

Darfur: Gendered Violence and Rape as a Weapon of Genocide

The fight for women's lives is being lost in Darfur. While the violence in Darfur is a human rights atrocity for all Darfurians, the situation on the ground is especially dangerous for women because the Janjaweed militiamen are employing rape and other acts of sexual violence as systematic weapons of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Women - from young girls to grandmothers - are raped and brutally assaulted during attacks on their villages, as they attempt to flee, and in refugee camps. It is difficult to gauge the true extent of abuse against women in Darfur due to social stigmas surrounding sexual abuse that keep women silent about the issue, but survivors' testimonies reveal that violence against women is widespread.

Rape as a Weapon of Genocide

As a weapon of genocide, rape is used in three ways – to impregnate women with children who are not ethnically African, to ostracize unmarried women so that they can't begin families, and to damage women's bodies so they are unable to have children. **The Janjaweed militia use sexual assault to “cleanse” Darfur of its ethnically distinct African population – eugenic through rape.**

Gang Rape, Abduction and Sexual Slavery

Gang rape, abduction and sexual slavery are all prevalent forms of sexual violence in Darfur. Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors with Borders) reports that 28% of the women they interviewed reported being gang raped. **Women and girls as young as eight are abducted and held in sexual slavery in militia camps where soldiers continually rape them for hours at a time.**

Physical and Medical Consequences of Rape

Attacks on women are characterized by extreme physical abuse. Women who attempt to escape or resist attack are beaten, tortured or killed. **Some women have reported having their fingernails pulled out as a form of torture or their legs broken so that they are not capable of escaping.** Rape has particularly severe health consequences in Darfur where an estimated 89% of women have undergone female circumcision and/or infibulation. Furthermore, rape exposes women to an increased risk of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Social Effects of Rape

The attacks are not isolated crimes of opportunity but part of a purposeful campaign to humiliate the women attacked and destroy the social fabric of the entire community. Women are deliberately raped in front of their families and neighbors, leaving survivors with extreme emotional damage in a society that shuns rape victims. **In many cases, women who survive rape attacks are subsequently disowned by their husbands and families, leaving them even more vulnerable to future attacks because they lack the economic, social and physical protection that men can provide.**

Furthermore, because children's ethnicity is determined by that of their fathers, women who become pregnant as the result of rape are considered to carry enemy children. Some women abandon their babies, and there are also reports of infanticide. Women who choose to keep



their children risk being ostracized by their community. In this conflict, rape does damage far beyond the scope of physical harm: it intentionally breaks apart the social structure of Darfurian communities.

Impunity

The assault on women occurs within an atmosphere of complete impunity for their assailants. A report by MSF indicates that 81% of rapes perpetrated by Janjaweed militia forces occur with government military personnel present. Although there are Sudanese laws against rape, punishable by imprisonment or even death, there are no accounts of attackers being charged or punished. **While the perpetrators are free from rebuke, in many cases the rape victims themselves are punished.** Women who become pregnant may be charged with “illegal pregnancy” and imprisoned where they are further exposed to sexual assault and other violence.

Need for protection

The one thing almost all women interviewed in Darfur say they need – above food, aid, and medical assistance – is protection. Even those women who reach the camps are not safe, but are vulnerable to assault when they must leave camps to gather necessary water and firewood outside. **Families face the decision of who should bear the brunt of assault – if they send their sons, they will be killed. If they send their daughters, they will only be raped.**

While many organizations provide aid to the victims of the genocide, the African Union (AU) is the only group providing protection for the people of Darfur. Where AU peacekeepers are present, violence is lessened; when humanitarian convoys come under fire, AU peacekeepers come to their aid. In particular, AU peacekeepers prevent further rape by escorting women when they leave refugee camps in search of water and firewood.

However, the AU lacks sufficient resources to protect all civilians in need. While the AU has deployed 3,200 peacekeepers to Darfur, the International Crisis Group (ICG) estimates that 12,000 –15,000 peacekeepers are needed to adequately protect the civilian population in Darfur, a region the size of Texas.

"I was sleeping when the attack on Disa started. I was taken away by the attackers, they were all in uniforms. They took dozens of other girls and made us walk for three hours. During the day we were beaten and they were telling us: "You, the black women, we will exterminate you, you have no god." At night we were raped several times. The Arabs guarded us with arms and we were not given food for three days." From the Amnesty International report “Darfur: Rape as a weapon of war: sexual violence and its consequences”



Further Resources on Sexual Violence Against Women in Darfur

Reports:

Amnesty International

“Lives blown apart: Crimes against women in times of conflict: Stop violence against women” (on violence against women in conflict in general, includes several pages on Darfur specifically)

December 8, 2004

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGACTION770752004?open&of=ENG-SDN>

“Sudan – mass rape, abduction and murder”

October 12, 2004

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR541252004?open&of=ENG-SDN>

“Sudan: Surviving Rape in Darfur”

August 9, 2004

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR540972004?open&of=ENG-SDN>

“Darfur: Rape as a weapon of war: sexual violence and its consequences”

July 19, 2004

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAFR540762004>

Gender-based Violence Global Technical Support Project

Field visit report: “Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence: Darfur, Sudan”

Beth Vann, Global GBV Technical Advisor

February 22 – March 4, 2005

Contact GIF for this document

Eric Reeves (Expert on Sudan and Professor at Smith College)

“Rape as a Strategic Weapon of War in Darfur”

June 21, 2005

Available from www.sudanreeves.org

Human Rights Watch

“Sexual Violence and its Consequences among Displaced Persons in Darfur and Chad”

April 12, 2005

<http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/darfur0505/>



“If We Return, We Will Be Killed: Consolidation of Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur, Sudan”
(section on impunity for perpetrators of rape)
November, 2004
http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/darfur1104/5.htm#_Toc88016107

Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Border)
“The Crushing Burden of Rape: Sexual Violence in Darfur”
March 8, 2005
<http://www.genocideinterventionfund.org/reports/others/>

Oslo Donors’ Conference on Sudan 2005
“Sudanese Women’s Priorities and Recommendations to the Oslo Donors’ Conference on Sudan”
April 11-12, 2005
<http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC18427.htm>

UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women)
“Crisis in the Darfurs” report
June, 2004
<http://www.womenwarpeace.org/sudan/docs/mmdarfurtrip.pdf>

“Crisis in the Darfur” article in newsletter
August/September 2004
http://www.unifem.org/news_events/currents/currents200409.html#darfur

Multi-media:

Amnesty International
“Rape and Abduction in Darfur, Sudan” (a slide show)
<http://web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/conflict-1-eng>

Popular Media:

Marie Claire
“I am the Mother of My Enemy’s Child” by Emily Wax
January, 2005
Available from <http://www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence/index.do>

