

South Sudan

The People the Gods Forgot

(An Eyewitness Odyssey in Western Upper Nile)



“Our Future is Dying in Front of Our Eyes — as We Look at the Children Dying of Hunger, Diseases and War . . .”

A Nuer Elder, Mr. Kuol Beliew, in the Majok Amal displaced persons' cattle camp of Toy Payam, Mayom County

(July 27, 2002, Western Upper Nile Province)



Food arrives in Leel, Western Upper Nile

“The history and nature of the Sudan Conflict demonstrates that a military solution cannot bring lasting peace and stability to the country”

The IGAD Declaration of Principles



A Nuer woman in Tam, Western Upper Nile



Preparing lunch in Wicok

Introduction

For the people of Western Upper Nile State, or Unity State to the Government of Sudan, life is nasty, brutish and short. It is a life of fear, despair and terror. Survival is at the very edge of human endurance with no way out of a vicious cycle of hunger, horror and death.

The terrible staple of their existence is compounded by a grand conspiracy of natural and man-made elements, all apparently in some demented competition to draw most blood from an anaemic people shorn of all vestiges of human dignity.

At the best of times, their lives are miserable as they struggle with natural elements for the most basic hand-to-mouth survival. But, over time, they have learned to endure and, occasionally, even to come to terms with their Hobbesian existence. They have devised survival mechanisms that make life somewhat bearable, if not sustainable and dignified.

On the one hand, they have to struggle against a hostile natural environment—floods, swamps, poor soils, and high temperatures that saps energy in an instant. On the other hand, their



Gathering up the grains

struggle is against the murderous military and its militia offshoots of one of the most relentlessly brutal regimes on the face of the earth, the Khartoum Government.

At the worst of times, their fate hangs by a thread as anxiety stalks, fear and horror reign and death lurks at every corner. There are many reasons why the people of Western Upper Nile are forever at their wits' end, but the most direct and vicious is death wrought on the grand scale by decades of violence in a seemingly never-ending conflict.

As the conflict rages, torture, hunger, rape and displacement are routine. So too are food shortages and disease epidemics. Their fate is also compounded by looting, theft of livestock and the ever-present prospect of aerial bombing by the Sudan Government's planes and helicopter gun-ships.

The perpetrators of these acts of violence are armed militia groups on both sides of the conflict, the pro-government militia, the anti-government militia allied to the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and militia groups controlled by individual warlords whose alliance or loyalty to either of the two warring sides is tenuous and suspect at all times.

The scale of the violence in Western Upper Nile is shocking, widespread and shows little signs of abating. On the contrary, all indications are that it will escalate with all its attendant horror and ever heavier toll. In short, the nightmare of Western Upper Nile continues inexorably, decimating all in its path — man, beast, the built environment, flora and fauna.

The people of Western Upper Nile, the young, the old, the displaced, the weak, the poor and the marginalized are the greatest victims of this madness. And their livestock have fared no better. Indeed, the animals from oxen to dogs, cats and poultry have come to recognize all the signs of the beginnings of an air raid as well as the whine of bombshells and mortar fire and flee in all directions split seconds before the humans have reacted. It is a gut-wrenching scenario.

The crops wither away in the fields unattended, the houses and other property burnt-down and looted by the pro-Khartoum

The scale of the violence in Western Upper Nile is shocking, widespread and shows little signs of abating

militia, one of the most sadistic storm-trooper forces in recent years. This truly evil juggernaut seems to have an insatiable appetite for death, destruction and misery. One can only wonder what their orders are and how they are debriefed after every murder-and-mayhem operation.

Compounding the woes of the people of Western Upper Nile is the truly diabolical fact that access to the area by humanitarian agencies has been woefully restricted and, even when possible, is largely ineffectual, all too often a case of too little, too late. This applies to both United Nations and affiliated agencies under the auspices of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) and relief agencies outside the OLS ambit.

The effect of this restricted access for the relief agencies has been devastation and catastrophe for the long-suffering people

of Western Upper Nile. The sum total effect of this cocktail of woes is utter destruction of a people's way of life under the most adverse conditions, culminating in an atmosphere of raw fear and horror not experienced elsewhere in the Sudan despite four decades of war, and very rarely in the outside world.

This report is divided into three parts, namely a general thematic outline of the Province, firsthand eye-witness accounts and secondary information from actors in the

region. These three broad categories also include, where appropriate, personal observations, analysis and projections.

This report is a departure from past reports in that it revolves around a number of actors — more appropriately victims — that the writer met during the research period in the Province. The ground research took place over a one-month period broken into two parts. The first period was between May 16 and May 30, and the second between July 9 and August 2, 2002.

The first phase was devoted to witnessing the logistical distri-



Relief food in Wicok, Western Upper Nile

bution of relief supplies, both food and non-food items, more popularly known as “food rotations” in the trade. As the name implies, this type of operation takes place from a central position serving as a forward operation base. The primary mode of delivery is air-freighting for a number of practical, logistical and security concerns.

These concerns range from the poor state of earth tracks that serve as roads in the South, the distances involved, usually over 500km, the terrain and, most importantly, insecurity in the region.

The field of work of this report took place between July 11-30, 2002, and was conducted in more than six administrative Locations in Western Upper Nile Province where the displaced have sought refuge. Most of these locations had not received any emergency relief supplies from any NGO, with the exception of Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

This first phase also includes interviews with the local leadership, both civil and community, the internally displaced (especially older women and men), local non-governmental staff drawn from the SPLA/M-affiliated relief agency, Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation (SRRA), Sudan Church Aid (SCA) and Norwegian People's Aid Emergency Relief Field Staff and Headquarter Staff.

In writing this report, the Writer was most gratified to receive support and assistance from a great variety of people directly and indirectly involved in South Sudan. Their support ranged from logistics to counsel, advice and insights. Others provided

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security and other back-up services. On the ground in South Sudan, all those who poured their hearts out to the writer and told the heart-rending stories of their basic survival in one of the world's most atrocious killing fields. Many of them shall remain unnamed, for obvious reasons. Included in this category are NPA Field Staff in South Sudan who were always co-operative and ever ready to share a smile. They are the unsung heroes of the relief operations.

But there are those who must be named for their special input into the compilation of this report; Mr Sten-Rino Bonsaksen, the out-going Norwegian Peoples Aid Resident Representative for Sudan for commissioning this report, Mr Dan Eiffe, former Liaison Officer with Norwegian Peoples Aid and Mr Ken Miller, the Programmes Coordinator, Norwegian People's Aid for their able and efficient collaboration, before, during and immediately after the compilation of this report. All three are South Sudan emergency relief operations veterans.

Unless where otherwise attributed or acknowledged, the views, observations, comments and inferences in the following report are entirely the Writer's.

NPA's Role and Interventions in Africa

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) is an international non-government organization (NGO) with close links to the Labour movement in Norway, that has worked in southern Sudan for many years. It has been involved in emergency relief operations, food security, agricultural development, health and veterinary services and community development projects and programmes as part of its core mission, namely solidarity with the poor and the marginalized. Over the years since its inception in 1939, NPA has been involved and active in diverse humanitarian interventions in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In Africa, NPA interventions have taken place in southern Africa, mainly in Angola, Mozambique and South Africa; in the Great Lakes Region in Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, and in the Horn of Africa in Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

In southern Africa, NPA's activities are mainly capacity-building in the areas of health/nutrition, de-mining and rehabilitation of agricultural production capacities in enhancing food security for the poor. In the Great Lakes Region, NPA activities are

centred around peace-building initiatives, re-settlement of refugees and of internally-displaced persons.

In the Horn of Africa, currently experiencing conflict and war, NPA's range of interventions is multiple, complex and fluid. These interventions are emergency, both short-term and long-term, encompassing relief operations, medical evacuations and nutritional feeding in southern Sudan, especially in Western Upper Nile Province and some parts of Bar-el-Ghazal Province.



Gone before the gun-ships come

Other NPA activities in South Sudan include creating food security capacities in SPLA/M- controlled areas through better food production methods and the provision of veterinary services.

NPA also facilitates the provision of better seeds, farm inputs and implements. Indeed, the Food Security Programme in the South has had the best direct impact in empowering the poor and the marginalized. Health and nutrition interventions have also been effective in enhancing the overall human endurance and capacity in NPA's areas of operation. The Community Development Programme helps in creating grassroots peace building initiatives and conflict resolution mechanisms, leadership training, and social skilling.

However, for these complementary and otherwise long-term projects and programmes to be effectively implemented and their impact felt by the poor and the marginalized, peace and security are paramount. In most areas controlled by the SPLA/M, there is relative peace and security, administrative structure and social/ethnic harmony are key ingredients in social-economic development.

Like all other pastoralists in the world, freedom of movement and access to grazing land and watering areas is paramount and essential to their livelihood

For years now, this seemingly conducive social-political ambience has obtained in most areas under SPLA/M control. This has led to a relatively normal life-style for most people of southern Sudan, despite the odds and hurdles brought about by the war. In these areas, life has a somewhat fulfilling, comparatively long-term aura of peace and security.

This in turn imbues the people with hope of a better future and possibilities of permanence and the joys of life. It is through this reality, or prism, that NPA's activities and in those of other humanitarian agencies must be viewed and appreciated. This is despite the enormous needs of the people, stability, safety, goodwill, permanency and, above all, hope and freedom from sudden fear, terror and death as currently obtains in Western Upper Nile Province.

The People of Western Upper Nile

The predominant indigenous people of Western Upper Nile Province are the Nuer, a Nilotic group and their neighbours, the Dinka, also of Nilotic stock. The inhabitants practice agro-pastoralism and fishing. For both ethnic groups, cattle are at the centre of their existence and are the defining attribute in the social hierarchy and pecking order. It is the cattle that confer social status and wealth and it is to them that influence is pegged. This affinity with and worship of cattle has over the centuries

been developed and honed into a way of life for the Nuer and Dinka people. In this regard, their cattle take precedence in all aspects of their lives.

In the dry season, from October to April, the people live near rivers and swampy areas in cattle camps and supplement their diet with fish. In the rainy season, May-October, they live in permanent villages and engage in crop production. These crops are mainly sorghum, millet, maize, beans and greens.

These seasonal migrations in pursuit of grazing grounds for their cattle have a direct impact on the lifestyles of the Nuer and has led to conflict with the Dinka people, the Baggra Arabs and other minority groups in the Province.

For the people of Western Upper Nile Province, like all other pastoralists in the world, freedom of movement and access to grazing land and watering areas is paramount and essential to their livelihood.

Over the centuries, these migratory lifestyle patterns have led to clear land demarcation of tribal land holdings, with different Nuer clans and groups occupying specific areas. The same pattern has evolved among the Dinka people and other minority ethnic groups in the Province. Conflict over these grazing grounds has led to localized skirmishes and loss of lives and cattle, but the intensity and spread has been minimal. In time, these differences have been overcome through elders' councils and mediation — until a new element was introduced by the Sudan Government.

Sudan's regimes, especially the Gaafar Numeiry military regime (1966-85) armed the Baggra Arabs to the North of the



Western Upper Nile State capital, Malakal, and in the Bentiu area with modern weapons, thus tipping the military balance in favour of the Arabs. The then new phenomenon of an Arab militia armed with modern weapons changed the power matrix, and soon resulted in the Nuer, and, to some extent, the Dinka, losing grazing lands in the dry season to the Arabs. In an effort to protect their vital grazing lands, the Nuer, and even the Dinka, sought the intervention of the central authorities in Khartoum, but without much success. In turn, they also acquired modern weapons and the conflict took on an entirely new dimension.

