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FREEDOM HOUSE

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Freedom in the World - Sudan (2006)

Polity: No polity available

Political Rights: 7

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Population:
40,200,000

GNI/Capita: \$460

Life Expectancy:
57

Religious Groups:
Sunni Muslim (70 percent),
indigenous beliefs (25 percent),
Christian (5 percent)

Ethnic Groups:
Black (52 percent),
Arab (39 percent),
Beja (6 percent),
other (3 percent)

Capital: Khartoum

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

While Sudan's 22-year-long civil war in the south concluded with a peace pact in 2005, widespread ethnic cleansing, massacres, and rape continued in the country's western Darfur region throughout the year. On-again, off-again talks between the government and Darfur rebel groups and an expanded African Union force failed to dampen the violence. The peace deal enacted a power-sharing arrangement with the southern leader John Garang, who was killed later in the year in a helicopter crash. A new violent front threatened to emerge in the country's east, as previously dormant rebel groups, demanding economic equality, clashed with government forces.

Sudan, Africa's largest country, achieved independence in 1956 after nearly 80 years of British rule, and it has been embroiled in civil wars for 39 of its 49 years as an independent state. The Anyanya movement, representing mainly Christian and animist black Africans in southern Sudan, battled Arab Muslim government forces from 1956 to 1972. In 1969, General Jafar Numeiri toppled an elected government, ushering in a military dictatorship. The South gained extensive autonomy under a 1972 accord, and for the next decade, an uneasy peace prevailed. Then, in 1983, Numeiri restricted southern autonomy and imposed Sharia (Islamic law). Civil war resumed, and Numeiri was overthrown in 1985. Civilian rule was restored in 1986 with the election of a government led by Sadiq al-Mahdi of the moderate Islamic Ummah Party. War, however, continued. Lieutenant General Omar al-Bashir ousted al-Mahdi in a 1989 coup, and al-Mahdi spent seven years in prison or under house arrest before fleeing to Eritrea. Until 1999, al-Bashir ruled through a military-civilian regime backed by senior Muslim clerics including Hassan al-Turabi, who wielded considerable power as the ruling National Congress (NC) party leader and speaker of the National Assembly.

Tensions between al-Bashir and al-Turabi climaxed in December 1999; on the eve of a parliamentary vote on a plan by al-Turabi to curb presidential powers, al-Bashir dissolved parliament and declared a state of emergency. He fired al-Turabi as NC head, replaced the cabinet with his own supporters, and held deeply flawed presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2000, which the NC won overwhelmingly. In June 2000, al-Turabi formed his own party, the Popular National Congress (PNC), but he was prohibited from participating in politics. In January 2001, the Ummah Party refused to join al-Bashir's new government despite the president's invitation, declaring that it refused to support totalitarianism.

Al-Turabi and some 20 of his supporters were arrested in February 2001 after he called for a national uprising against the government and signed a memorandum of understanding in Geneva with the southern-based, rebel Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). In May 2001, al-Turabi and four aides were charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government; al-Turabi was placed under house arrest. In September 2002, he was moved to a high-security prison and subsequently released in October 2003.

By sidelining al-Turabi, who was considered a leading force behind Sudan's efforts to export Islamic extremism, al-Bashir began to lift Sudan out of international isolation. Although Vice President Ali Osman Mohammed Taha—who replaced al-Turabi as Islamic ideologue—remained committed to Sudan's status as an Islamic state and to the government's self-proclaimed jihad against non-Muslims, al-Bashir has managed in recent years to repair relations with several countries, including the United States. After the September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States, al-Bashir offered his country's cooperation in combating terrorism. Sudan had previously provided a safe haven for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the terrorist network. In March 2004, al-Turabi was again placed under house arrest, this time on suspicion of plotting a coup with sympathizers of rebel groups in the western region of Darfur; Al-Turabi had been outspokenly critical of the government's tactics in the region. He remained in detention in 2005.

Sudan's international image remained tarnished in 2005 as violence in Darfur continued. The conflict began in February 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), representing black farmers and villagers in Darfur, attacked Sudanese military garrisons in the region. Darfur residents had long complained of official discrimination, unfair economic and land rights, and

occasional pogrom-type attacks by state-backed Arab militias, known as "Janjaweed." By early 2004, government and Janjaweed attacks against villages in Darfur were well under way, creating mass casualties and an enormous refugee crisis. Sudanese jet fighters and helicopter gunships routinely bombed and strafed villages. Horse- and camel-mounted Janjaweed militiamen, in seeming coordination with airborne government forces, would often follow air strikes, massacring survivors, especially men and boys. These tactics continued to be employed in 2005. Hundreds of thousands of people, their villages torched, were forcibly displaced, relegated to makeshift, government-run refugee camps. Tens of thousands escaped westward to neighboring Chad. Attacks seemed to focus on three black tribal groups-the Fur, Massalit, and Zaghawa-leading to charges of racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, and genocide by international human rights organizations.

