

**ONE CALLED HER “YEBIT”...
A HUMAN ATROCITY - A POLITICAL DECEPTION**

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Before discussing and analyzing the issue of “YEBIT”, I would like to take a little mental detour. By now, I think we have all realized that the extent of freedom we experienced before 9 - 11 is greatly diminished. We do look at this development with mixed feelings such as being comforted by the thought that our government will protect us countered by the downright fear of losing our valued freedom. The new rule I wholeheartedly support is the one which requires passengers to arrive at airports well in advance of their scheduled departure time. Of course, I am not enamored with the prospect of having my personal belongings unfolded and looked at, but the request of early arrival provides me with the luxury of time to explore and browse through airport bookstores, time, which I had never allowed myself before 9 - 11. And I can honestly say that some of the airport bookstores are remarkably well stocked and quite current. In 2002, at the small airport of Bremen, Germany, I came across a book titled “SKLAVIN”. The book was originally written in English, but was first published in German in September 2002. I bought and read the German edition. French and Spanish translations followed the German one. The English version was originally scheduled to be published at the end of the year 2003, but is now to be released in the first quarter of this year. (I did receive the English edition just 10

days ago). Reading the book does not require an advanced degree, but the underlying issues are of such an enormous severity that one cannot ignore them. One cannot remain emotionally untouched by the cruelties and injustices that were extended to a once happy and carefree child. Reading the book becomes a long lasting, deeply disturbing experience.

The presentation will bring to light one of the most perfidious Human Rights violations one can imagine. It involves not only the most precious but also the most vulnerable members of society: children, who so easily become prey to every kind of abuse. They cannot speak for themselves, they are easily intimidated, they can be beaten into submission and be molded into obedient puppets by their owners. If they were bought cheap enough, they will be discarded as soon as they lose their usefulness. New supply is plentiful and, for example, the average price for a slave in Sudan today is less than \$150.00, often as low as \$40.00.

Before proceeding with the subject, I would like to give a brief history of the Human Rights movement: The idea of human rights - although referred to under different names - actually goes back quite some time. For example, King John of England was forced by his subjects to sign the Magna Charta Libertatum at Ronnymede in 1215 after he had violated numerous ancient laws. Some of the rights guaranteed in this document were, that the church should be free from governmental interference, widows could own property and had the right not to remarry, citizens were to be free from excessive taxes, and the establishment of principles of due process and equality before the law were guaranteed.

European philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries formulated the concept of “natural rights”. A person had certain rights because he or she was a human being and not because of his or her citizenship. The Constitution of the United States is an example of the recognition and acknowledgement of the concept of “natural rights”. In France, after the monarchy was overthrown in 1789 and the first French Republic was proclaimed, the “Declaration of the Rights of Man” was documented. The first philosopher using the term “human rights” was actually Henry David Thoreau, who used the expression in his book “Civil Disobedience”. Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King were deeply influenced by Thoreau’s work promoting the non-violent resistance to the unethical actions of government. Two other writers who were greatly concerned about human freedom were the English philosopher John Stuart Mill and the American political theorist Thomas Paine. They discussed in detail this issue in their publications “Essay on Liberty” and “The Rights of Man” respectively.

The nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century showed, that neither the emancipated former American slaves nor the freed Russian serfs were experiencing true freedom. It was a time, when revolutionaries exposed governments’ abuses and atrocities, a time, when revolutionaries felt that overturning an existing government by force was justified. In response to this form of social disorder, governments felt compelled to respond strongly toward dissent and often enforced more oppression. In other words, neither side gained much credibility with ordinary citizens and progress was actually slowed down by

the forceful attitude that the opposing sides displayed. Nonetheless, profound social changes were introduced at this time: Labor Unions established the forty hour work week in the United States and in many European countries, workers were granted the right to peaceful strikes, child labor became regulated and in many countries women were granted the right to vote. Also, the national liberation movements in different parts of the world succeeded by driving out colonial powers; for example, Mahatma Gandhi freed his country from British rule.