By the time the second round of fighting between Government forces and the people of the South broke out in 1983-4, the fault-lines and flash points of conflict over grazing land and watering areas were clear. The escalation of the conflict and the ensuing civil war added fire to an already highly volatile situation and the results were a veritable war of survival on all fronts as the very elements themselves seemingly conspired with Khartoum and its allies against the people of Western Upper Nile Province.

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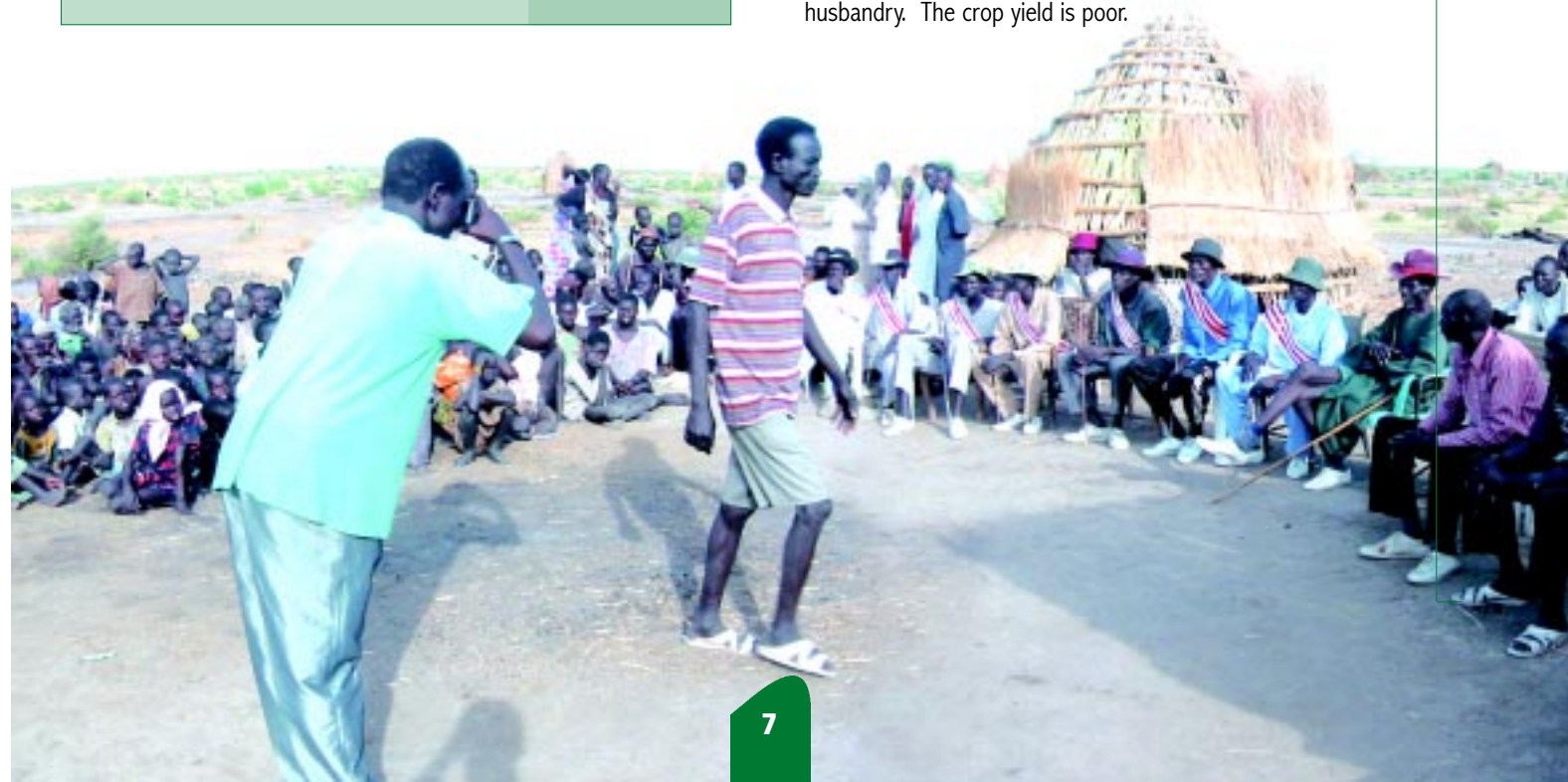


Taking food to a safe store

Topography of Western Upper Nile

The topography of Western Upper Nile Province is one of a flat cotton soil plain with swamps and rivers, with high temperatures and humidity. There is little vegetation — mainly Savannah-dry shrub land interspersed with dry riverbeds in the dry season, which turn into torrential, fast-flowing rivers in the rainy seasons. The soil is in most parts a mixture of lime and sand, poor in water retention on the higher ground, hence poor in agriculture production. On the higher ground, the vegetation is woodland and shrubs, with little ground cover in the dry season. This turns into lush woodland in the rainy season, allowing for crop production.

On the plain, the soil is mostly black-cotton, poorly drained, delicate and poor in nutrients, requiring careful nurturing and husbandry. The crop yield is poor.





However, the swampy ground provides good grazing areas and water points for the livestock in the dry season, while the rivers provide fishing points to supplement the dietary needs of the people. With a low altitude of no more than 300 metres above sea level at the highest point, and temperatures hovering around 35-45° Centigrade nearly all-year-round, the Western Upper Nile Province environment is fragile and survival skills must be mastered for bare existence.

It is therefore in this context that the status quo must be viewed. It is an area with an abundance of natural fault-lines — an inhospitable environment with only a fragile carrying capacity, contentious ethnic diversity and hostilities spurred on by the introduction of modern weapons.

Another combustible ingredient in this deadly cocktail is the introduction of divisive tribal-cum- ethnic political rivalries manifested by a decade-long, bitter civil war. But perhaps the most dangerous of all the catalysts is the discovery of vast oil deposits in 1974 and the subsequent oil exploitation and drilling from 1998.

The Background to the Conflict in Western Upper Nile

The discovery of oil deposits in the Province provides the background against which the Government of Sudan sought to stoke the fires of tribal-ethnic conflict for its own ends. Khartoum sought to alter both the boundaries and demographic composition of the Province. In its endeavours to effect its hegemony-control over the oil deposits, the Sudanese Government played off one side against the other by the provision of weapons, financial and material support, initially through the Baggra and Muraheleen Arab militia in their fighting over grazing lands with the Nuer and the Dinka.

At the same time, at the start of the second round of the Sudan Civil War in 1983-4, Khartoum armed, financed and trained Nuer

and Dinka warlords not affiliated with the rebels of the Anyanya Two and the SPLA/M. This policy was initially intended to split the different ethnic groups, thus denying them ground support among the people.

This initial phase lasted up to 1990-2, before the split of the SPLA/M into rival tribally-based factions. One faction was Nuer-led, by Riak Machar, and drew its support from the Nuer mostly of Western Upper Nile Province. Colonel John Garang led the other faction, which was Dinka-led and -supported. In the intervening decade or so, the conflict in South Sudan was more between the Nuer- and Dinka-dominated rival rebel groups than against the Sudanese Government.

However, despite this split and ethnic rivalries, the Khartoum Government continued to maintain, support, finance and arm freelance warlords in the South.

The warlords owed their continued existence, at least in terms of weapons and ammunition, to Khartoum. Some of these warlords were also provided with financial and material support and training for their fighters. They had their tactical and strategic use to Khartoum and still do, as this report will show.

As the conflict escalated in the mid-80s, the suffering of the civilian population in Western Upper Nile Province and in South Sudan generally continued. The war has taken a terrible toll.

The toll, in terms of lives lost directly, and indirectly through hunger and disease, runs into hundreds of thousands of people, mostly women and children. The death toll continues with even greater velocity as the conflict rages.

The plight of the people of Western Upper Nile is at once shocking and compelling. The tragedy is catastrophic in its scale. Within minutes of arriving in this region, the perceptive observer becomes aware of a pain so close, a fear so pervasive, a destruction so utter, a despair so deep, and death lurking everywhere.

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SPLA/M

Western Upper Nile commanders, not more than 70km from pro-government militia strongholds.

As a displaced old woman from Warier Village, Mankien Payam, originally from Mayom County, interviewed by the Writer in Toy Payam, some 100km from her home, said with fatalistic finality: "I don't care if they kill me, or I die of hunger . . . what have they left for me . . . nothing but trouble . . . two of my sons are dead because of this war . . . I have only two daughters left . . . the other son is fighting Poulino Matip's people . . . The only thing I know is that I shall not share my grave with anyone . . . not even my son if he dies fighting." (July 28, 2002)

Locations Visited in Western Upper Nile

Three of the locations, Koch, Tam and Kerial had received some emergency relief food supplies from the World Food Programme (WFP) and some non-food items in addition to the NPA interventions. However, in all these three locations, the displaced have had to flee some 36 - 45 hours after the WFP food drops as they invariably came under militia attack.

Most of the locations visited in July were between 70-150km from the key Government garrison towns of Mankien, Wankei, Mayom and Bentiu, all in Western Upper Nile Province. Other locations were further South, but within reach, according to

In all the Locations visited, there were no other international NGOs operating except NPA, all the others having closed their operations early last year at the start of the Government dry-season offensive and owing to the state of insecurity in the region. Indeed, in all the Locations visited by the Writer, the local NGOs were operating in or close to premises abandoned by international NGOs. The most conspicuous aspect of all these locations were the freshly-cleared landing strips, with clearing work in progress to lengthen and widen the strips. In other Locations, especially in Tam, Koch and Wicoh, they were attempting to drain the landing strips of water and to make the ground firmer.

In Kerial, the landing strip stands near the deserted Turkuls, cattle pens and there was little sign of recent habitation. Kerial, a once-thriving market square, was deserted, with the stalls in various stages of decay, an abandoned water-drilling rig made in Zimbabwe and an incomplete water-pump imported from India by UNICEF scattered about. Other signs of a formerly active market centre were an abandoned earthen bread-making oven, with the tray and grill still in place, but with ash and half-burnt firewood in the kiln. To the left of the landing strip, the remains of what was once a Medicines Sans Frontieres (MSF) clinic, a four-roomed structure, were empty, bar a scattering of medical bottles, used syringes and decaying tablets on the floor.

In Leel, the landing strip was freshly cleared, less than 200 metres from a freshly-constructed, thatched, two-row marketplace about 400 metres in length. Most of the wares in the market were from the Bentiu. Indeed, one shop had a sign reading "Bentiu Shop" below Kenyan-made Sportsman cigarette-brand advertising colours. There were tailors, cloth dealers, plastic household item-sellers and even a chemist. A kilometre away to the northeast from the market was an NPA mobile clinic. The clinic, a six-tent affair, is the only medical facility in the non-Government-controlled part of Western Upper Nile Province for the wounded, though it provides a once-a-week out-patient service.



Waiting for evacuation



Relief workers in Tam, Western Upper Nile

In all the six Locations visited in July, the fear of fresh militia attack, or aerial bombardment by Sudanese Government's Antonov bombers or helicopters gun-ships, was palpable. It was the point of discussion, the central point of reference, and the core issue to consider for both civilian and military personnel and indeed everyone else in between. However, other than in Tam, Koch and Leel, where the military presence was visible, the ratio of soldiers to the civilian population was very low as the front lines were further away, and access routes were well guarded.