In 2005, the African Union increased its force in Darfur to 7,000 troops. However, the troops lacked a civilian protection mandate authorizing the use of force, effectively rendering them eyewitness bystanders to the violence, able only to monitor and report on events on the ground. By November, the total number of people killed in the conflict ranged from 70,000 to 400,000, with at least 2 million displaced.

Government-run camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) set up throughout Darfur lacked adequate sanitation facilities, water, or feeding centers. The government also routinely blocked humanitarian workers from accessing the camps. Reports of hunger and malnutrition surfaced during the year as aid groups lost access to IDP camps. The government also cut off jet fuel to aid groups, hampering airdrops of food and relief materials. To discourage villagers from returning home, Janjaweed militiamen have at times dumped the corpses of executed civilians into village wells to poison the water. Male refugees generally avoided venturing outside refugee camps for fear of being murdered; women generally went out in search of firewood and water, often exposing themselves to rape by Janjaweed and government soldiers.

In July, the government and the SLA and JEM signed a declaration of principles to end the conflict, but a comprehensive deal was never achieved. Within two months, Janjaweed and government attacks resumed; 29 people were killed in one attack on an IDP camp.

In a separate conflict, fighting between people belonging to the Beja tribes and government forces erupted in the eastern region of Sudan in the beginning of the year. The Beja have long complained of marginalization and economic neglect. In January, 14 people were killed in Port Sudan when police dispersed demonstrators. More fighting erupted in June, as rebel groups known as the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions clashed with authorities. The rebellion grew in intensity in September, raising fears of a new violent front in the country.

The 23-year-long conflict in southern Sudan was officially brought to an end at the beginning of 2005. Sudan's government and the SPLA signed a permanent ceasefire and power- and wealth-sharing accords. The war had pitted government forces and government-backed, northern Arab Muslims against African animists and Christians in the country's oil-rich South. A convoluted mix of historical, religious, ethnic, and cultural tensions has made peace elusive, while competition for economic resources-most notably, oil-had fueled the conflict. Throughout the war, the government regularly bombed civilian targets in the south, including villages, churches, and humanitarian relief facilities. The government also denied humanitarian relief workers access to rebel-held areas or areas containing large concentrations of internal refugees. The SPLA also engaged in attacks on civilians and recruited child soldiers.

The peace agreement includes a six-year transition period that will culminate in a referendum on southern secession, during which time the government will withdraw 80 percent of its troops from the south. In July, SPLA leader John Garang was appointed top deputy to President al-Bashir, but less than a month later, Garang was killed in a helicopter crash. Mystery surrounding the cause of the crash sparked days of rioting in the south and in Khartoum by Garang supporters. At least 130 people were killed in the clashes and approximately 2,000 were arrested. The large political vacuum left by the death of the tough and charismatic Garang immediately called into question the SPLA's ability to influence national affairs. Salva Kiir, Garang's first deputy, took over the SPLA leadership.

While the United Nations has lifted sanctions against Sudan, the United States still maintains them because of Sudan's human rights record and its classification by the U.S. Department of State as a sponsor of terrorism.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Sudan cannot change their government democratically. December 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections cannot credibly be said to have reflected the will of the people. The major opposition parties, which are believed to have the support of most Sudanese, boycotted in protest of what they said were attempts by a totalitarian regime to impart the appearance of fairness. The European Union declined an invitation to monitor the polls to avoid bestowing legitimacy on the outcome. Omar al-Bashir, running against former president Jafar Numeiri and three relative unknowns, won 86 percent of the vote. NC candidates stood uncontested for nearly two-thirds of parliamentary seats. Voting did not take place in some 17 rebel-held constituencies, and government claims of 66 percent voter turnout in some states were

denounced as fictitious.

In September 2005, in accordance with the peace agreement ending the civil war in the south, the ruling NC and the SPLA agreed on the formation of a transitional government. Per the breakdown of seats provided in the peace agreement, the presidency appointed 450 members to the National Assembly. The SPLA was given control over eight government ministries, including foreign affairs. According to the agreement, national elections must be held no later than July 2009.

