will deliver the Nuba to the North without any safeguards. If the Nuba are eradicated in secret, then there will be no embarrassment to those who resolve on this "compromise".

The Nuba are excluded from humanitarian programmes. Those in the SPLA-controlled areas receive absolutely nothing at all, while those in the government "peace camps" receive assistance—often very meagre—on the condition of total submission. Exceptionally severe famine raged in the Nuba Mountains from 1990 to 1993, and utter destitution is the norm today. The failure of the humanitarian international in the Nuba Mountains has facilitated the government's war against the Nuba people.

The obligation to prevent genocide also falls upon Sudanese opposition forces, including the northern parties and the SPLA, which have so far conspicuously failed to make a clear commitment to the rights of the Nuba people. In fact, it is important to remember that it was "democratic" politicians, now in opposition, who were the first architects of the war against the Nuba in the 1980s.

The one group who are not passive in the face of this genocide are the Nuba people themselves. They have been forced into self-reliance. There was no self-pity, no pleading for an international rescue. During nearly two months of travelling, we were never begged for charity. The people in the non-government controlled areas have come to rely only on no-one but themselves.

Nuba cultures are vibrant in a way that we had never expected. We spent scarcely a night in the Nuba Mountains without hearing music. Every evening and night there was drumming, singing and dancing, in an astonishing variety of musical styles. We were presented with locally-woven clothes, with elaborately-decorated gourds, with beads and cowrie shells. We were treated to displays of wrestling. Certainly the cultures are changing under the strain of the war, and cultural traditions are being distorted or irretrievably lost, but in the heat of war, facing the abyss of eradication, the Nuba peoples are finding immense strength in their cultures. It is striking that many Nuba people who, ten or fifteen years ago, would have used solely their Arabic names, are proudly using their Nuba names today.

The cultures of the Nuba have been celebrated, and rightly so. But much more profound is the rediscovery of Nuba political identity in the midst of war. In 1992, a remarkable conference was convened in the centre of the non-government controlled area, in which two hundred delegates from all parts of the Nuba Mountains, most of them civilians, openly debated whether the SPLA should be given a popular mandate to continue the war. It was not a propaganda exercise (it has never been reported outside the Nuba Mountains before this book)—it was a genuine debate, with prominent civilians and SPLA commanders arguing on both sides.

This conference ushered in a Nuba political renaissance, in which villagers have pressed the SPLM leadership to institute a full range of civil institutions and social services. With no outside assistance

whatsoever, medical clinics, schools, law courts, district administration and relief programmes have been set up. A "General Assembly" and "Consultative Council" meet regularly. A large conference on religious tolerance has been held. The clinics use medicines bought on the black market or locally fabricated; the courts function with a single printed copy of the penal code, laboriously copied out by hand. There is not a single typewriter in the SPLA-held areas, nor a single wheeled vehicle, and scarcely a school textbook. But the Nuba are determined to succeed.

The active political participation of large sections of the Nuba dramatically shows up the shallowness of the debate on "self-determination." For most Sudanese politicians and international diplomats, "self-determination" is just an event, such as a referendum, which decides who is to rule which area. For the Nuba who are practising self-determination, it is a political process of self-enfranchisement. The Nuba certainly have a long way to go: but they have started.

However, the Nuba are desperately isolated. The intellectual starvation of lack of news, lack of education and lack of books is more keenly felt than the material deprivation. The few requests that we received were never for food, and only occasionally for medicines (by people who mistook us for doctors)—they were for books, for batteries for radios, or for pens and paper. The isolation has engendered a sense of absolute solitude, the feeling that the Nuba Mountains are completely cut off from the rest of the world. The very fact that the suffering of the people was worthy of being recorded came as a pleasant shock. They had not regarded themselves and their struggles as part of history.

This book is the product of African Rights' investigations into human rights abuses in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. We have made two visits to the non-government controlled areas of the Nuba Mountains in 1995. The first visit, following up on preparations made in 1994, was to establish a human rights monitoring programme that covers each of the seven districts of the region. This programme uses Nuba citizens as monitors; to date it is the only formal human rights monitoring programme in Sudan. The second visit was to see how the monitoring programme was progressing, to

debrief the monitors, and to undertake further investigations ourselves.

African Rights is the only human rights organisation to have undertaken such a programme of monitoring and investigation in the Nuba Mountains since the war began there exactly ten years ago. Indeed, we are the first outsiders to have travelled so extensively in this region, which has been effectively sealed off from the rest of Sudan, and the rest of the world, for the best part of a decade. This enforced isolation is partly a testament to the high stakes in the war in South Kordofan, and the determination of the Sudan Government to commit its crimes in secrecy. It also attests to the lack of interest by the international community, which has been ready to make only minimal gestures of concern.

One purpose of this book is to draw international attention to the plight of the Nuba people. We hope that international public opinion can shame the Sudan Government into halting and reversing its policy of genocide against the Nuba people. But equally importantly, we hope that this book can stimulate the Nuba people themselves to reflect upon their remarkable capacities and their recent history of facing and resisting genocide, relying on no-one but themselves.

Acknowledgements

We were privileged in that many Nuba people were prepared to tell to us the horrific, humiliating and often distressingly intimate details of the abuses they had suffered. Many of our informants have been acknowledged and named. Others, notably the victims of rape, have had their identities concealed. We hope that this book can go some way to repaying the debt that we owe them, and the faith that they have entrusted in us.

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For reasons of security, we are unable to thank by name those individuals who worked extremely hard and took considerable risks to make our visit possible. At the appropriate time, we hope they will receive the recognition that they deserve.

Alex de Waal
Yoanes Ajawin

London, June 1995.

GLOSSARY AND LIST OF ACRONYMS

<i>Anyanya</i>	Term popularly used for the SPLA
<i>Dar el Salaam</i>	Peace camp or peace village
GUN	General Union of the Nuba Mountains
<i>Jebel</i>	Mountain
<i>Khalwa</i>	Koranic school
<i>Kujur</i>	Traditional priest
LS	Sudanese Pound (LS600=US\$ 1.00)
<i>Malwa</i>	Measure of one bowl (usually sorghum)
MFC	Mechanised Farming Corporation
<i>Nafir el Sha'abi</i>	"Popular Mobilisation"
NIF	National Islamic Front
PDF	People's Defence Force
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
<i>Salaam min al Dakhal</i>	"Peace from Within"
SNP	Sudan National Party
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement