

# Hiding between the streams

**The war on civilians in the oil  
regions of southern Sudan**



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# **Section 1: An advocacy and humanitarian assessment trip to Western Upper Nile 28-31 March 2002**

## **Introduction**

Christian Aid and Dan Church Aid have been at the forefront of the advocacy campaign on the oil in Sudan issue in the past two years. Both agencies have reported on the issue many times (most particularly in Christian Aid's publication *The Scorched Earth - Oil and War in Sudan* March 2001), and have been monitoring the situation since through further field visits and via a local partner - South Sudan Operation Mercy (SSOM) - as it affects the civilians in Western Upper Nile particularly. As concerned agencies we have also been assisting the population where we can through supplying non-food items, such as blankets, mosquito nets, seeds and fishing hooks to three locations in the area since February 2000.

On 20 February 2002, the government of Sudan launched a helicopter gunship attack on a world food programme (WFP) distribution point at Bieh, southern Sudan. At least 24 people were killed in this attack and many more injured. Following this attack, it became clear to both Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS)<sup>1</sup> and non-OLS agencies that there was a worsening humanitarian situation developing in Western Upper Nile (WUN).

Ignoring a recent agreement between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), brokered by the US, the government of Sudan is deliberately targeting civilians in an attempt to rid the area of SPLA and secure control of the oil fields. The SPLA have declared oil installations a legitimate target for attacks, and have increased pressure on the government of Sudan as a result of a unity agreement between the two southern factions, the SPLA and Southern People's Democratic Front (SPDF). This has led to an intensification of the conflict, which, coupled with the presence of oil, is a deadly combination for the civilians of Western Upper Nile.

## **Purpose of Christian Aid and Dan Church Aid's assessment trip**

(see maps at end of report)

The assessment mission had three main objectives:

1. to assess the numbers, condition, needs and locations of the displaced people of Rubkona County, Western Upper Nile, southern Sudan;
2. to understand the reasons for the displacement and to document personal accounts of the attacks, the atrocities and the violations of humanitarian law that were perpetrated; and,
3. to provide this documentation to interested parties to be used for advocacy purposes.

After the attack on Bieh, joint OLS/non-OLS<sup>1</sup> meetings were held to gather all the information coming out of Western Upper Nile, to analyse the situation and to co-ordinate any response that was clearly going to be necessary. All reports highlighted that people were on the move because of the

1 OLS is Operation Lifeline Sudan – the 13-year-old United Nations co-ordinated humanitarian response into Sudan. Some agencies operate under OLS and some choose to remain outside the OLS umbrella for greater freedom of operations. These are called the non-OLS agencies.

increased government activity, and that these attacks had intensified from the occasional Antonov aerial bombardment to the use of far more threatening helicopter gunships supporting ground forces - including militia on horse back. This deliberate targeting of civilians to clear the area was pervasive over large parts of Rubkona County especially (also coinciding with what is known as Block 5A oil concession) and was leading to people fleeing in various directions. However due to this very insecurity it was difficult for international staff to get into the area to assess the reality on the ground - to verify the extent and range of the stories, to know the condition and needs of the people, and to ascertain where they were or where they were heading.

In mid-March, OLS agencies were finally able to access a limited number of locations to carry out a rapid assessment of the number of people displaced. This was mostly in areas outside Rubkona County, and unfortunately reports were coming out that indicated that most of the displaced people were located in areas where access by OLS agencies had been denied by the government. Therefore, most of the displaced people had not been seen during these rapid assessments.

Although a non-OLS agency had gone in to a couple of locations denied to OLS to deliver a small amount of food and medical assistance, they had not had the time (or inclination) on the ground to assess the situation fully. The agency did not get verifiable information on where the majority of displaced people had sought refuge, on how many people were actually displaced, or on their condition. There appears to be too great a reliance on broad Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) figures that cannot be clearly substantiated.

In the hope of clarifying the situation and needs for ourselves, Dan Church Aid and Christian Aid made a three to four day assessment mission to a part of WUN currently denied to the OLS agencies. The team of four international agency representatives was accompanied by local partner, South Sudan Operation Mercy (SSOM), and the SRRA.

The team flew into Wicok on the morning of 28 March. Over the next three days, the team interviewed displaced people from a variety of locations and villages from Rubkona County.

The team left Wicok early on 29 March and followed the path of some of the displaced people southwards for about six hours across seven streams, to a place called Chotchar, where they had moved in order to feel safe. After spending more than a day with them there, the team then walked on to Tuoc (two hours away) and Pam (a further two hour walk) looking for other internally displaced people in the vicinity. Interviews were conducted to elicit information on the tactics used by the government forces during the attacks, as well as to determine their condition and needs.

What follows are the findings of this short assessment trip, and some stories from the displaced people themselves. These are the voices of the newly dispossessed, the latest thousands forcibly chased from their homes with little or nothing - through the ongoing efforts of the Sudanese government to enable oil companies to exploit the oil riches of southern Sudan.

It is important to note that it is virtually impossible to make an accurate assessment of the numbers of people affected and their precise locations - given that there is constant movement over a very large geographic area. It should be said, though, that the assessment team has significant experience in Sudan over many years (one of the expatriate team members has over 20 years experience in the region), and the conservative estimates of numbers below are tempered and based around their knowledge and understanding of the context garnered over this time.

## **Key findings:**

1. **The government of Sudan is deliberately targeting civilian populations**, resulting in the displacement of the majority of the people of Rubkona County - maybe as many as 50-60,000 people(though SRRA say 200,000). The government is using the same clearance tactics witnessed in Blocks 1 and 2, Ruweng County, in the area of the Unity and Heglig oilfields. (See section 2 of this report.)
2. **There is an immediate need to implement 'preventive protection' in the region**, using the presence of international personnel and other methods in an attempt to prevent further human rights abuses and displacement.
3. **These attacks have been conducted mostly out of sight of the international community**, due to the systematic denial of airstrips by the Sudanese government. The targeting of civilians, even at OLS relief centres, by the government has generally taken place without international witnesses as humanitarian workers have been denied access to the region.
4. **Any humanitarian intervention MUST incorporate some form of protection for civilians.** This could be an international monitoring body, or a group of 'peace witnesses', willing to be present in insecure locations to document and report any violations of human rights and humanitarian law. It is to be hoped that by announcing the presence of such persons, the Sudanese government would be forced to desist from its current practices.
5. **An intervention must happen immediately, before the onset of the rains at the end of May. The intervention must be comprehensive and include food security, shelter, healthcare, water and sanitation. Most importantly, it must include PREVENTIVE PROTECTION.** The health of the displaced people will deteriorate rapidly, due to the fact that they are now approaching the 'Hunger Gap' period, where grain and other food stocks are depleted and there are many months before any potential harvest. Without comprehensive intervention now, thousands of Nuer people may be forced to cross into Dinka areas of Bahr el Ghazal in search of safety, food and shelter. Such a massive movement of Nuer people could increase inter-tribal tensions over limited resources such as water and grazing lands.
6. **The intervention must incorporate the needs of the host communities**, who are already struggling to survive due to the continuing insecurity in WUN, yet are sharing what little they do have with the displaced people.

## **Fleeing for their lives – the cause of the displacement**

Dak Yiey is about eight years old. Until mid February 2002 Dak, lived in a small village near Nhialdiu in Rubkona County of Western Upper Nile in southern Sudan. In mid February the forces of the Sudanese government attacked his village. They came first with Antonov bombers - something they had done for the previous few days, but then they came with two helicopter gunships, and many soldiers on horseback, and ground troops. The horse soldiers rode two to a horse - one riding the horse, the other shooting from behind with his gun.

Dak Yiey and his cousin Pouk Deng - also about eight years old - were frightened by the bombers but terrified by the gunships and horsemen. They had never witnessed this type of attack before. When they came to his village, set on the wide open spaces of Western Upper Nile, he and Pouk, like everyone else in the village, ran for their lives. The two of them ran towards the grassy swamps at the edge of the village - the only place which enables them to hide and not be seen and which is difficult for the horsemen to enter.

Dak was in front and Pouk was just behind as they sprinted for cover. The gunships were coming behind them sweeping over the village shooting at anything that moved. The gunships flew low over them firing as they went past. Dak reached the swamp but unfortunately Pouk Deng was shot - in the head - and killed.

After the attack and when the soldiers had gone - having burnt down his village - Dak, his family and other survivors, all traumatised by the attack, fled quickly and almost empty handed westwards, crossing many rivers and swamps until they reached a place they felt would be safe. They feel safer between the streams, because the horse soldiers cannot cross so quickly and attack them. However they have no protection from the gunships or Antonovs should they come again. It took them days to reach this place, and Dak now lives with many thousands of other displaced people in the south west part of Western Upper Nile. All these people from all the villages around Nhialdiu have gone west and crossed the streams to hide where they feel safer. Dak, like the others, doesn't know if he will ever be able to return to his home. For now he is too afraid - he still has nightmares and misses his cousin. What they do know is that they have experienced the most terrifying attack of their lives.

