



Sudan: Caught Between the Hell of War and the Networks of Human Trafficking: Escaping Death into the Trap of Slavery

Since the outbreak of war in Sudan on April 15, 2023, Sudanese people have faced unprecedented humanitarian crises, including killings, rape, and forced displacement at the hands of conflicting parties. The country has turned into a field of grave violations against civilians, leading millions to internally displace or flee across borders through irregular routes. However, escaping the horrors of war was not the end of the tragedy but rather the gateway to entering human trafficking networks, smuggling, and exploitation.

In the absence of state control and weak border surveillance, organized human trafficking networks have exploited the needs of war refugees, especially women and children, subjecting them to various forms of violence, sexual exploitation, forced labor, sale, and abduction. These networks operate along the desert roads used by Sudanese refugees, using smuggling as a cover for human trafficking activities. Often, the victims of these networks are transported to unknown destinations or are forced to perform forced labor in transit countries.

The journey of escape is fraught with death from hunger and thirst in the desert or from accidents resulting from police and border guard chases against smugglers. Despite the existence of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which prohibits the expulsion of refugees to places that may threaten their lives, the reality on the ground often shows a different picture. Many refugees are apprehended and deported back to conflict areas or thrown into inhumane prisons.

In countries like Egypt, despite being recipients of Sudanese refugees, the suffering does not end upon crossing the border. Many are detained on the road from Aswan to Cairo or Alexandria, where the offices of the Refugee Affairs Commission are located, exposing them to the risk of forced return. The situation worsened after the lax recognition of reservation messages as protective documents, increasing the suffering of refugees and making them vulnerable to exploitation once again.

Sudanese women and girls are among the most affected groups, being sexually exploited by smuggling networks, forced into forced marriages, or used in prostitution networks in some transit countries. Children, especially those unaccompanied by their parents, are at risk of abduction, enslavement, or forced recruitment in ongoing conflicts.

Amid this chaos, reports have emerged suggesting the complicity of some border security elements in facilitating smuggling operations for bribes, complicating legal accountability. Furthermore, some countries justify these violations under the guise of "state sovereignty," disregarding their international obligations.

Therefore, those forced to flee must take precautions from the beginning of their journey by carrying water and food to avoid perishing along the way, choosing trustworthy companions, avoiding travel through known smuggling networks with exploitation histories. It is crucial to expedite registration with official authorities, steer clear of suspicious locations or unsafe gatherings.

As for the Egyptian Law No. 164 of 2024 regarding refugee regulation, (which has not yet been implemented), it carries punitive provisions, requiring Sudanese refugees to be informed and seek to regularize their legal status promptly.

Amidst this chaos, hope remains that international organizations and the global community will fulfill their responsibilities and shed light on the systematic crimes of human trafficking committed daily against Sudanese people. Escaping the hell of war should not lead to a new form of slavery.