On December 10, 1948 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which actually was a direct response to the ominous acts of the Holocaust. It was the first time, that the issue of Human Rights was approved by a multinational forum.

The year 1961 saw the formation of “Appeal for Amnesty”, which later became “Amnesty International”. What set this modern human rights group apart from earlier human rights movements was, that it explicitly rejected any involvement with political ideologies, it remained and remains totally impartial. Amnesty International only becomes involved when basic principles of human rights are violated by governments, such as imprisoning citizens for peacefully expressing their opinions or beliefs. In the meantime, Amnesty International has gained permanent observer status at the United Nations and was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1977 for its work.

And now back to “ONE CALLED HER YEBIT”... For the first twelve years of her life, her name was Mende and then a raid on her village changed it all.

What used to be an idyllic life in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan became - overnight - an eight year long life of slavery, a life of rape, brutal beatings and verbal insults, isolation and eighteen hour workdays, seven days per week, three hundred sixty five days per year. It is not a story of two hundred years ago, but it is one of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, which began in Sudan and ended on September 11, 2000 in London, UK, when “YEBIT” finally found a chance to run away from her master, Abdel Mahmoud al-Koronky, the Press attaché at the Sudanese Embassy. “YEBIT” is an Arabic word and means “the one who is not worth having a name”. We carefully and lovingly choose names for our pets, but here is a human being, a twelve-year old girl who is called by her owners “YEBIT” and she remained “YEBIT” for eight painful years. Hers is the true story of modern day slavery, a human and political tragedy.

Modern day slavery covers a wide variety of Human Rights violations, including the sale of children. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights state, that, quote, “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude: slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”, end quote. The present Sudanese regime, the National Islamic Front (NIF), is a signatory of the resolution that outlaws slavery.

Please “lend me your ears” for one additional mental detour, which is important for the understanding and analysis of the problem with which I wish to present you. Sudan’s current political turmoil is rooted in its fifty-eight year long Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule, which preceded Sudan’s independence in 1956. As

a result of the profound cultural, racial, and religious differences between the Arab-Islamic north and the black Christian and Animist south, these two regions were governed separately during the entire duration of the Anglo-Egyptian occupation. Upon Sudan's independence, the predominantly Arab-Islamic government in Khartoum, which is situated in northern Sudan, tried to impose Sharia law on the entire country. This move led - already in 1956, the year of independence - to a brutal 16 year long civil war, followed later by another 19 year long one. Right now, there is an official cease-fire, which both sides have used - so far - to rearm their militias. Since Sudan's liberation, government supported raids on southern villages have created an active slave trade: Women and children are abducted and taken to the north to be sold into slavery while the men are usually killed. In my opinion, it is not just a war of Muslims versus Christians and Animists; what is practiced in Sudan is genocide of its black population. (Sudan, by the way, means "Land of the Black People".) All of Mende's family are Nubas from the Nuba Mountains in central Sudan, a region, which geographically and politically belongs to the north. Also, most of the Nubas are Muslims, including Mende's tribe. Consequently, raids on Nuba villages cannot account for religious persecution, it clearly speaks for genocide.

The story I would like to share with you has an innocent, peaceful beginning: Mende grew up as the youngest of five children in, I think modern terminology calls it, a functional family unit, where love, respect, verbal openness, and also responsibilities were shared. (The name Mende refers to a beautiful, slender gazelle.) When she was about eight years old, her parents

