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## Sudan (North-South ethnic war) (1983 - 2005)

Sudan's north-south civil war went on for more than two decades, and resulted in roughly two million war-related deaths and the displacement of millions of others from their homes. The conflict pitted the mainly Arab and Islamic government based in the capital, Khartoum, against the mainly African and animist or Christian peoples of the south, led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Civilians died at the hands of both the government and SPLA forces, and both sides recruited child soldiers. Government forces also sent captured black civilians to work as slaves in the north.

The violence began in the early 1980s, shortly after the Sudanese government redivided the country's southern provinces and instituted Islamic Sharia law. These moves coincided with a serious drought, and the distribution of food relief was stymied by insecurity. The fighting continued after president Jafar Nimeiri was ousted in 1985, but by 1988 the government and the SPLA were close to agreement on a ceasefire. In 1989 the hard-line National Islamic Front (NIF) staged a coup, and negotiations ended. The NIF regime insisted upon Islam as the dominant religion, Arabic as the dominant language, and Sharia in the Sudanese legal code. The SPLM/A demanded autonomy, the right of self-determination, and separation of religion and state. The war spilled over beyond the south into other parts of the country.

Although ethnic identity and religion were key elements to the conflict, there was an economic dimension as well: control over natural resources, in particular oil which was discovered in the south in 1978. An oil installation of Chevron corporation was one of the SPLA's first targets. Tensions over land and water resources have also contributed to the conflict. In the 1980s, the government promoted the expansion of cotton and sugar crops, requiring new land and forcibly displacing groups along ethnic lines.

The people of southern Sudan suffered tremendous hardships during the war. The government's military campaigns targeted specific ethnic groups, and included the bombing of civilian sites, arbitrary killings and arrests, torture, rape, and abduction of women and children. The government also sought to pit rival southern groups against one another, causing further harm to the civilians caught in the crossfire. The famine of the late 1980s, a humanitarian disaster that put millions of Sudanese at risk of starvation, was caused by a combination of drought, violence, population displacements, and aid blockages and diversions to combatants.

After two years of intensive negotiations, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Khartoum government and the SPLM/A was signed in January 2005. The agreement provided for power sharing, the distribution of oil earnings, and a referendum on national unity to be held in 2011. Hopes for successful peace implementation have been dimmed by the death in a plane crash of SPLM leader John Garang in August 2005, less than a month after he was sworn in as Sudan's vice-president under the terms of the CPA, as well as by the intensifying conflict in Sudan's Darfur region (see Darfur profile).

### *Print Resources*

Keen, David (1994) *The Benefits of Famine: a Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-1989*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Kebbede, Girma (1999) *Sudan's Predicament: Civil War, Displacement and Ecological Degradation*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Johnson, Douglas H. (2003) *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*. Oxford: James Currey.

#### *Online Resources*

BBC News. *Country Profile: Sudan*.

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, IRIN News. *Sudan*.

International Crisis Group. *Sudan documents*.

Human Rights Watch. *Sudan documents*.

#### *Timeline*

1956 - Sudan becomes independent from British-Egyptian rule

1962 - civil war begins in the south

1969 - military coup led by Jafar Nimeiri

1972 - south gains autonomy under Addis Ababa peace accord

1978 - oil discovered in the south

1983 - civil war begins between government and SPLM/A

1985 - Nimeiri deposed by military council led by Sadiq al-Mahdi

1988 - ceasefire agreed between SPLA and government but not implemented

1989 - NIF ousts al-Mahdi

1998 - US attacks chemical plant in Sudan alleging terrorist connections

1999 - first Sudanese oil exports

2002 - government and SPLM/A sign Machakos Protocol in Kenya, setting terms for peace talks

2003 - Darfur fighting begins

2005 - Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the government and SPLM/A; Garang dies in plane crash