This story is especially poignant because it is that of a small innocent child, but it is the testimony of many of the displaced people we met on the assessment trip. These frightened people have left behind them an almost empty land, for there are now thousands of people who have had to flee their homes due to the atrocious tactics of the government of Sudan against civilians in Western Upper Nile. This latest phase of fighting has intensified since the beginning of the year, according to the people we spoke to. The government armed with tanks and gunships, and supported by the heavily funded local militia horsemen, is now able to perpetrate more than ever before gross human rights abuses against its own people.

All this is done because of the oil. Rubkona County sits on large reserves of oil, which Lundin Oil Company of Sweden has the concession to exploit. Lundin have been unable to operate in the past months because the area has been 'insecure'. The insecurity is caused by government attacks on the area, and is compounded by the response of the southern rebel army of the SPLA, who claim they are fighting for self-determination for their people, land and resources. After years of government attacks on civilians to clear the areas around the oilfields of 'rebels' - in Ruweng County especially - the SPLA have been fighting back and have made it difficult for the oil companies to operate in parts of Western

Upper Nile. In this way, over the past few years, the government has attempted to secure the area for these oil companies to function - and that means not only fighting the SPLA, but also clearing the whole land of the civilians who support them. In reports from many people and sources, stories have come out of efforts made by the government to rid this land of its people and exploit the oil.

It was the attack on Bieh on 20 February 2002, however, which really highlighted the intensity and nature of the latest government tactics to the wider world. On that occasion a helicopter gunship attacked a food distribution point, where thousands of people had gathered to receive food from WFP. The gunship rocketed the crowd and shot up and burnt tukuls in the village. At least 24 people were killed and many injured. This only came to light because WFP had people on the ground. It hit the world news headlines for a day or two, and brought unequivocal condemnation from the international community, and the Sudanese government promised an investigation. It was this event that kicked the international agencies into action. However, this is just one of many such incidents since the start of 2002, as the Sudanese government has sought to clear the whole area of people.

## **Fleeing to where they feel safe – the consequences of the displacement**

The accounts of the attacks on civilians by the Sudanese government were consistent from all the people we interviewed. Everyone spoke of the bombardment by Antonovs, the gunship strafings and rocket attacks, and the violence and horror when the horsemen bore down on them in their villages. The first attacks began in January, and seemed to be linked to the government efforts to complete the all-weather oil road to the Nile. The second wave of attacks took place in mid to late February, as the government began a serious push to capture Nhialdiu. Whoever controls Nhialdiu, can hope to control access to the oil road - and use it from which to clear new areas.

In our talks with people there are four main locations that people have fled from, towards safety. (See maps at the end of the report.)

1. **From east of Bentiu – from the area around Nimni.** Attacks started on the area in early January, and people at first fled east into the swamps and streams near the river, but they were still facing bombardment and attack. There was not enough food, so they headed south to Chang then Kuey. From Kuey they headed to Pam. Many from Pam have now moved further west to Touc, or across the streams towards the River Dol or to Chotchar, and other places.
2. **From villages, such as Rier and Pultuni, along the new oil road.** The Nuer civilians that lived along the oil road said they were free to remain there in 2001 due to the 'period of cooperation' between the Sudanese government and the SPDF, a major southern opposition movement. This cooperation came to an abrupt end when the SPLA and SPDF agreed to unify and fight a 'common enemy,' the Sudanese government. The civilians then became targets again. Now, these Nuer have joined the ranks of the displaced and are living in Touc, Chotchar and Wumlit, south of Pam.
3. **From the areas around Nhialdiu.** Nhialdiu came under heavy attack around the middle of February, though the government had bombarded the area before then. The government came out of Bentiu with tanks and troops, supported by helicopter gunships, in an attempt to capture Nhialdiu. An ambush laid by the SPLA, was spotted and a fierce battle ensued, and the government forces were pushed back to Bentiu. In the days that followed the government then heavily bombarded all the villages around Nhialdiu. After clearing the land the Government

attacked and captured Nhialdiu on 20 February 2002. Most civilians fled south to Ngop, and to Wumlit or to Pam, and on west.

4. **From the areas around Buoth and Rupnyegai, near the river.** A long-range artillery gun, placed in the government garrison town of Wangkai, was able to reach Buoth and surrounding villages. This, coupled with the ground troops, forced people to flee south across the streams to Wicok, and then further south again to Chotchar.

## **Overall impressions**

**This displacement by the government of Sudan is extensive and deliberate.** It has been undertaken with resolve and determination through a number of means - through extensive aerial bombardment by Antonovs from high altitude, by low-flying MI-24 helicopter gunships often attacking in pairs, by ground attacks of both horsemen and foot soldiers by Government supported militias and Government troops. T55 tanks have also been used to capture Nhialdiu and threaten the villages just south of Bentiu.