sent her to a public school, which was about one hour's walk away from Mende's village. All teachers were of Arab descent and - in a deliberate and calculated manner to undermine the Nubas' identity and culture - they requested from day one on, that each non Arab child be given an Arabic name: Mende became ZAINAH, her friend Kehko was called FATIYAH. Students were strictly forbidden to speak in their native tongue even during break. Non compliance resulted in corporal punishment. All classes were taught in Arabic and during the second year of schooling, the English language was introduced. As it turned out, Mende, speak Zainah, was an exceptionally bright student with high ambitions. After a traumatic experience of almost losing her brother to an infectious disease, Mende decided to become a physician. Since there were no medical facilities in the Nuba Mountain area, her seriously ill brother had to be carried on a two day trip to the nearest hospital to be stabilized and cared for. Following this episode, Mende made it known to her family and whoever would listen, that she planned to practice medicine in the Nuba Mountain region. But all her plans for a life of service to the Nuba people were shattered one night: Her village was raided - as were so many neighboring ones before - by government equipped militias, called *mujahedin*. I spare you the description of the slaughter that took place. Some adults were lucky enough to escape, but most of them were less fortunate, as were infants and very young children. Young girls about eight to fourteen years old and some boys of the same age group were abducted and taken to a military camp on the outskirts of Dilling after they had been raped numerous times by their abductors. All girls, including Mende, had been circumcised as was

customary in their culture. Again, I leave it to your imagination to visualize the injuries and pain these young innocent girls had to endure as a result of rape. The camp served as a holding tank or slave distribution center. The first customer, an officer in uniform, bought three girls. Mende and four other girls were sold to a slave trader who took the girls to Khartoum for further sale into private homes, where Mende was to suffer eight dehumanizing years, where she was called YEBIT instead of Mende, where she had to realize, that she had no rights anymore and no life of her own. At night, she was locked into a shed away from the house and during the day she had to work up to eighteen hours per day. Her meals consisted of table scrap and leftovers. If she made a mistake, she was beaten and verbally abused and often, when her owner was in a bad mood, she was beaten too, just for being around. An example of the physical abuse she encountered was: One day, instead of poaching eggs, Mende fried them. The punishment for this mistake was, that her owner put the burning hot frying pan on Mende's bare forearm and upon removal of the pan, a good portion of the skin was removed as well. This, by the way, was not the worst physical punishment. Here is a twelve-year old girl who does not have anybody to hold and comfort her in her misery. She is completely alone with her fears and her emotional and physical pain. One denies her a childhood, one denies her any form of schooling and interaction with other human beings. Her only companions are desperation, pain and the realization that she may never see her family again. She lives in almost unbearable isolation.

After seven, long, extremely abusive years of enslavement, Mende was sent to work in a diplomat's household in London, U.K. And here in a free, democratic, west European country, the unimaginable happens: An official representative of Sudan, the Press attaché of the Sudanese Embassy in London, holds Mende as a slave and shamelessly exploits her. The harsh work conditions, the soul destroying emotional abuse eventually took its toll on Mende. She becomes depressed and thinks more and more about suicide, until an unexpected opportunity arises, which gives her a chance to run away from Al Koronky's house into freedom. At least, that was what she thought until numerous attempts to re-enslave her again were made by Sudanese officials.

Soon after her escape, Mende applied for asylum in the U.K. But in October 2002 her claim was denied by the Home Office. This decision was based on Al Koronky's statement, that Mende was an au-pair and had been free to go wherever she wanted. She was equally free to travel back to Sudan to either live with her family or to stay in Khartoum to work. She had always been a free person. Al Koronky portrayed Mende as a pathologic liar and opportunist. And, as one can see, a well presented diplomat's testimony, or more precisely expressed his lies, bear more weight than an honest request for asylum by an intimidated, abused young lady from Sudan who spoke only broken English. In the meantime, however, Mende had met Damien Lewis, a British journalist, who had previously reported on Human Rights violations in Sudan. He had filmed, interviewed and reported on hundreds of escaped slaves in Sudan before he met Mende in London, U.K. While Mende's application for asylum was pending, she,

in conjunction with Damien Lewis, wrote the book “Sklavin”, which gave a horrific account of modern-day slavery in Sudan. The book was published, as mentioned before, in Germany in September 2002 and, in addition to that, her story was also aired on German national television and German newspapers talked about her enslavement. The denial of her application for asylum in the United Kingdom just one month after the book became public, caused quite an uproar: Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery Watch, International Eminent Persons Group, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, and politicians like Baroness Cox, an anti-slavery campaigner and a speaker of the House of Lords became involved on Mende’s behalf and finally, in January 2003, the U.K. Home Office reversed its original decision and announced that Mende was a genuine refugee from persecution and was granted full asylum status in the U.K. Mende’s comment on her newly guaranteed freedom was: “I want all the others who are still in slavery and misery to be set free. How can I really be free, when I know that they remain enslaved?”