In mid-June, the Writer had visited the same Locations in Western Upper Nile Province as the first phase of NPA's emergency relief operation was in full gear. During this field trip, the Writer took part in food rotations in which emergency food and non-food items were airlifted to various Locations in the region. NPA sometimes undertook as many as four or six one-hour flights to areas where the internally displaced were seeking refuge and safety. These food rotations airlifted between three, five or eight metric tonnes of emergency supplies, either food or non-food

items, or a combination of both, and were a logistical wonder, given the circumstances.

Depending, first and foremost, on the security situation on the ground, the condition of the landing strip, the availability of emergency supplies, ground storage and distribution capacity, the plane(s) would take off and be back in about two hours, the rationale being that the more the food rotations, the more internally-displaced people were provided with emergency relief supplies. The catch, however, was that not all variables were constant, especially security and the weather.

These two variables were so paramount to the success of the operation that when they were constant or appeared to be so, the food rotations were a spectacle to watch. There were at times between three and four planes at various stages of fueling, loading and taking off to deliver their relief supplies to different Locations. Others were expected back for refueling and loading in a highly coordinated process. Other than the security and weather variables, the entire operation was also beholden to the availability of aviation fuel and aircraft maintenance.

These relief food rotations gave the Writer a general feel of the needs on the ground, the extent and spread of the plight of the internally displaced in Western Upper Nile, but never a face, a name or emotional attachment to the beneficiaries.

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The situation never allowed for a physical attachment, feel or identity. It never allowed direct on-the-ground investigations, assessment or eyewitness accounts from the displaced themselves. It never allowed for interviews with the local leadership, civilians and NGOs ground staff. This was an air food-relay operating under very strenuous conditions and strict deadlines at the mercy of the elements — both natural and man-made. The operation was all speed, logistics, efficiency, co-ordination, passion — and lots of luck.

The Displacement of People in Western Upper Nile

The displacement of people in Western Upper Nile Province and indeed in all of southern Sudan is no new phenomenon. It has existed, been practiced and encouraged by various factors and actors. These factors and actors include traditional ethnic rivalries, primarily over grazing lands and watering points. They also occurred in an earlier epoch, through the slave raids by the Arab slave traders of the 19th Century and through pu-

The displacement of people is widespread, extensive, sustained and unrelenting

native pacification expeditions by both Turkish overlords and their British Colonial successors.

What is different now is that the displacement of people is not occasional,

localized or over grazing lands and watering points, but organized to achieve a military objective in pursuit of clear political and economic objectives. The displacement of people is widespread, extensive, sustained and unrelenting. It is effected with utter disregard for human life, pursued with military precision and focus, sustained by terror tactics and enforced by militia groups armed, trained, financed and supported by the Government of Sudan.

These militia groups are led by warlords or renegade militia commanders whose allies are either formerly rival factions in the Province or affiliated to the government forces.

Where these attempts at displacement of the people have faced strong resistance from the local population, the government forces have joined in the fray, either by providing support through high- altitude bombers or helicopter gun-ships or by providing ground troops, armour and artillery. Depending on the circumstances, this support could be a combination of the above options or one of the options at a time. However, support is always available, where and when needed.

As an Alternate Commander of the SPLA Western Upper Nile Command observed: “Every time Polino Matip’s fighters are on the receiving end from our forces, we are either attacked by helicopter gun-ships or bombers. The last time this happened was in Tam in early July.” (Interview July 28, Kerial).

According to both local and international NGOs, and the local population, the on-going internal displacement of people has two clear objectives. One is purely military and pegged to oil exploitation and development, while the other is political, linked to boundary reviews and or expansion. There are other reasons, but all related to or hinged on the two major objectives. These range from localized power feuds amongst the Nuer people, to banditry and a culture of warlordship by renegade militia commanders. Ethnic cleansing between the two major Nilotic groups in the Province is also a key factor.

The military objective is to create buffer zones in areas within a



Food arrives after 2,600 kilometres on the road

radius of 150km from oil-producing installations and drilling platforms, secure the roads leading to these installations and protect oil pipelines. The objective being to clear the areas of what the Government perceives as a hostile local population. Once the areas are cleared of these hostile groups, the Government then establishes garrison towns and other fortifications to ensure security.

As a report by Georgette and Ryle (October 2001) observed: "For the Government the supply to militias is part of a counter-insurgency strategy aimed at limiting support for anti-government forces by depopulating the countryside and driving the population . . . into government-controlled towns or further South, away from strategic areas."

The report continued: "In Western Upper Nile the strategy has acquired a new focus with the advent of active oil exploitation."

Perhaps the best description of the military objective in the displacement campaign comes from a former Kenyan Army officer, now working for an international NGO in the Sudan. He observed: "The clear military objective is simple; deny the enemy local support and intelligence . . . drain the water to catch the fish." (August 22, 2002)

An International Crisis Group (ICG) report (June 27, 2002) gives yet another clear example of the economic-cum-military objectives of the displacement campaign. It says in part: "Oil revenues have allowed the Government to purchase increasingly lethal weapons to more effectively pursue population-clearing operations."

The ICG report adds: "The Government must open new oil fields to production if it is at least to maintain current revenues. This requires pushing further South into insurgent strongholds."

The importance of Western Upper Nile Province to the Government's future revenue generation is amply captured by the then chief Islamic ideologue of the State and Speaker of the Sudanese Parliament, Hassan el-Tourabi, when he said, ac-

The driving force for the current massive displacement of people in the Province is tied to oil exploitation and development

According to the Gagyon report, that the Government would use oil revenues to finance weapons factories, though the Sudanese leadership had said that oil revenues would be used for construction and development.

The military-economic objectives are predicated on the fact that, all the active oil concession areas, especially Blocks 4, 5 and 5A, are within or close to the Province. These areas therefore must be secured, controlled and cleansed of hostile local populations. The people of Western Upper Nile therefore are clearly a military obstacle that

must be contained, if not actually destroyed, or forced to flee the Province.

The political objectives ride on the military-cum-economic, namely that with the recent merger of SPLA/M with Riak Macher's forces, the Nuer, at least the majority, are not with the Government.



Changing a tyre somewhere in South Sudan

With the ongoing peace talks under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), the issue of boundaries will come to the fore and, for these reasons, perhaps more so than anything else, a Western Upper Nile Province demographically altered with a fluid ground situation offers the best option for continued oil extraction. With the active involvement of the pro-government militia groups and renegade warlords, the prospect of a divided local population taking part

in a future referendum on the question of the South's seceding is quite tempting. However, the driving force for the current massive displacement of people in the Province is tied to oil exploitation and development.

The Anatomy of a Militia Attack

According to eyewitness accounts, most of the displacement of people in the Province is preceded by either a militia attack or a joint government-militia operation against a village. This is done irrespective of the village/settlement's political affiliation or allegiance, and usually before dawn or after dusk. The raids usually target cattle camps or settlements, loot, plunder and burn the household property, food or grain.

The raiders steal or kill the cattle from the camps while forcing the local population to flee in a particular direction towards the swamps or woodlands. Most of the attacks are spear-headed by pro-government militia well-versed in the local terrain and topography and with access to good intelligence about, and knowledge of, settlement and defensive structures and, or the disposition of SPLA troops in any one area. As a local SRRA field monitor, Andrew, from Kerial, said: "You don't understand. These people know the area, they are sons of the soil . . . it is not unlikely that some of the militia fighters have brothers or relatives fighting with Gadet's forces currently with the SPLA . . . they know when to attack, know the back tracks . . . you have to understand that, before the fall-out between Polino Matip and Peter Gadet, the militia were one and the same."

Andrew, 24 years old with two wives, was educated in Khartoum until two years ago, when he fled after Riak Macher fell out with the Government. (Andrew was a guide to the Writer in Kerial, but as of July 29, 2002, he was among the people who fled Kerial after pro-government militia attacked the area. He had lent the Writer a Jeffrey Archer thriller, *The Lucifer Connection*, which the Writer hoped to return to him on his second trip to Kerial, but this was not to be).

In this particular incident there were prior signs that an attack was imminent, at least to the people of Kerial and surrounding

villages. On Saturday, July 28, 2002, the deputy Alternate Commander of the SPLA forces in the area summoned the SRRA Secretary, Peter Kur, and asked him to evacuate the camp after a WFP team had left after distributing food and non-food items in the area.

It is noteworthy that the WFP food drops were made on Wednesday, July 25 and Thursday, July 26, 2002. The food was distributed on Friday, July 27 and Saturday, July 28 and the four-person WFP team, including a security officer, flew out the same day.



Awaiting food in Kerial

For the Writer, there was nothing untoward happening, but the sudden re-location of the SPLA field radio four kilometres to the South of camp to almost 10km due West of the landing strip was telling. At the same time, during the previous day's 10-hour walk to Toy Payam and back to Kerial, there were numerous encounters with SPLA detachments on the higher ground at various points up to about mid-day.

On our return to Kerial for a meeting with the Commissioner and the Alternate Commander of the area, we again encountered numerous SPLA detachments on their way to their positions in the late afternoon. However, the Commissioner and the Alternate Commander were up-beat and assured the Writer that the security situation was under control, so when the Deputy Alternate Commander told the SRRA Secretary to evacuate the camp, at about 7.30pm., it was rather surprising.

After some consultations, it was agreed that the SRRA compound would be provided with extra security for the night and

**Most civilians fled to Bahr-el-Ghazal,
North to Mayomadony, Twic County,
West to Mayan Jur, Gogrial County, or
South to Marialou, Tonj County**

the Writer be provided with an armed guard. All this time, my guide and interpreters were re-assuring and betrayed no sense of urgency or signs of an impending militia attack. The night passed without incident, but in the morning the Deputy Alternate Commander was still not satisfied and kept asking when the plane to evacuate me would arrive. At about mid-day, Sunday, July 28, a WFP security team landed and after consultation with the SRRA Secretary and Deputy Alternate Commander, left at about 1.30pm the same day.

My plane arrived at 3.30pm the same day and I left without any idea as to what would happen next.

The Typology of Internally Displaced People

On Monday, July 29, information got through to our camp in the Lakes Province, some 600km to the South, that Kerial had been attacked by militia allied to Polino Matip and that the 11 villages of Kerial Payam were deserted as the people fled towards Toy Payam, heading for Mayan Jur Payam in Gogrial County in eastern Bar-el-Ghazal Province.

In less than 12 hours since the Writer flew out of Kerial, over 100,000 people were on the run as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with tens of thousands of animals and fields with waist-high crops left unattended while the fate of their houses and other immovable property was unknown. The irony and tragedy of the Kerial attack was that in the previous 48 hours, over 70 metric tonnes of food and non-food items had been distributed to the people in the area, including the internally displaced, returnees and their hosts, who were now on the move, this time running for their dear lives.

As one NPA field staffer observed, in Western Upper Nile Province, nothing is permanent: "It's like a dog chasing its tail . . . we have just dropped and distributed food rations for over 30,000 people for a month and now those people are on the run and we don't know where they are now or headed to, but

we are certain they did not take away all their monthly rations. It is impossible, the militia must have taken at least half the food that was brought in." (Tuesday, July 30, 2002).