**The consequence is that most of the people of Rubkona County have now fled the area.** It is unclear as to exactly how many people have fled. The SRRA claim the number to be over 200,000. In our experience this figure seems high. However there is no doubt that people have fled and there may be at least a quarter of the SRRA figure at a conservative guess - around 50,000 people on the move.

**People have experienced terrifying attacks, many have lost family and friends, and appear to have suffered tremendous trauma.**

**We did not find great numbers of displaced people in Wicok** – though there were some from the Buoth area who had fled because of the long-range shelling from Wangkai and ground attacks. **Most appear to have moved on further south or west, deeper into the area across the streams where they feel safer.**

## **Locations visited**

The team walked an hour west of **Wicok** to **Mayarluok** where we found a small group, less than 100 people, who had fled as part of a bigger group. They had fled from near Rupnyegai (near Wangkai) because of the shelling and bombing. They had come as 40 families. Those with no food had moved on and others had remained behind for the present. They had brought 140 cattle with them, but had lost eight in an Antonov attack on the way. At present they are still coping, and still have some possessions, but they will need assistance soon if their health is not to deteriorate.

One man we talked to there was called Nyuot Dok, and he commented that when the white man was in charge of Sudan this kind of thing didn't happen. He asked why it was happening now and what we could do about it. He said that it should be made to stop and that it was up to us outsiders to make sure it did. He also said the community they were living amongst needed help - 'they are suffering also' he told us.

On Friday 29 March we set off early to walk to where we were told the majority of displaced people had gone to. We walked six hours south to Chotchar, seeing few displaced, along the way, but passing

some resident people and villages. The team started walking from Wicok and crossed seven streams in all - the Wicok, Goktoor, Wangrang, Nyigol, Tuotwia, Wangeek, and Chotchar (Lel) where we spent the night.

We came across only one group of displaced people, along the way, about four hours south of Wicok at Wangrang - it was a kind of cattle camp. They had come from Wangrial - west of Nhialdiu and had been there for about 30 days.

We reached Chotchar between 1 -2 pm and had just over 24 hours there, interviewing people and talking with the local chiefs and local authorities about the situation.

We then walked on to east of Tuoc for the night before proceeding to Pam on the Sunday morning. It was here we got our overall impression of both timings and movements of displaced people.

## **General situation**

The area of Chotchar is flat and open with few trees but many streams to cross, which provides an element of security for the people - though some streams are dry at this time of year. It is hot, and there are many flies during the day and mosquitoes at night. There are some cattle around grazing in the swamps, though most have gone further south towards the River Dol. Grass for roofing and trees for building are some distance away. People are surviving, but are under increasing pressure, including the host community. All types of assistance are required as soon as possible.

With the onset of the rains, generally by late May-early June, most of the airstrips in WUN become unusable for several months. It is imperative, therefore, that a major intervention should take place now to see the displaced people, and their host populations, through the hunger gap period until the main harvests in October. Presently, it is very hot and dry. Once the rains come it will be a different matter, and disease and hunger will increase.

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## **Shelter**

Some of the displaced people are living with, or alongside, the host population in Chotchar and the surrounding areas within a days walk of Chotchar. Many more displaced are living some distance away from the village proper - south west towards the River Dol. Shelter is a major problem, since there is little grass available this time of year. Many have built makeshift shelters from swamp reeds. These provide some shade during the day but will most certainly not keep people dry and warm during the coming rains.

The team found that the lack of building materials mean the *tukuls* being built are smaller than usual. Yet the number of people dwelling in each shelter is much higher than normal. In some huts, the team found anywhere from 10-35 people in residence. If they were fortunate, they managed to share two small *tukuls* amongst the group. At the moment, people can live like this as they can choose to sleep or relax outside. Once the rains begin, this will not be the case. Then the people will find themselves constantly wet and chilled. Diseases will flourish.

There seemed to be a large number of women-headed households. Some of the women stated that their husbands were dead. For others, it is likely their husbands are fishing at the *toic*, (swamp lands), or had taken their cattle to grazing areas. Many of the women said all of their time was taken up trying to find food for their family. They did not have time to worry about shelter. This will change soon, though, as the wet season kicks in.

## **Food**

Many of the displaced people are surviving on water lily and what little grain relatives or hosts can share. The team was shown water lily in most of the homes, along with other types of wild foods. Many women, especially those from Nhialdiu, said they were having to learn about these wild foods in order to keep their families alive.

A minority of people have some grain, but only in very small quantities. The team saw little grinding taking place, except for the grinding of water lily seeds. People were reduced to using the husks from maize seeds as food. There were sorghum stalks from last year's harvest in the fields farmed by the local population, but it is difficult to know how much sorghum is stored. It is also difficult to tell how much seed will be held back for planting, if the host population has to feed the displaced for much longer.