Despite the Sudanese government’s denial of slavery in the country, it remains a fact, that slavery in Sudan is still very much a reality. In a calculated process, the Islamic Fundamentalist government forms Arab militias, arms these soldiers with AK-47 rifles and instructs the soldiers to fight a “jihad” against the “infidels” in the south and against non-Arab tribes in the north. As a reward, the soldiers get to keep the booty, which means goats, cattle, women and children. And here we have it; a profitable business is in operation: Human beings are captured, separated from their families and moved against their will to locations

where they will be sold, while the government “looks the other way”. Tens of thousands of women and children are now being used as slaves by Arabs in the north of Sudan. The well intended attempts to redeem the slaves - the group Christian Solidarity Worldwide has been quite active in this respect - also has its downside: The same slave traders who originally bought the women and children from the soldiers and then sold them as slaves to the Arabs in the north of Sudan, are now buying the slaves back from the Arabs for the purpose of transporting them to designated areas where they are met by members of groups like Christian Solidarity. These groups pay a redemption fee of about \$300.00 per slave but, unfortunately, also create - although unintentionally - a market which demands new slaves. There is, of course, no guarantee, that the newly freed slaves will not fall victim to another raid again, it did happen before. Although the redemption procedures succeeded in reuniting some families, it, unfortunately, also promotes the trafficking of women and children indirectly.

The United States had - in the meantime - presented the Sudanese government in Khartoum with an ultimatum where both sides, north and south, were to sign a peace treaty by March 11, 2004 otherwise sanctions against Sudan may go into effect. The ultimatum, of course, completely ignored the fact, that a credibility problem exists: The Khartoum government - as mentioned before - is a signatory on documents that outlaw slavery. However, reality shows, that the Sudanese government actively supports slavery in its own country. Also, decades of animosity will not be wiped out by a deadline; it

involves a change in behavior pattern and that takes time, a long time. Just consider the Palestinians and the Jews.

The first step in combating slavery in Sudan has to be the government's admittance that slavery does exist in its country. However, how changes and corrections should be made are not clear in my mind. There is a country without a shared feeling of nationalism. Would a total separation between north and south Sudan serve any purpose? The oil- and mineral rich south would certainly have a more prosperous economic future than the north. Under these conditions, the north, which consists mostly of farmland and arid regions, would have to settle for a lot less than what they have control over now. Or would a unified, secular state with tolerance for all minorities be preferable? As long as an Islamic Fundamentalist government rules the country, this solution does not even seem to be an option. Also, one deals with a culture or cultures that already had a long history of slavery. To overcome this practice, the question of what it means to be human - human in the ethical sense - has to be seriously addressed by those who are in charge of the Sudanese government. What kind of morality guides those individuals? In other words, what code of value is applied when committing atrocities against innocent citizens whose basic human rights, especially the right to one's own life, are violated or completely denied? Unfortunately, I seem to have a lot more questions than answers in reference to the abolishment of slavery in Sudan.

In closing I have to state, that I do owe all of you an explanation: The topic "YEBIT" was chosen, because I wanted to do "something" for the enslaved

children in Sudan. I did not feel comfortable with the idea of buying a slave back, instead I decided to spread the word, to talk about the atrocious acts that are committed daily against helpless and innocent children. Please consider this presentation a contribution to the enslaved children of Sudan.

abda - singular - slave

abid - plural - slaves

A **“right”** is a moral principal; it refers to freedom from physical and mental coercion by others.

“Morality” is a code of values that guides men in his choices and actions.

“Ethics” as a science deals with defining man’s code of values.