It took NPA field staff an anxious two days to establish that the displaced of Kerial were headed for Mayan Jur and in their company was an American scholar, Mr. Philip Rossler from the International Crisis Group (ICG), safe and sound, but physically and emotionally exhausted. For the American scholar, a PhD student in conflict management at the University of North Carolina, it was to be a personal initiation into the world of conflict resolution and survival as part of a displaced group fleeing for their dear lives.

As Mr. Rossler puts it: "I arrived in Kerial on Sunday, July 28, to conduct pre-dissertation field research on the rainy season security situation and the conflict dynamics in Western Upper Nile (that is what influences and motivates the activities of the militias, the strategy of the Government of Sudan forces and



Mr Sten-Rino Bonsaksen, the outgoing NPA, Resident Representative leads visitors from Norway in Leel, Western Upper Nile

the SPLA, etc). On the morning of Monday, July 29, Peter Kur, the SRRA Secretary for Mayom County, instructed all civilians in the surrounding community to evacuate Kerial because of nearby GoS militia movement. The GoS militia had been key in the attack on Tam beginning on Friday, July 26. Now that Tam had been attacked, looted, and torched, there was speculation that, on its return North to Mankien, it may take a northwesterly route through Kerial."

He continues: "From Monday, July 29, at about 9am., until Wednesday, July 31 at about 2pm., I was on the run, fleeing with thousands of civilians West, away from Kerial, Western Upper Nile, to Mayan Jur, Bahr-el-Ghazal. Though I tried to obtain

information about the location and activities of GoS forces from the SRRA Secretary and Field Monitor as we traveled, accurate information was very hard to ascertain during journey.

“In order to protect me and calm my nerves, the Sudanese I traveled with (who did everything they could to guarantee my safety and well-being, from securing two goats along the way to eat, to always having someone walking in front of me and behind me; their generosity, selflessness, and courage in this time of crisis I cannot forget) concealed exactly how precarious our situation was.”

However, after piecing information together based on conversations with displaced civilians, chiefs, community leaders, SRRA officers, and SPLA personnel during his journey and by getting a sense of the larger crisis when he returned to a safe base where he had a better overview of the flight of the displaced, the American had a clearer picture of the danger he had just been through.

GoS militia had stolen cattle from civilians in Tam and were taking them to Mankien.”

He said most civilians fled to Bahr-el-Ghazal, North to Mayomadony, Twic County, West to Mayan Jur, Gogrial County, or South to Marialou, Tonj County.

“In our trek to Mayan Jur, we encountered civilians coming all the way from Tam, more than a three-day walking distance. Civilians from Tam were also displaced to the East towards Leel. But any journey East required civilians to cross the Jur River, which is too deep to wade across.

“The GoS militia eventually entered and raided Kerial on Tuesday, July 30. The WFP had dropped food the previous week and NPA dropped food on Sunday, July 28. Most of the food was left behind as the civilians were forced to flee. Thus, the GoS militia had plenty to loot. A very disturbing pattern of behaviour emerges regarding the GoS militia raiding Western Upper Nile;

the GoS gives clearance to WFP to deliver food to a landing strip in WUN, the WFP comes and drops the food, a few days later the GoS forces and militia chase the civilians out of the town, steal the abundance of food, and return to Mankien. This occurred in Tam (which had also received WFP food, only days before the GoS offensive) and in Kerial. The coordinated strategy of clearance, food drops, and GoS militia raiding allows Khartoum to heed to the international community’s demand that it allow humanitarian access to Western Upper Nile, while ensuring the relief aid does not reach its intended target.

“Many civilians I talked to coming from Tam said they were chased by GoS militia, and helicopter gun-ships.

The GoS militia targeted the civilians and the cattle. According to many, the captured cattle and civilians were taken back to Mankien.”

It is evident from his report that the GoS used the helicopter gun-ships to devastate and terrorize the civilian population. This time the attacks occurred in Tam and Toy and areas in-between. Most people coming from Tam said they saw five helicopter gun-ships flying throughout the Location, targeting anyone within reach.

The Writer shuddered at the thought that had he remained just a few more hours in Kerial, he would have suffered the fate of



Offloaded and preparing for take off

He observed: “Civilians fled Kerial on Monday morning. The SRRA Secretary estimated 85,000 people lived in or around Kerial. There are no civilians left in Kerial, according to the Commissioner of Mayom County. In addition, all of Mayom County (estimated population by the SRRA Secretary at over 300,000) has been displaced. In our journey we traveled together with thousands of displaced persons — young and old, blind and wounded. The IDPs carried what food and belongings they could, but most are in dire need of food, plastic sheets, blankets, mosquito nets, saucepans, and medicine. Many herded their cattle with them, after hearing reports that the

an internally displaced person on the run. This rapid change of fortunes in Western Upper Nile, or even its ever-present prospect, is best captured by the following episode in the life of an Assistant Chief of the Bul Clan of the Nuer, Mr. Peter Madit of Kerial Payam, whom the Writer had met five days earlier in Mayan Jur, some 100km southwest of Kerial, in a chance encounter.

Theirs is an existence based on hope in the face of fear, terror and death

To fully appreciate the tragedy that is the daily fare of the people of Western Upper Nile, the chance encounter with Assistant Chief Madit of Kerial Payam of Mayom County is instructive. In a period of no more than five days, his life had been turned topsy-turvy and had swung from a relatively sedate existence in the village of Kerial to a goodwill emissary to the Dinka people of Mayan Jur Payam, Gogrial County, Bar-el-Ghazal Province, some 100km southwest of his village, to an internally displaced person on the run less than 30 hours since his return from his goodwill mission.

Chief Madit's goodwill mission to the Dinka of Mayan Jur was to collect a number of milking cows and two bulls his people had earlier taken to their Dinka neighbours for safe-keeping for a peace ceremony in his village. His mission, though initially successful, rapidly aborted and turned into a flight of mercy amidst a fluid security situation as pro-government militia attacked his

people for the second time in less than six months.

The attack's effect on Chief Madit's people was devastating, the fact that it was to be expected as a way of life in Western Upper Nile where fortunes change at the blink of an eye notwithstanding. However, for a foreigner, the rapidity of these bewilderingly swift swings of the pendulum can be confounding, on top of being thoroughly frightening.

For the humanitarian workers and relief agencies, both the prospect and the reality are fraught with danger. How they cope with the constant threat to personal safety we can only marvel at. In such a situation, for a foreigner like the Writer, the options are clear: Opt out of the mess to a safer haven or the sanctuary of home.

For the humanitarian workers, the options are far more complex than opting out of the mess. They must, over and above the personal risk, be cognizant of all other attendant problems associated with such a situation as it impacts on others, especially the people they have come to bring relief and succour to. This has to be the very definition of selflessness.

For Chief Madit's people and indeed the whole Western Upper Nile Province, the options are even grimmer. They not only have

to flee for their own lives and those of their animals, but must also re-locate and re-start their lives, abandon their homes and crops and hope, again and again and again.

Theirs is an existence based on hope in the face of fear, terror and death. They subsist — one can hardly say they live — under the most perilous of circumstances. They have to grapple with pain, hunger, disease, the elements and despair at having no control over their feckless lives.



Loading relief food in the Lakes Province, South Sudan

This is vintage Western Upper Nile, a Province that has been devastated by war egged on by economic-cum-political interests pegged to a cultural, pseudo-religious milieu. This conflict has also been stoked by ethnic rivalries, clan and personality feuds, warlordism and, until very recently, indifference and ignorance on the part of the international community.

On Tuesday, July 23, at 6.30pm., the Writer met assistant Chief Michael Madit of the Nuer people of Kerial Payam, Mayan County, Western Upper Nile, by chance in Mayan Jur. We met again under different circumstances that were to drive home the plight of the internally displaced of Western Upper Nile Province. Mayan Jur, where the chance encounter took place, is predominantly inhabited by the Dinka and has been relatively peaceful over the years and under SPLA/M control.

In this regard, Mayan Jur Payam had suffered little by way of fighting and life had assumed a semblance of normality. The airstrip had not, according to the local people, been used in over two years, that being the last time a World Food Programme plane had dropped relief food there. Indeed, the fields were green with maize, sorghum and bean crops in full bloom.

The houses were standard Dinka fare, so were the cattle sheds. There were women weeding crops as the young, mostly men, were out herding the animals at the cattle camps. There was very little, if any, weaponry in sight and in the homesteads older women were weaving baskets. Others were bent over grinding stones and pounded sorghum.

The scene was calm, it was, in relation to Western Upper Nile Province some 100km to the northwest, an island of peace. Assistant Chief Madit was on a goodwill mission to Mayan Jur. For the Writer, Mayan Jur was not on the itinerary. Indeed, landing there was the result of the wrong co-ordinates being given to the pilot, hence the chance encounter with the Nuer Chief.

Chief Madit was upbeat, though somewhat subdued and cautious. He was in Mayan Jur, he said, "to pass on my people's regards and gratitude to our brothers, the Dinka people of

Gogrial County, for their generosity, sympathy, support and understanding in our time of need. They have come to our assistance, given our animals refuge."

He went on: "They have really been understanding, despite our past history. You have to remember that, until two years ago, the Nuer and Dinka were enemies. We have had our differences that have led to loss of life on both sides and for them to come to our support now that we are facing war brought to us by the Polino Matip militia, Government troops and helicopter gun-ships,



Ready for loading of relief supplies in Bouth, Western Upper Nile

not to mention the Antonov bombers, we are very grateful."

Asked why he was not yet ready to take all the Nuer animals back to Kerial as the area was under Commander Peter Gadet's Western Upper Nile Command of the SPLA/M, Chief Madit was clear: "You have to understand it is not as calm as it may appear. The militia, Matip's people, could still strike. They know the territory, they know the people."

A second chance encounter with Chief Madit was to happen four days later, in Toy Payam, Mayom County, Western Upper Nile, on his way back home at the end of his goodwill mission amongst the Dinka of Mayan Jur. His invitation to the Writer to attend the cleansing ceremony in Kerial was never to be as he and his people had to flee from a pro-government militia attack.

Personal Testimony of a People's Tragedy

A recent piece in the venerable British weekly news magazine the *Economist*, (9th August 2002) on the plight of the people of Western Upper Nile aptly captures their tragedy in a somewhat surreal scene.

The article opens with the scene of an attack on GoS soldiers: "As the battle starts, mortars, grenades and machine gun bullets rip into a column of 1,200 Government troops. Clouds of white smoke and panicked birds billow and flutter.

"In a set-piece slaughter in the Sudanese Savannah, another day of death in Africa's largest country, and its longest war."

The article goes on to describe in graphic detail how the government militia fighters are slain in a short, vicious and brutal encounter. The toll for the day is, according to the *Economist*, around 30 killed and 100 badly wounded. For the anti-government fighters of Peter Gadet of the SPLA/M Western Upper Nile Command: "The Government's losses are much heavier, but impossible to count. Knowing they can expect no mercy, the wounded drag themselves silently into the elephant grass to die."

And most telling of all is the *Economist's* writer's observation that the Government troops are in reality, "Black militiamen in the pay of Sudan's Arab regime."

This observation belies the fact that the tragedy of South Sudan is, in a way, "self-inflicted" or wrought by the victims' kinsmen, for Khartoum's irregular foot soldiers are for the most part Nuer. The Government has used these militia groups to establish a virtual reign of terror in the Province as they are sup-

ported, trained, armed and paid by Khartoum. They are the Trojan horses or fifth columnists of the Sudan Government in the war with the Nuer for the control of the oil-rich Province. As the *Economist* writer summed it-up, "So long as the rebels control the South, [Khartoum] can hardly touch it [the oil]. If the South were to secede, it would lose it altogether."