The team heard of people being sent to the fishing camps in order to catch and send back dried fish. However, dried fish was not in evidence as the team toured Chotchar. Few people mentioned having hooks or nets. Once the rains begin, and the rivers and swamps rise, it will be impossible to fish with spears.

## **Livestock**

Many of the displaced people managed to flee with some livestock - though many lost some also. Since the attacks took place during the dry season, most of the livestock had already been taken from the villages to the *toic*. Those interviewed said milk production is always down during the dry season. The cattle did look relatively healthy. Most of the cattle have been taken towards the River Dol to the south, where there is better security and better grass. However, if the displaced are not able to build proper shelters for their livestock before the rains begin, the health of the cattle will quickly deteriorate when they are constantly exposed to the wet conditions and the mosquitoes. Goats, in particular, do not withstand such weather and are likely to succumb quickly to disease.

## **Markets**

There is a small market in Chotchar, with teashops run by women. Tea leaves, sugar, salt and soap were available for those who could afford them. The traders said they were bringing the goods from Bahr el Ghazal. There was no grain, cooking oil or vegetables such as onions for sale - although these items were later seen in the larger market in Pam.

## **Health**

People interviewed said they had little to eat and that this was affecting their health. Although there were no signs of serious malnutrition, people were thin and in need of more nutrition. Children were skinny but were not yet listless. Rather, the children were seen to be attentive and playful.

There is no health NGO in the area, nor are there any health clinics. The team met one medical assistant and several community health workers but they had few drugs with which to treat people and no centre from which to operate. Those drugs had been brought recently by Safe Harbor. The chiefs informed the team that there were the usual health problems - diarrhoea, malaria, upper and lower respiratory infections, fevers and general weaknesses. Kala-azar is one of the most prevalent diseases in Upper Nile but the team was not told of suspected cases. Guinea worm and river blindness are also known to be highly prevalent in the region. A proper technical medical assessment is needed.

There is no potable water in the area and sanitation is non-existent. There were no hand dug protected wells or latrines. The team encouraged the local SRRA to educate the community and organise a campaign.

There was a little soap available in the markets but most people are too destitute to afford it. **Food was the first priority.** People are bathing in filthy swamps that they share with livestock. This is also the source of their drinking water. Since firewood was at a premium, it is unlikely the SRRA will be able get people to boil their water. Nor was there any evidence that people were attempting at least to filter their drinking water.

As for mortality figures, neither the SRRA nor the health staff are keeping records of numbers or causes of death.

## **Psycho-social aspects of the conflict**

Most of the displaced people gave horrific accounts of bombardments and gunship attacks. Many interviewed were chased and shot at by the horsemen. All too many of those interviewed spoke quietly of relatives, even their own little children, being killed in front of them. There has been a systematic and wholesale abuse of human rights against its own civilians by the government despite the many overtures made by the Sudanese government officials to the US special envoy, former Senator Danforth.

Many have been killed by high-altitude aerial bombardments. More pernicious and cruel, as well as terrifying, has been the intensification of gunship attacks on civilians. These attacks are usually supported by militia and mounted horsemen. This makes for a deadly cocktail of destruction. Not only are people terrorised, their homes are burned to the ground, crops are destroyed and possessions are stolen. Women have been abducted, probably raped, and children have been abducted. No one knows if they are dead or alive. Others have died on the long trek to safety.

People's health will begin to deteriorate as they remain without assistance and the hunger gap deepens. The effect of all this on people's peace of mind, on their sense of well-being, is not known but must be taken into consideration.

## **Population figures**

It was impossible for the team to estimate the number of displaced people, as they are spread out over a large area of maybe 5000 square kilometres. The authorities have encouraged the people not to congregate in any one area for security reasons. The displaced are, therefore, spread over an area up to two days' walk from Chotchar, mostly to the south and west towards the River Dol and Bahr el Ghazal.

The local authorities and SRRA told the team that the total population of Rubkona County was 222,000 and that all these people are now displaced. 75,000 of these are considered by SRRA to be most vulnerable. This number seemed high to the team. Even the SRRA staff from the Nairobi office travelling with the team agreed that the figure was unrealistic. The team estimated that the number of displaced maybe as many as 50-60,000 from Nimni, Rier/Pultuni, Buoth, Nhialdiu, Kuey and Chang. There is a sizeable host population in the area of maybe 20,000 also, especially between Touc and Pam as far as we saw. This would bring the total population figure up to approximately 75,000- 80,000 - spread over the area. Most of them are in need, but maybe a quarter need assistance immediately - around 18,000-20,000 people or about 3,000 households. The SRRA and the local NGO partner, SSOM, were urgently requested to work closely with the sub-chiefs to determine actual figures if an intervention is to take place in a timely manner.