Sudan ranked 144 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

There is scant press freedom in Sudan. Journalists practice self-censorship to avoid harassment, arrest, and closure of their publications. While there are several daily newspapers and a wide variety of Arabic- and English-language publications, which engage in some criticism of the government, all are subject to censorship. Radio and television stations are owned by the government, and broadcasts are required to reflect official policy. Penalties apply to journalists who allegedly harm the nation or economy or violate national security. A 1999 law imposes penalties for "professional errors." In recent years, several journalists have been detained without explanation, and the authorities have arbitrarily shut down newspapers. In May, police forcibly cancelled the printing of the English-language Khartoum Monitor newspaper as editors prepared a front-page story on civilian deaths in Darfur. The same month, the editor-in-chief of the daily Al-Wife was put on trial for blasphemy after publishing an article questioning the prophet Muhammad's parentage. In June, the Khartoum Monitor was again targeted, this time forced to close after the Khartoum High Court withdrew the paper's operating license. It was banned after it published an interview with a former government official who accused the state of practicing slavery. The following month, however, after President Bashir ended the state of emergency and announced the lifting of censorship, the Khartoum Monitor was permitted to resume publishing. In August, police prevented the publication of two other newspapers, seizing tens of thousands of copies. Access to the internet is not restricted by the government but is limited by economic and social constraints.

Islam is the state religion, and the constitution claims Sharia (Islamic law) as the source of its legislation. The majority of Sudanese are Muslim, though most southern Sudanese adhere to traditional indigenous beliefs or Christianity. The overwhelming majority of those displaced or killed by war and famine in Sudan have been non-Muslims, and many have starved under a policy of withholding food pending conversion to Islam. Officials have described their campaign against non-Muslims as a holy war (in Darfur, however, the victimized tribes practice Islam). Under the 1994 Societies Registration Act, religious groups must register in order to legally gather. Registration is reportedly difficult to obtain. The government denies permission to build churches and sometimes destroys Christian schools, centers, and churches. Roman Catholic priests face random detention and interrogation by police.

Academic freedom is restricted. The government controls the administration of public universities and determines curriculums. Professors in both public and private institutions practice self-censorship.

While international nongovernmental organizations operate in Sudan, the government at times restricts their movement and ability to carry out their work, which often includes providing essential humanitarian assistance. In May, Sudanese police arrested a member of Doctors Without Borders after the group published a report describing systematic rape of women in Darfur by government and militia forces. The Sudanese army and police have also at times surrounded IDP camps in Darfur and have barred outside access to camp inhabitants. Humanitarian workers have also been targeted, and in some cases kidnapped and killed, by rebel groups.

There are no independent trade unions. The Sudan Workers Trade Unions Federation is the main labor organization, with about 800,000 members. Local union elections are rigged to ensure the election of government-approved candidates. A lack of labor legislation limits the freedom of workers to organize or bargain collectively.

The judiciary is not independent. The chief justice of the Supreme Court, who presides over the entire judiciary, is government-appointed. Regular courts provide some due process safeguards, but special security and military courts, which are used to punish political opponents of the government, provide none. "Special Courts" often deal with criminal matters, despite their use of military judges. Criminal law is based on Sharia and provides for flogging, amputation, crucifixion, and execution. Ten southern, predominantly non-Muslim, states are officially exempted from Sharia, although criminal law allows for its application in the future if the state assemblies choose to implement it. Arbitrary arrest, detention, and torture are widespread, and security forces act with impunity. Prison conditions do not meet international standards.

Serious human rights abuses by nearly every faction involved in the country's longstanding civil war and in the Darfur conflict have been reported. Secret police reportedly have operated "ghost houses"-detention and torture centers-in several cities. Government forces are said to have routinely raided villages, burning homes, killing residents, and abducting women and children to be used as slaves in the North. Relief agencies have discovered thousands of people held captive in the North and have purchased their freedom so they could return to the South. In 2002, the International Eminent Persons Group-a fact-finding mission

composed of humanitarian relief workers, human rights lawyers, academics, and former European and American diplomats-confirmed the existence of slavery in Sudan. The group also reported on abductions and forced servitude under the SPLA's authority. Although there has been no organized effort to compile casualty statistics in southern Sudan since 1994, the total number of people killed by war, famine, and disease is believed to exceed two million, with millions more displaced as refugees.

Women face discrimination in family matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, which are governed by Sharia. Women are represented in parliament and hold 66 of the assembly's 450 seats. Public order police frequently harass women and monitor their dress for adherence to government standards of modesty. Female genital mutilation occurs despite legal prohibition, and rape is reportedly widespread in war zones. Rape of young girls and women in Darfur by Janjaweed forces was reported throughout 2005. In July, a UN report implicated Sudanese soldiers, militia members, and police in widespread sexual attacks, including gang rape, in Darfur. Doctors Without Borders reported that 500 rapes took place over a four-and-a-half month period, with 80 percent committed by Janjaweed or other government-backed forces. According to Sudanese law, women who charge rape can face prosecution if their case is unsuccessful before a court. Pregnant, unmarried women who cannot prove a rape charge, are subject to charges of adultery, a capital crime in Sudan. The testimony of four witnesses is also required in order to convict a man of rape. Sudan has not ratified the international Convention on Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination against Women because it "contradict[s] Sudanese values and traditions."