In this regard, the pro-government militia forces serve an indispensable dual role. The first is to keep the population under a virtual reign of terror, where death lurks from every corner, thus forcing the people to flee to safer havens. The second role is closely linked to the first, but has a deniability factor, i.e. the Government of Sudan can diplomatically deny responsibility for the militia atrocities against the people of the region as purely the result of localized ethnic feuds, where it has no physical presence on the ground. This dual use of the pro-government militia in the Province advances the Government's military-political-economic objectives, while offering a diplomatic face-saving way out.

But as the personal accounts of victims of these militia attacks show, the cost has been horrendous. For 80-year-old Kual Beliew, originally from Warier Village, Mankien Payam, Mayom County, and internally displaced in the Mojok Amal Cattle Camp in Toy Payam, over 100 km South of his village, life has no meaning any more.

Says Beliew: "We can't go back to our village until there is peace. I would really like to have peace, I am only waiting for my day — to die. I would really like to have peace before I die."

He continues: "All our young men are at the front line as fighters of the SPLA. The Jalabas (Arabs) and Polino Matip's people



are fighting against us . . . don't know why they are fighting us . . . they know why. The Jalabas can stay in their place and we in our place.”

Almost as an afterthought, he prefers what appears to him to be an equitable way out for both sides: “I have no problem with the Arabs so long as they stay away from my place. They have their place, I have my place.”

For him and others marooned in this cattle camp, life has been rough, tough and miserable. According to his testimony, the journey South from his native village of Warier took over 10 days as they had to cross rivers and swamps while at the same time taking care of the children and the animals.

Along the way, they lost three old women, seven children and a blind old man. They also lost over 10 cows. This cattle camp, with over 2,000 animals and over 1,000 people, has had to make do with meagre relief supplies over the past 27 days at the date of the interview (July 27, 2002)

Believ pleads his people's case thus:

“We really need some more food. We have received some little food from NPA, plastic sheets, blankets and some cooking pans and oil, as you can see we have no land to cultivate. We feed on milk only and as you know milk is not enough.”

To emphasize his people's dire situation he sums up their perilous existence as follows:

“We really need some more food, mosquito nets and — very, very important — medicine for the children. Our future is dying in front of our eyes as we look at the children dying from hunger, disease and war.”

(Author's note: Only days after this interview on the July 29, over 100,000 people in all of Kerial Payam, Mayom County, were on the run, after a pro-government militia attack on Mayan Jur, 100km to the southwest).

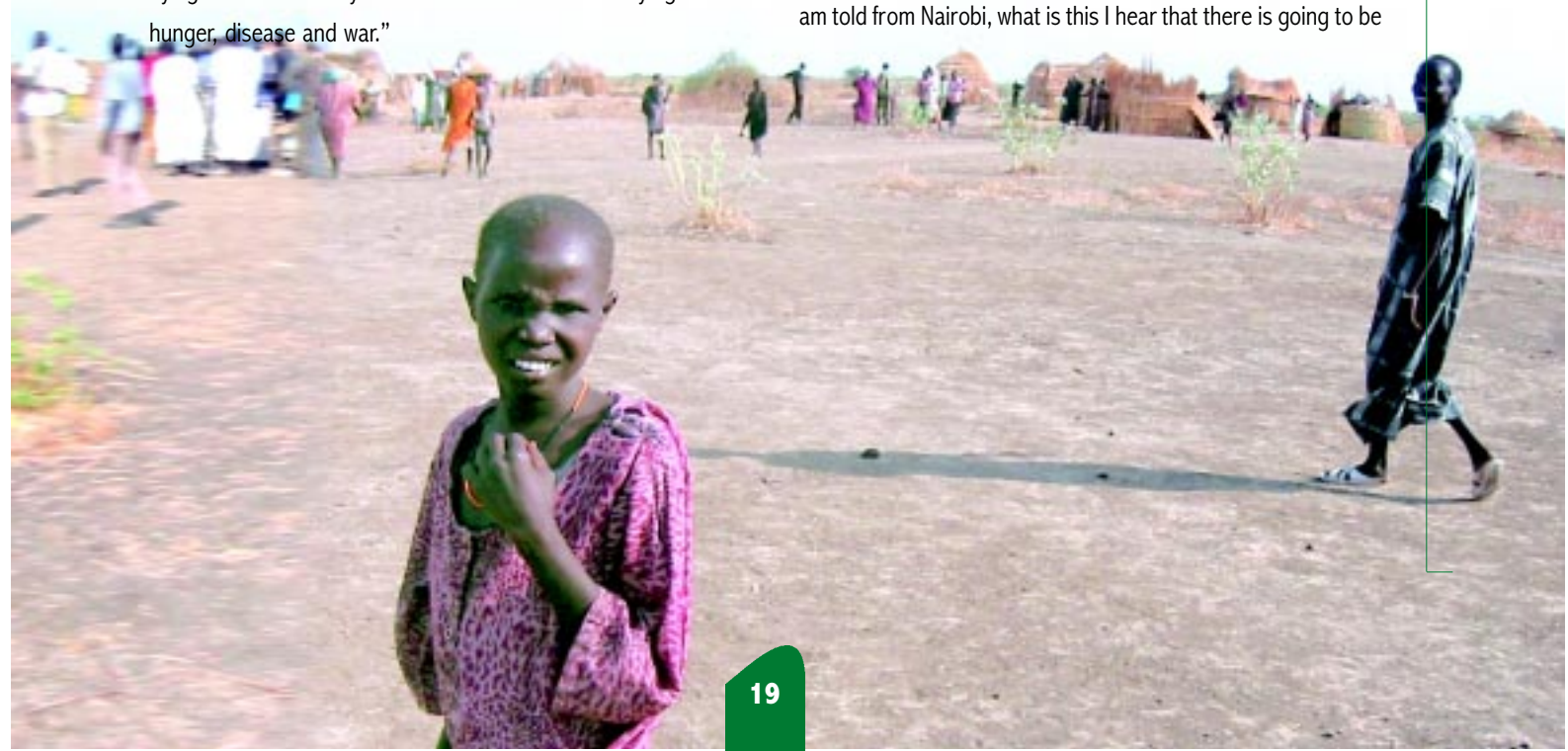
A Spiritual Leader's Fight of Mercy

In a better world, Mr. Mut Tuoroah is no ordinary mortal, at least not in the eyes of the people of the Bul Clan of the Nuer tribe. He is a venerated man, endowed with super-natural powers, charismatic, engaging and wealthy in all things that a man of his social status ought to have.

Mut Tuoroah is one of the few Nuer spiritual leaders and the most eminent amongst the Bul Clan. He is one person that everybody wants to be close to, though he does not suffer fools gladly, according to legend. He is an awesome enemy to have and his views are law, at the least, and spiritual edicts at most. In his homestead in Koatna Village, Toy Payam, Mayam County, Mut Touroah is half-way between an aristocratic Lord and a deity. His homestead boasts over 200 cattle sheds (Luwacks) and over 200 huts (Turkuls) and he has more than 100 wives and countless children.

During our encounter, Mr. Mut Touroah divided his time between playing host to a goodwill delegation seeking his intervention in rain-making and our interview. In-between, he also had to make time for other people who sought his advice on myriad problems. This grey-haired eighty-something man was all regal.

For a start, he wanted to be briefed on the peace talks (then taking place in Machakos, Kenya) between the SPLA/M and the Sudan Government. He asked: “You have come from outside, I am told from Nairobi, what is this I hear that there is going to be



peace, yet our people are still dying at the hands of Government gun-ships and Polino Matip's people? There can never be peace unless the Arabs in Mankien, Bentiu and Dhow go back to the North!"

Taking the cue, I posed the question: "Are you not for peace with the North?"

He weighs his words carefully before answering; "I have prayed for peace very much, I want peace very much, but I am not convinced the Arabs want peace at all. They have oppressed us for too long. Used us as slaves. They do not want our children to go to school. I think it is better for us in the South to be left alone. So it is better if we do it alone."

To give the answer some context, he adds: "Our major problem now is when this mass movement of people will end. The world should help us, the world should know our problems and help us resolve them. The world should help us because of the war. If they could help us with food and medicine. This disturbs me very much. . ."

Mr. Touroah's authority was sought by the displaced of Mankien to settle in his area after they fled from pro-government militia attacks in May 2002.

He says he has suffered from the war and believes the war will end only with the help of the world. However, he sounds bitter and dejected by the social cost of the war. He says: " This fighting is not only by Arabs alone, there are some of our people who are fighting with the Arabs because of food. This is the politics of the stomach!"

"Nothing is permanent in Western Upper Nile — it's like a dog chasing its tail." — NPA field coordinator, July 20, 2002

Asked why he has not used his position as the spiritual leader to end the fighting, at least by his people, Mut Touroah is agitated and spits out the answer: "I have nothing to do with these people, if I talk to them or go to them they might harm me . . . they have already killed one of my sons in this fighting!"

We bid Mut Touroah good-bye and head for Kerial, some six hours walk away to the South. Half-way there, the heavens opened up and a storm raged

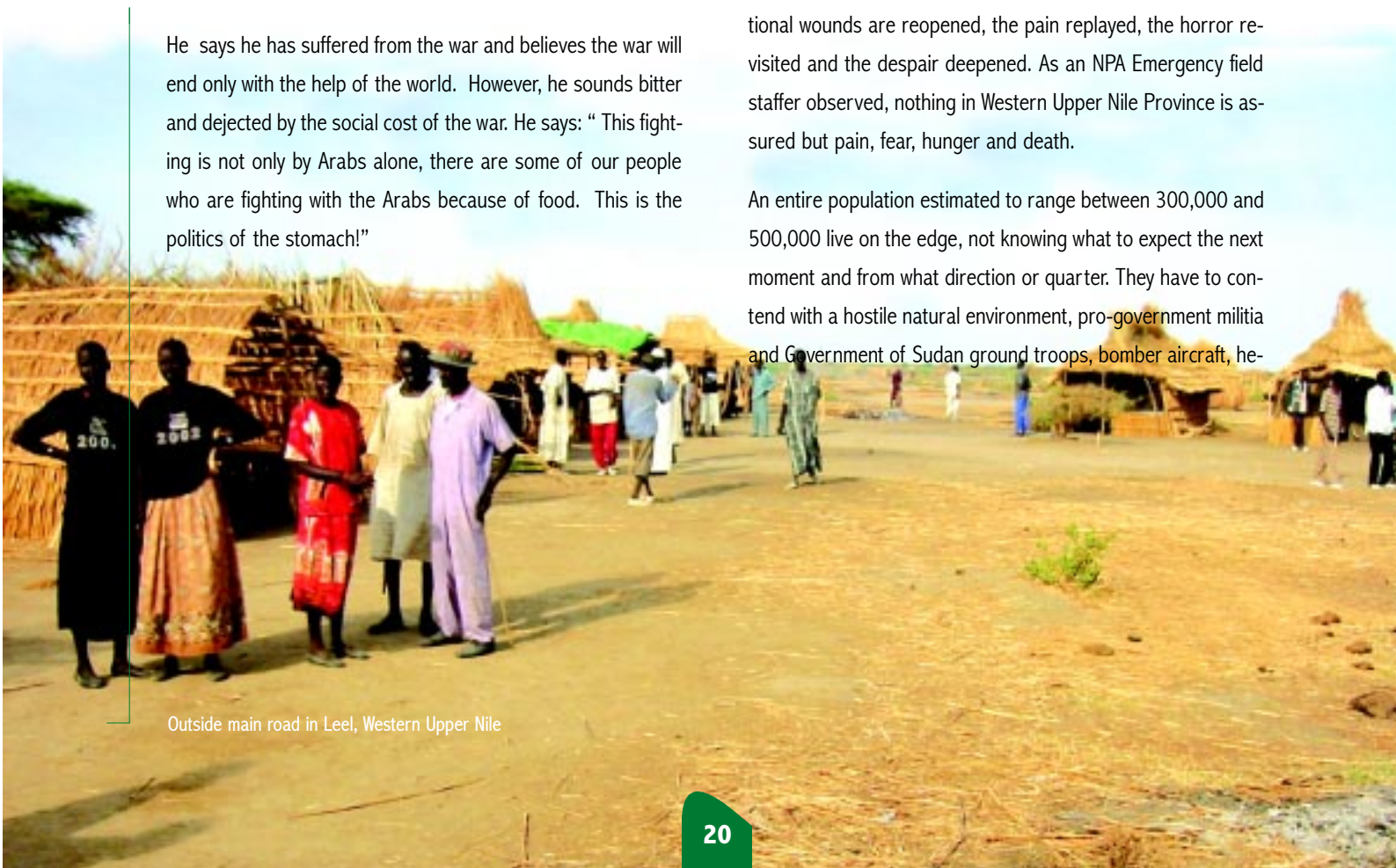
for over an hour, apparently his prayers for rain were answered. But, woefully for him and his homestead, his prayers for peace were for the time being unanswered, for less than 48 hours later, he was on the run from a pro-government militia force.