It should be noted that the host population was without health, clean water or sanitation services even before the arrival of the displaced. Any intervention must also consider the urgent needs of the host community. A cash injection to allow the displaced to purchase local seeds might be one way to assist the local population.

Some of the displaced are said to have crossed into Mayom County to villages such as Tam or Manee. Others may have walked as far as Kerial and Kuerbol in Bul areas and on to Twic County. Others may cross into Tonj or Rumbek Counties of Bahr el Ghazal. These locations are accessible to OLS who can carry out assessments there while the non-OLS agencies concentrate on the locations that are OLS denied by the government.

However, it was repeatedly stated to us that most people wanted to stay within Rubkona County and be assisted to remain there - within a few days walk of home. The community is in the process of building an airstrip at Chotchar, called Lel. At present it is 700 metres long, but they intend to lengthen it to 1000 metres during March so that larger cargo planes can land.

*Christian Aid and Dan Church Aid  
Thursday 11 April 2002*

## **Section 2: The scorched earth policy continues in Heglig and Unity Oil Fields, Ruweng County, southern Sudan**

Research trip February 2002

### **Introduction**

Chevron first discovered oil in Heglig and Unity oilfields back in 1980. That was the beginning of the depopulation of Ruweng County through a scorched earth policy brutally implemented by the government of Sudan. Chevron was forced out of Sudan by the increasing hostilities between the government and the Southern opposition. However, oil exploration and production has recently resumed under the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC). This is a consortium consisting of Talisman Energy (Canada), CNPC (China), Petronas (Malaysia) and Sudapet (Sudan's state oil company).

Talisman Oil joined GNPOC in 1998. From April to July 1999, more than half the population of Ruweng County, where the Unity and Heglig oilfields are found, was displaced by savage government attacks. This was confirmed in a report by the UN Special Rapporteur, Leonardo Franco, in 1999. Talisman and the other oil companies, however, say there have been no attacks, no depopulation. They claim that they found an 'empty landscape'. It is true. The county was empty, but not because it was never inhabited. A research team funded by the European Coalition on Oil met the people that Talisman Oil says do not exist. What follows is an account of the appalling human rights abuses that the government of Sudan still carries out against Southerners living in Ruweng County, in Blocks 1 and 2.

### **The people they say do not exist**

In Blocks 1 and 2, Ruweng County, the devastating effects of the oil war are all too apparent. Over three-quarters of the civilian population has been displaced. The areas around Heglig and Unity oilfields, the first to be opened up, have been wastelands since early 1999, when the government began forcibly removing the civilians in an effort to secure the area before oil exploration began. The most recent attacks were on the villages between Jukabar and Bal in October and November 2001. The entire area is the newest wasteland, devoid of civilian population. The Southerners of Ruweng County now huddle in two areas of swampland in the northeast and southeast corners of their county. There is nowhere else to run.

Chief Chimum's personal history is also the history of oil in Ruweng County. Chief Chimum and his people were forcibly displaced from El Toor seven years ago. Since then, he has been forced out of Kumagon, Miper, Adiei, Aruch, Panlual, Mankuor and Alel. El Toor, Kumagon and Miper are now oil drilling sites. All of the other locations are on the new road linking the government garrisons from Heglig to Lieri.

Then, there is Chief Midiing Kuot. His life story is also the saga of oil in Ruweng County. He was originally from a village near Heglig, but the government attacked eight years ago, and drove all the Southerners away. Chief Midiing took his people east to Kuelmopiny but, as the chief related, 'The

government and Talisman Oil began began their expansion eastwards.' Again, Chief Midiing and his people were forced to flee to Kueldit. Finally, the massive government air and ground attack in October 2001 drove Chief Midiing's people out of Kueldit to one of only two corners of the county still under the control of the Southern opposition, Beam Rom (Padit 2). First, the civilian population is forcibly displaced. Then, the government quickly builds new roads and builds garrisons to protect the roads. Finally, the oil companies are free to begin drilling for oil using the new roads that wind their way through the new wastelands.

The government of Sudan (GoS) first sent helicopter gunships to the Jukabar/Bal area to scatter the civilians. As they fled into the tall grass in search of cover, trying to shield their small children, the helicopters flew low enough to part the grass to enable the pilots to see their intended targets. Then, the gunships swung around, directing deadly fire at the civilians cowering in the grass. When the Government attacked his village of Kuelmopiny in November 2001, Bol Yout and his family ran into the bush. Bol said, 'The gunships flew so low they whipped the grass apart, exposing my children.' The gunships came back around, bore down on his family, and killed three of his eight children - Deng, age 6, Chol, age 5, and Manjok, age 4. As his children were mowed down, Bol could see his village going up in smoke.