Finally for the spiritual leader, it was his turn to be on the run, hoping against hope that the spirits would keep harm at bay as he joined his people in flight.

As these brief eyewitness accounts by the victims attest to, the entire population of Western Upper Nile Province is constantly on the move. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that they barely have time to catch their collective breath before having to move on yet again.

And with each and every hurried move, the physical and emotional wounds are reopened, the pain replayed, the horror revisited and the despair deepened. As an NPA Emergency field staffer observed, nothing in Western Upper Nile Province is assured but pain, fear, hunger and death.

An entire population estimated to range between 300,000 and 500,000 live on the edge, not knowing what to expect the next moment and from what direction or quarter. They have to contend with a hostile natural environment, pro-government militia and Government of Sudan ground troops, bomber aircraft, he-



Outside main road in Leel, Western Upper Nile

licopter gun-ships, warlords and renegade commanders on all sides.

They also have to contend with SPLA counter-offensives and at all times battle hunger and disease and live in fear of the unknown every moment of their lives. But perhaps the worst part of it is that this has been their fate for over two decades. For years, the Province was virtually closed to the outside world as death and terror reigned, the people's plight sealed off from the international community. By the time the world took notice, theirs was a broken society with an enormous socio-economic and psychological void that will require a massive infusion of resources, capital and the milk of human kindness.

To heal and mend a people traumatized for decades by a brutal and vicious conflict will be a long and arduous process. To rehabilitate, reconcile and restore trust and social reunification will involve a delicate process, deft balancing act and social engineering. The emotional toll on the entire population is deep and pervasive. Nearly half the adult population has never known anything but turmoil since birth, barring all-too-brief periods of a shaky peace.

As a matter of routine dictated by the weather, in the wet season Sudanese troops are almost always engaged in purely defensive operations, restocking and planning for the next dry-season offensive

The other half of the adult population has experienced only a semblance of peace for less than two decades. The children and young adults raised in a war zone have had no experience of any way other life.

No family has escaped forced movement, separation, hunger, terror and death. No family has escaped fear, despondency and trauma. It is a society beset by pain, overtaken by hunger and disease and where death looms terribly large always.

Their plight is not substantially different from that of other peoples of southern Sudan, but it seems to be more perilous, more precarious. The people of Western Upper Nile need, require and deserve respite from their woes and this calls for urgent, massive international humanitarian intervention.

The Challenges Facing NGOs Working in Western Upper Nile

"Nothing is permanent in Western Upper Nile — it's like a dog chasing its tail." — *NGO field coordinator, July 20, 2002*

Western Upper Nile Province is beset by a grand conspiracy of natural and man-made elements, all seemingly in competition to inflict the most pain. To non-governmental organizations, both local and international, the challenge is how best to confront and contain these elements. This will require focus, commitment, empathy and, above all, skills in community rehabilitation and integration. And this will apply to all NGOs that seek to intervene in the Province for the short or long haul.

The fundamental challenge is security and insecurity. The experience of the American student Philip Rosseler captures the precarious existence of the people of the region: In less than 36 hours after his arrival in the Province, he was in the thick of things and on the run for his life.

That Rosseler and tens of thousands of the people of Kerial Payam and their animals were able to flee in the nick of time ahead of a major raid is the exception rather than the rule. Rosseler's graphic eyewitness account of this massive narrow escape is compelling. It captured all the elemental and terrible ingredients that are a daily staple of the life of the people of this region.

Yet again, this was in the wet season, when there is, according to Sudan analysts, a lull, a window of calm in the cycle of fighting in the conflict. According to the analysts, government troops are confined to their fortified camps and garrison towns as mobility is greatly reduced.

As a matter of routine dictated by the weather, in the wet season Sudanese troops are almost always engaged in purely defensive operations, restocking and planning for the next dry-season offensive. However, this military strategy seems to have changed, as evidenced in Western Upper Nile in May.

As an ICG report (June 2002) points out, "Oil revenues have allowed the Government to purchase increasingly lethal weapons and to more effectively pursue population clearing operations."

“For now Peter Gadet has gone too far to go back to the Government, but if pushed too hard by the SPLA/M he might decide to go solo.”

The Government’s next dry-season offensive (usually November-to-April, when the ground is dry and swamps and rivers are easily forded) will undoubtedly see the deployment of more and better weapons.

Last year’s dry season saw the capture of the SPLA-held towns of Nhialdou and Mankien in January and the subsequent massive displacement of the entire population of Mankien County. In the course of the Government’s offensive, the relatively safe people of Mayom County were forced to host their fleeing kinsmen from Mankien County and accommodate them.

As the conflict raged and battlefield fortunes changed, the ripples of the mass movement of entire populations were felt throughout the Province, with major spillovers into parts of Bar-el-Ghazel Province and other areas of South Sudan.

The experience of Chief Michael Mandit of Kerial Village, Mayom County, is instructive. For Chief Mandit and his people, the wheel had turned a full 360° and their future abode was in Mayan Jur. The chief’s sojourn among the Dinka people in eastern Bar-el-Ghazel Province and his people’s subsequent flight back to Mayan Jur especially captures the precariousness of the situation.

Fluid and untenable as it is at the moment, the security situation in the Province is made worse by the induction of pro-government militia forces. The militia are as adaptable, mobile and lightly armed as the SPLA forces in the area. They are therefore much less encumbered by wet-season conditions than the more heavily armed Sudan Government forces that are more dependent on mechanized transport and an elaborate logistics and supply network.

The SPLA must, as a former Kenya Army officer has said, “take the initiative now or force a better-equipped, bigger and better supported Government dry-season offensive”. This officer believes the current wet-season fighting is a foretaste of what is to be expected in the dry season offensive. He adds: “Even though the current fighting is mainly by pro-government militia, the employment of helicopter gun-ships is an indication of the

Government’s overall strategy.”

There are claims by the SPLA that the Government has acquired amphibious trucks and tanks. If this is confirmed, then the State could wage all-weather and all-terrain offensives and drastically alter the conduct — to say nothing of the outcome — of the war.

Also of great concern is the fact that on top of the fluid nature of the security situation, there are lingering suspicions among the SPLA’s new-found allies in the Province. Some military analysts perceive residual hostility among the Nuer people of Western Upper Nile against the Dinka-dominated SPLA/M. Though not at all pronounced or even apparent, the process of integrating the Western Upper Nile fighters into the mainstream SPLA forces has been far from smooth. The Western Upper Nile command is Nuer-dominated and —led.

These forces are under the command of Peter Gadet, a one-time pro-government militia commander until he switched sides about two years ago to join the SPLA. Some military analysts have questioned these forces’ commitment to the SPLA/M’s overall objectives.

An NPA emergency staffer says: “You have to remember that before switching sides and joining the SPLA/M, Peter Gadet was as notorious and vicious as Polino Matip’s people. What guarantees do the SPLA/M have that Gadet will not switch sides again? Remember the late Kerubino . . . indeed, what would the SPLA do if Gadet opted out of this arrangement?”

The emergency worker continued: “The SPLA/M must tread very carefully, they must not rush things in Western Upper Nile or



Picking food grains

they could topple the local power dynamics.”

He was quick to add, though: “For now Peter Gadet has gone too far to go back to the Government, but if pushed too hard by the SPLA/ M he might decide to go solo.” Our interlocutor spoke on July 19, 2002. In December, Peter Gadet yet again switched sides and did indeed rejoin the Government side, this time joining his erstwhile foe Polino Matip.

According to some observers, this suspicion will take some time to overcome and could explain, in a way, why the SPLA's Western Upper Nile military strategy is more defensive than offensive.

Since the start of this year's dry-season offensive and wet-season raids by the pro-government militia, the SPLA has for the most part been on the defensive, they have not taken the initiative unlike the case elsewhere in the South. For instance, in Eastern Equatorial Province, close to the Kenya border, the SPLA has captured two of the Government's major garrison towns — Kapoeta and Torit.

The Government of Sudan's change in strategy is clearly influenced by its perceived need to stamp its authority in the oil-rich province. The die has therefore clearly been cast with regard to continuing, large-scale human suffering in the area. Insecurity and massive displacement of people in the Province will be persistent, extensive and relentless. Local and interna-

I was lost, confused and not a little irritated, so I pursued a different line of questioning and sought to know how much food had been received from the World Food Programme since May

tional NGOs and other relief agencies have their work cut out for them.

As numerous reports on South Sudan since the advent of oil exploitation in 1998 have indicated, the people of Western Upper Nile have been condemned to death by oil more than anything else in their lives.

Civil Structures and Human Resources Deficiencies

An encounter with the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association Secretary (SRRA) in Leel, one of the newly-established displaced persons'

settlements in Western Upper Nile, was as humorous as it was telling.

The forty-something-year-old Secretary, Peter Gatipin Thoung, was already late for a meeting at the SRRA's office when he stopped the interview with the excuse that he had to attend to some urgent business.

After some 20 minutes he came back smiling, saying he was now all set for the interview, because the acting area Commissioner had officially confirmed his position as the SRRA Secretary for Rub Kona Payam, Mankien County.

It was then explained to me that since early May, the entire SRRA Secretariat in the area had been replaced for a number of reasons,

ranging from incompetence to theft and consorting with the enemy. However, Mr. Thoung had been appointed a caretaker of the SRRA in the area pending a new substantive appointment, and had not been given any records and was left entirely to his own devices.

For over two months a power struggle had raged in the SRRA office and it was only now that he had managed to lay his hands on the records, a single 48-page exercise book. And so our interview commenced.

“How many displaced people are in Leel?” I asked the Secretary. He flipped through two-



Child soldier in Kerial

dozen pages or so, all the time squinting and shaking his head: “There are 198,000 in Leel and 38,000 in the surrounding villages.”