'The helicopter gunships flew so low I could see the faces of the pilots,' stated Chigo Milwal, a former resident of Bal. 'The gunships quickly swung around and came back shooting at the people.' Chigo's cousin, Dau Ajiang, and his two children were killed during the gunship attack. The gunships were quickly followed by vehicles carrying the ground forces.

Back in the village, Government forces arrived in trucks and other army vehicles. Many people stayed in their tukuls since they had not been the target during previous attacks. This was not true this time. The team was given names of civilians shot and killed outside their homes. Once all the civilians had fled or been killed, the soldiers systematically torched the villages after looting the stored grain from the long-term sorghum harvest that had just ripened. Alai Bol Agook and her family tried to flee into the bush when the attack began in Bal. She grabbed her two youngest children but the two teenage boys hesitated. When they realised the Government troops were killing civilians, they tried to run after Alai. Soldiers ran after them, shooting, and both fell mortally wounded. The boys managed to drag themselves into the bush. For five days, Alai searched for her two sons. 'It was the vultures gathering overhead that led me to their bodies,' Alai quietly said. Her sons, Riang Miyiek Monyjok and Bol Miyiek Monyjok had died alone in the tall grass.

Chol Minyiel Athor told of similar brutalities during the attack on his village of Nyajungo, north of Mankuor. When the Government soldiers entered his village, they shot and killed a very old man, Myuol Deng Kier, age 70. Mayuol was blind and unable to run from the soldiers. They shot him at point blank range as he sat outside his tukul. Then, according to Chol, 'They cut off his hand in order to steal his antique silver bracelet.'

'Many people found themselves trapped in their tukuls and were burned alive by the Government soldiers,' Achol Thon Milek said sadly when asked about the attack on Bal in November 2001. Achol personally knew of six men who were burned alive. 'I suspect the soldiers rounded up these men, locked them all in the one tukul and then torched the building,' she concluded.

Chief Mirial said many people were still missing after the attack on his village in October 2001. When some of the men from the village tried to return to look for those who were missing, they found Government forces still on the ground. When they tried to get closer to the village to look for bodies, Chol Piouk Dau, age 38, stepped on a newly planted landmine and was killed. 'It was then

that I gave up any hope of taking my people back home,' lamented Chief Mirial.

Many Southerners are still missing and are unaccounted for after the attacks of 2001. Some families still search for their loved ones. Occasionally, someone manages to escape from one of the Government garrisons and is able to tell other villagers the names of those still being held captive. Wilson Mathiang Chol has been searching the countryside for his wife and two children since his village of Bal was attacked. For months he has been looking for their bodies. Now, he is convinced they were abducted and taken to the garrison at Pariang since he has never found their bodies. 'I just wish I knew for certain what had happened to my family,' Wilson uttered so quietly. He continues to search for answers.

Ngunreng Mayom Chan could be said to be more fortunate than Wilson Mathiang. At least she knows the fate of her sister, Aboi Tiop Ayiik, aged 18. Aboi was abducted from her village when the Government attacked in July 2001. Ngunreng agonised over the fate of her younger sister. Then, just recently, a boy who had been captured along with her sister, managed to escape. According to Ngunreng, 'Now I know that Aboi is being held by the Government at their garrison in Lieri. I just wish I knew whether she is alright.'