As the interview progressed I asked him how many people there were in Leel before the displacement occurred. He answered: “One hundred and ninety-eight thousand and 38,000 in the surrounding villages.” So I asked him: “There are no displaced persons in Leel then as the figure is the same?” He answered: “No.”

I was lost, confused and not a little irritated, so I pursued a different line of questioning and sought to know how much food had been received from the World Food Programme since May.

“I don’t have the figures — but I don’t think we have received much,” he said. When reminded that I was a witness to a WFP food drop in Leel three days previously, he said he was not the Secretary then and had neither the records nor any knowledge of the food drop.

After a while, he said: “The figures I gave you were compiled by

“When you talk of food or nutritional deficiencies in West Upper Nile . . . you must remember it does not end with food crops or nutritional supplements alone, but with fighting the human resource deficiency as well.” (Thursday July 25, 2002, Kerial)

the Relief Association of South Sudan (RASS).”

RASS had acted in conjunction with SRRRA, of which he is now the Secretary and if I wanted the figures I should contact the former RASS officials. On enquiring how I could contact the RASS people he laughed and said “in Mankien”.

Mankien is under Government of Sudan troops and a no-go area for anyone from Leel.

The reason Mr. Thoung, like many of his counterparts in the SPLA/M-controlled area of Western Upper Nile, is new to his position is that the old civil structure was replaced once there was a change in leadership. The Peter Gadget group has, in a near-total clean sweep, removed or forced out all those perceived to be outside their inner circle in all military and civil structures. The same applies to most chiefs and other social-civil structures in the SPLA/M-controlled areas of Western Upper Nile Province.

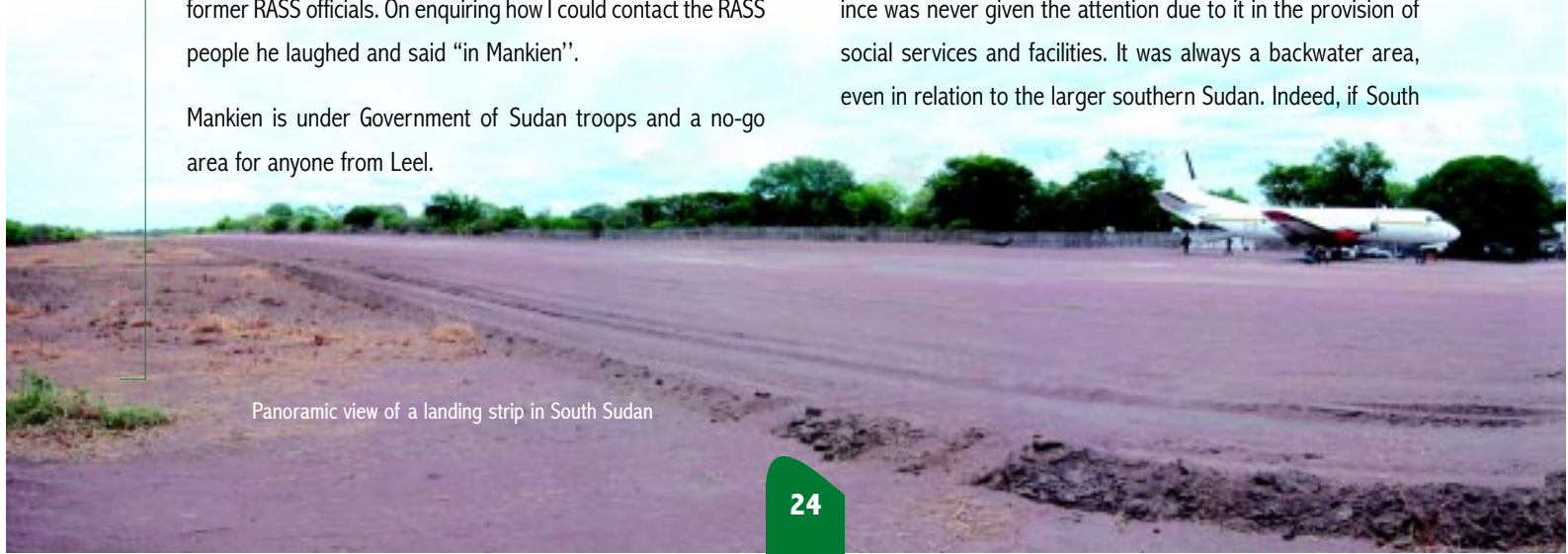
Few of the former staff remain, not that they did a sterling job or kept records but because, as in everything else in the Province, a new power dispensation affects every aspect of life.

The other tragedy is that the core group that has replaced the former officials is barely literate and has little by way of experiential capacity or ability. They are the creatures of the new wielders of power and owe their existence to a wide client patronage network. Mr. Thoung, though a former fighter with a pro-government militia, joined the Gadget group when it joined the SPLA two years ago. He had returned to Leel from East Africa in April and had no idea of the SRRRA or RASS operations.

In the areas visited during the research period none of the civil authority/structure people had been in their positions longer than three months. Most were poorly educated, if educated at all, most were barely literate or capable of keeping records. As one relief worker observed: “They are Peter Gadget’s people, like it or not we have to make do with what we have, it’s as simple as that.” (Kerial, July 27, 2002, WFP Food Monitor).

There are many reasons why this state of affairs obtains in the Province, but the most fundamental is conflict.

For decades prior to the present conflict, the Province was marginalized by successive authorities, be they Turkish, British or independent Governments of Sudan. Western Upper Nile Province was never given the attention due to it in the provision of social services and facilities. It was always a backwater area, even in relation to the larger southern Sudan. Indeed, if South



Panoramic view of a landing strip in South Sudan

Sudan was neglected and even ignored, West Upper Nile Province was at the very bottom of the heap.

Even after the Nuer people sued for peace with the Sudan Government, there was little to show for it in terms of social services facilities and delivery. If anything, the people were left entirely to their fate, bar the provision of weapons and ammunition. Most of the people were encouraged to live in Government garrison towns or settle in northern towns as a cheap source of labour —hence few schools were ever built and even fewer Nuer were encouraged to pursue even the rudiments of education.

In this regard those that managed to acquire any formal education have left the region or been forced to flee or are held up in the northern towns. Few of the educated are to be found in the Province.

Towards this end, for any local or international agency, manpower and functioning local counterpart civil or community partners are sorely lacking. There is a huge shortage of trained manpower in all of South Sudan, but this is most pronounced in Western Upper Nile.

A World Food Programme officer in Kerial captured the lack of trained human resources and civil authority in the Province thus: “When you talk of food or nutritional deficiencies in West Upper Nile . . . you must remember it does not end with food crops or nutritional supplements alone, but with fighting the human resource deficiency as well.” (Thursday July 25, 2002, Kerial).

An NPA field coordinator was even more forthright: “I have to fly in simple chairs or benches for the mobile clinic because I cannot get a carpenter. You see in our base here [in the Lake Province], at least I can get one, two or even ten carpenters, the issue then becomes one of experience, availability and quality of the work that I want done, but not in Western Upper Nile, it is very different there.” (NPA forward operations base, July 21, 2002).

As mentioned above, the issue of NGOs finding partner local counterparts in Western Upper Nile is crucial to their endeavours to ameliorate the suffering of the people of the area. The lack of functioning civil structures and human capacity will greatly hamper the delivery of much-needed humanitarian intervention in the Province.

Use of Food as a Weapon and Denial of Aid Agency Access to Western Upper Nile

Many investigations have been carried out and reports written about the use of food as a weapon in South Sudan as a whole and in Western Upper Nile in particular.

It has been comprehensively demonstrated that the Government of Sudan has not only used food as a weapon but as one of its most potent instruments. There are both military and political objectives in using food as a weapon, but the cynicism with which the Sudan Government applies this arsenal is appalling.

In Western Upper Nile, as in all other areas of the South that experience conflict, food is in short supply. People scavenge for food and eat everything from water lilies to wild fruits, roots and berries to survive. This has been the case and will continue to be the case for as long as the conflict rages in South Sudan. But in areas where either of the warring sides is in control, the level of hunger or need for food is somewhat lessened. If a need arises to address a particular food shortage in either of these areas, there are structures on the ground which facilitate distribution, delivery and storage.

Most importantly, those that really need food intervention are assured of getting it (though not all of it). The need is addressed, however inadequately, but at least an effort is always made. This is because access to these areas is not as cumbersome, administratively, in terms of bu-

The controlling authorities had leeway and often the reality on the ground dictated how a food appeal would be addressed

reaucratic and martial red tape, as is the case in Western Upper Nile. The onus is on the controlling authority, whether SPLA/M or Sudan Government, to seek food aid and allow international aid agencies access to areas in need.

Notwithstanding the tripartite agreement that led to the creation of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) in the late 1980s to the early '90s, access to food deficit areas of the South was relatively easy compared to Western Upper Nile Province.

The controlling authorities had leeway and often the reality on the ground dictated how a food appeal would be addressed. This is more pronounced in the SPLA/M-controlled areas of South Sudan, especially where non-OLS humanitarian agencies are involved.

In the case of Western Upper Nile, the scenario is entirely different and it is here that Sudan Government cynicism in using food as a weapon is brutally apparent. As in the last of three major famines to hit South Sudan (1987-88, 1992-3 and 1998), the Government of Sudan has repeatedly denied humanitarian agencies access to the famine areas.

The reasons (invariably spurious) for denial of access are couched in diplomatic language and invoke "military objectives", namely the denial of food to persons perceived to be hostile to the Government. Other "reasons" cited have been so-called insecurity in the famine-stricken areas or the suspicion that the food will fall into the wrong hands (read SPLA/M fighters), among many other untenable excuses.

In Western Upper Nile Province, access to the area by the WFP has been granted since May 2002, and the Programme has made food and non-food item drops, but at a price.

At the height of the dry-season offensive in Western Upper Nile in February-May 2002, the Government imposed a blanket flight ban as hundreds of thousands of people were internally displaced. The ban was lifted only after the UN agreed to re-route the food flights from the North, and then official cynicism set in.

In Kerial, the WFP dropped over 70 metric tonnes of food and non-food items on Wednesday and Thursday, July 24-25, 2002, which were distributed on Fri-



Buffalo arrives to collect another load

day, Saturday and part of Sunday (July 26, 27 and 28).

On Monday, July 29, a pro-government militia attacked Kerial and neighbouring villages, on a burning and looting spree and stole the food. Residents of the area fled with very little food or non-food items. The same militia had attacked Tam, over 70km to the East of Kerial, which had received similar WFP food drops on Friday July 26.

From NPA, one of the few non-OLS international humanitarian agencies operating in the Province, both Tam and Kerial had received over 50 tonnes of food and non-food items the same week. The pro-government militia's attacks on both places was clearly no coincidence but an act of the most thoroughgoing malice aforethought. The militia had a bounty to loot and the spoils were grain, lentils, cooking oil, mosquito nets, plastic ground sheets and a variety of non-food items earmarked for the truly wretched of the earth.

The Alternate Commander of Western Upper Nile had the following heart-rending comment: "Sometimes we are not so sure what to make of this . . . our people get food from the UN, then the pro-government militia come for it shortly afterwards — we don't know whether to accept the food in the first place, because sometimes the price is too high when the militia attack." (July 26, 2002, Toy Village, Mayom County).