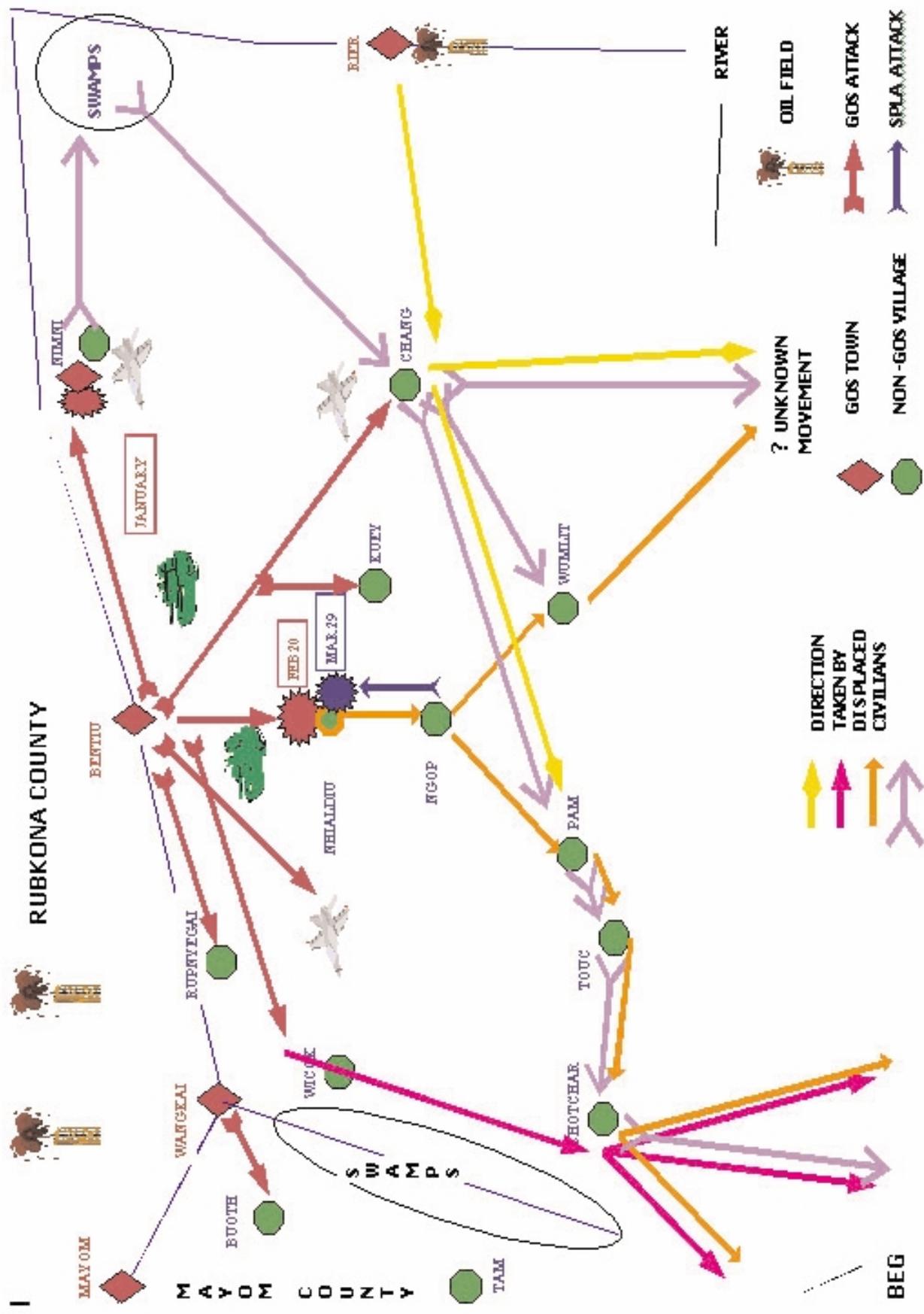
Within a month after the civilian populations were driven from their homes in the Jukabar/Bal area, a drilling rig was moved a short distance to the west to a location called Pakier, according to some of the people interviewed. Several civilians told of seeing the light on the top of the rig at night. The SPLA claims it attacked the location and forced Talisman to cap the well and withdraw. One civilian, however, said he thought the company had been unsuccessful in finding oil and had withdrawn. Regardless, it was a very short period, about a month, between the forced depopulation of the area by Government and the appearance of the Talisman rig. This same pattern has been seen throughout Ruweng County. When the Government attacked and forced the population out of Manawal, the oil company arrived with a drilling rig within a very short period. Drilling continues in the location. Oil companies, such as Talisman, contribute to the extension of the war by permitting government forces to clear new areas for oil exploration and production. The evidence of human rights abuses is overwhelming and the documentation extensive. The companies operating in Ruweng County can no longer pretend not to know. The company officials are free to visit the locations and interview the displaced, the people the oil companies say do not exist.

*European Coalition on Oil in Sudan – research trip  
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Oil concessions owned by foreign oil companies	
Blocks 1 & 2 (Heglig and Unity oil fields) in production:	GNPOC consortium; Talisman (Canada), CNPC (China), Petronas (Malaysia), Sudapet (Sudan)
Block 3 (Adar Ysle oil field), in production:	CNPC and Gulf Petroleum Corporation (Qatar)
Block 4 (Kalkang oil field), under exploration:	Talisman, plus other members of GNPOC consortium
Blocks 5a and 5b, 5a in production, 5b not:	Lundin (Sweden), OMV (Austria), Petronas (Malaysia), Sudapet (Sudan)
Block 5, no production:	Total/Finareff (France)
Block 6, no production:	CNPC

Scorched earth



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