The NPA field coordinator, forward base, observed: "Every time a WFP food drop takes place, sure enough a pro-government militia attack occurs not more than 96 hours after." (Base

Of all the six Locations visited in May and July 2002, the displaced, local hosts, and returnees were all in a state of flux

The non-food items in most demand are, in order of priority, medicines, mosquito nets, plastic ground sheets, fishing nets and hooks, blankets and cooking pots.

Camp, July 30 2002).

As Mr. Rosseler said, when he was on the run: "The people carried very little food . . . they are in great need of plastic sheets, mosquito nets. They left the bulk of their food in their granaries and only carried what was easy to carry."

In Kerial, Toy and Gamzan villages, Mayom County, the crop in the field was waist-high and needed weeding, but with the

people on the run and displaced some 100km to the West of Mayan Jur, food will continue to be in short supply.

The Sudan Government is using UN, non-UN and other international agencies' food deliveries to feed its militia, who are in effect carrying out Khartoum's key military objective — clearing the people off the land.

There have been Sudan Government reports to the effect that relief food has ended up in the wrong hands, allegedly being used to feed SPLA/M fighters. In West Upper Nile the food actually ends up in Sudan Government irregulars' hands in a well-coordinated enterprise that fits in well with the overall military, political and objectives of the Khartoum regime in the Province — massive dislocation and expulsion of the people to make way for oil exploitation.

Coordination and Networking Amongst Aid Agencies in Western Upper Nile

"The problem is to track the whereabouts of internally displaced people" — *NPA Emergency Field Coordinator, July 30, 2002*

The basic human needs of the people of Western Upper Nile Province are huge, the logistics mind-boggling and the financial and material outlay gigantic.

If these needs are to be met, the issue of coordination and networking amongst the relief agency actors in the Province is paramount. This is because of the extent and scope of such intervention, which is clearly well beyond the capacity of any one agency.

With the populations of Mankien, Rubkona and Mayom counties displaced since February last year, estimated to be upwards of 300,000 people, the task at hand is onerous indeed. The first priority is a needs assessment on the ground, but, as indicated earlier, reliable data is almost non-existent in the Province. This is compounded by the fact that the victims and intended recipients of these emergency interventions are constantly on the move as the conflict swings from one extreme to another.

Of all the six Locations visited in May and July 2002, the displaced, local hosts, and returnees were all in a state of flux. They were on edge, anxious and not keen or



Welcoming guests from Oslo the Nuer way, Leel, Western Upper Nile

prepared to engage in any long-term activity. Some of them, as is only to be expected, were distraught. Their status did not allow for long-term planning, only bare survival.

What is even more challenging is the fact that, unlike other refugees in neighbouring countries, they are scattered, frequently on the move and rarely in any one area for long. In this regard, though they are in their own country, theirs is a decidedly more precarious existence, requiring the utmost from humanitarian agencies in terms of response, capacity and resources.

Talking to the chiefs and other local community leaders in the six Locations, the basic needs are near-universal — food, mainly cereals, lentils, cooking oil and nutritional supplements. The non-food items in most demand are, in order of priority, medicines, mosquito nets, plastic ground sheets, fishing nets and hooks, blankets and cooking pots. There were slight variations in priority in different Locations, depending on local circumstances, but the wish list was generally the same.

Mr. Thoung, the SRRRA Secretary in Leel, said there was a great need for food, water and medicines for the people. The population in Leel was more settled, having been in the area since the end of February 2002 after fleeing from Nhialdiu in Payam County. (July 19, 2002).

Chief Puk Makwich of the Leek Clan of the Neur needed food, medicines and seeds for his people. Assistant Chief David Cheng Ding hails from Gulnyang Village, Mayom County. His people need food, medicines, mosquito nets, fishing nets and hooks. Mr. Kuol Beliew of Majok Amal Cattle Camp in Toy Payam, Mayom County, says his people need food, medicines, mosquito nets, plastic sheets, cooking oil, lentils and cooking utensils. They had arrived in the area from Warier Village in Mankien County a month earlier, at the end of June 2002. (Interviews conducted July 2, 2002).

Their needs were dictated by the place or location the people were settled in, the duration they had stayed in the place, the terrain and how far away from the nearest Sudanese Government garrison town and, or pro-government militia forces. Indeed, for some time there will be no need for relief food supplies towards the end of October and early November. This was

the case in Kerial and surrounding villages and of Leel and Koatna Village in Toy Payam. In all these areas, the crop was waist-high and weeding was in progress.

However, all this was not to be, as indicated earlier in this report. The people were forced to flee a pro-government militia attack between July 26 and 30, 2002, and with that their hopes of harvesting the crop in the field.

As the NPA's Emergency Field Coordinator for Western Upper Nile Province said: "There is a deteriorating food situation in the Province and it will continue to worsen as the security situation worsens because food cultivation — own cultivation — is not feasible as people are constantly on the move."

He said as the security situation continues to deteriorate, he expected the displacement rate in the Province to increase. Hence the need for more food aid.

He categorizes the people in need of emergency assistance as Internally Displaced People (IDPS) those that had to flee from their homes, Returnees as those who after fleeing homes owing to insecurity had returned as security improved. The resident population hosted the community where the displaced were seeking refuge.

According to the NPA man, the three groups need relief emergency intervention. He said "the food security problem amongst the people is made worse by the fact that the displaced

population eats into the host community's food resources which in turn becomes vulnerable". (July 30, 2002).

In this way the population in the Province, especially those from Rubkona, Mankien and Mayom are vulnerable as the conflict rages.

The emergency relief intervention sustained life and eased their food needs somewhat, but it was a drop in the ocean. Their needs are far more extensive and all indications are that they will be for a longer period than originally envisaged.

The pro-government militia attacks are on the increase and their impact is predictable. There will be more people in Western Upper Nile requiring emergency food intervention as the

“The food security problem amongst the people is made worse by the fact that the displaced population eats into the host community’s food resources which in turn becomes vulnerable”

wet season comes to an end, as most of the crop in the field has been lost as fighting rages.

As earlier planned, the Western Upper Nile emergency intervention is almost certain to be longer in duration, the requirements even more as displacement continues. This was brought home by an NPA field staffer when he said: "In Mankien County in June 2002, there were nine attacks by pro-government militia — in Koch, Wicoh, Tam, Reer, and Bouth."

He said other areas attacked were in the Rier Corridor on the border with Eastern Upper Nile.

The biggest problem, according to emergency relief workers, is tracking the whereabouts, direction and destination of the internally placed. As an NPA field coordinator put it: "It's a nightmare. One day you have 30,000 people in a place, then in less than a day they have disappeared — where to, nobody knows. Then how do you intervene, is there a landing strip and if so in what condition, how long is it and, finally, how long will they stay there? Your guess is as good as mine." (July 30, 2002).

He emphasized the point further, "you [the writer] were in Kerial on Sunday 28th July and on Monday 29th the whole population of internally displaced people, the host community and even an American national are on the run. As of now we don't know where to, we have no clue."

According to most relief workers in Sudan, there is poor or little coordination or networking between humanitarian agencies working in the Sudan and less in Western Upper Nile Province.

This is between the UN Operation Lifeline Sudan and allied non-UN agencies and also among the non-OLS agencies as well. This was more in areas of coverage, items supplied and information sharing. The same is true between local agencies operating in South Sudan as well.

This has led at times to duplication of efforts and interventions where the supplies, though not the quantities, are more or less similar, and data sharing and activity coordination could perhaps have avoided the Kerial experience between the WFP food drops and the NPA food deliveries. Perhaps too, had they shared information and worked at the pattern(s) of pro-government militia attacks in the province, the Tam and Kerial loss of relief supplies to militia could have been avoided.



One up, one down as relief operations start

CONCLUSION AND OBSERVATIONS

Hell on Earth Meets Heart of Darkness

Back in the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, Vietnam and Cambodia used to be just about the worst places on Planet Earth to be. Well, today these two southeast Asian addresses are peaceful and enterprising places, and even attract tourism. Hell on earth seems to have re-located since the very late '70s to southern Sudan, with the epicentre of this latter-day Heart of Darkness being Western Upper Nile Province.

As we have seen in the foregoing report to Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), the South Sudan conflict is waged with a brutality on the part of the Khartoum regime that smacks of cruelty for cruelty's sake. The story of the uses to which the Sudan Government puts food as a weapon is shocking beyond belief at the start of the 21st Century. It smacks of Stalinist mass murder campaigns against the kulaks in the 1920s and '30s in the now defunct Soviet Union.

This is the anatomy of the theft of the food drops, as described by Philip Rosseler, American PhD student and eyewitness of the atrocity:

"A very disturbing pattern of behaviour emerges regarding the GoS militia raiding Western Upper Nile; the GoS gives clearance to WFP to deliver food to a landing strip in WUN, the WFP comes and drops the food, a few days later the GoS forces and militia chase the civilians out of the town, steal the abundance of food, and return to Mankien. This occurred in Tam (which had also received WFP food, only days before the GoS offensive) and in Kerial. The coordinated strategy of clearance, food drops, and GoS militia raiding allows Khartoum to heed to the international community's demand that it allow humanitarian access to Western Upper Nile, while ensuring the relief aid does not reach its intended target."

The suffering of the people of South Sudan goes far beyond the regime's use of food as a weapon. The twin evil concepts of ethnic cleansing and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are being given new meaning in Western Upper Nile Province. The well-nigh constant displacement of entire populations and their

This is the anatomy of the theft of the food drops, as described by Philip Rosseler, American PhD student and eyewitness of the atrocity

livestock, leaving crops in the field in full bloom and burning houses and granaries is a scenario that any government with any pretensions to a stake in the 21st Century should be deeply shamed of.

And yet, as we have seen, the people of Western Upper Nile are all too frequently on the move in a forced exodus of truly Old Testament proportions, hatreds and cruelty.

The Writer did not go into South Sudan with a political agenda, but one thing is crystal clear: It is high time the world intervened in that region and did so massively. As a matter of the most urgent priority buffer zones must be put

up between the people of South Sudan and their Khartoum-sponsored tormentors, the pro-government militia.

If this does not happen, then no relief measure, from aerial food-drop to planting food on farms, will ever come to fruition unless the international community intervenes, soon and in earnest, in South Sudan. Within hours of a relief food-drop the pro-government militia move in on the displaced, the diseased and the starving, give them an extra dose of arson, death and destruction and steal the relief supplies. On the farms, the crop gets barely waist-high before the militia move in and drive the people and the livestock away.

South Sudan and in particular, Western Upper Nile Province, is the world's last regional torture chamber. What is happening there is every bit as monstrous as the Rwanda genocide of the mid-1990s and the Balkans war of about the same time. Those conflicts were waged by cruel central governments whose leaders are now hunted down as criminals against humanity. This is precisely the category the tormentors of South Sudan belong to.

What is all this industrial scale murder and mayhem in aid of? Quite simply the Sudan Government is pursuing the key military objective of clearing the people off the land so as to exploit the Province's rich oil deposits without reference to the area's people. This bespeaks a racial hatred that calls for the world's attention, censure and boycott as much as apartheid did in South Africa.

The faces of
hunger in
Bouth



Waiting for
relief food

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Dedicated to Mr. Sten-Rino Bonsaksen for his tireless efforts over the last three years in the service of the Sudanese people.

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“These people are not dying because they are poor but because they are rich”

(Western Upper Nile Province has enormous oil reserves that the Government of Sudan is determined to exploit regardless of the consequences — Dan Eiffe, Sudan Veteran)