

# Darfur and crusaders

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An American friend asked me what I meant when I claimed in a previous article that Evangelists collect billions to support Christian revolts in the Muslim world. I gave him three examples: East Timor, South Sudan and Darfur. He seemed to recognize the first two but not the last. I had to explain:

In many wild parts of the globe there have been continuous struggles among various groups for racial, economic and religious reasons. Darfur is a huge countryside, the size of France. It has all kinds of tough terrains: Jungles, deserts and mountains.

Most of its inhabitants, if not all, are Muslims. They come

Africa. The state called on the Arab nomads again, this time against their old rivals. Another war ensued. Like in the southern war, the Western world took notice only when the government forces seemed to be winning.

No one is denying that the situation is bad. Five thousand people were killed or died from both sides, more from the insurgents. Both rivals committed atrocities. The government should stop supporting the nomads, and the foreign powers must cut off arms to the separatists.

Terrible as is, the situation has not reached the level of genocide, and the government cannot alone improve the situa-

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from Arab and African origins. The Arabs are mostly nomads and Africans farmers. In dry seasons, nomads move to farming areas to feed their camels and sheep. They fight over rights. This is an ancient, global phenomenon.

It was worse when central governments were weaker, like before the present government took over. In recent years the nomads got stronger because they joined the state in fighting the southern revolt. After the peace accords, they returned home veterans and well-armed. In their absence, some Africans revolted with foreign help. Support comes from the same sources that sustained the southerners - Evangelical organiza-

tion. More than 2,500 Iraqis were killed in a month, half the number of people killed in Darfur in 18 months. Close to a million (and counting) of Hutus and Tutsis were killed lately in similar conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi.

The situation is worsening there, as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, the occupied Palestinian territories, Chechnya, Kashmir, Muslim parts of China and Philippines.

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tions, neighbouring countries and Israel.

The goal is to cut off the Arab Muslim Sudan from the rest of

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## Putting things in perspective

Walid M. Sadi

The recent report of the National Centre for Human Rights (NCHR) on conditions in the Juweideh "Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre", and on the death of one inmate and the injury of scores of others in that prison more than three weeks ago has unleashed a string of public condemnations and painted prison conditions in the country in the worst possible way.

The press joined the fray and succeeded in putting a spin on the NCHR report, blowing the entire issue of prison conditions in the country out of all sensible and fair proportions.

To be sure, the death of even one inmate is serious enough to warrant the concern and consternation of human rights activists in particular and the general public in particular, and to sound the alarm about violations of prisoners' rights.

It is equally true that conditions in the country's eight prisons are not exactly perfect, and there is indeed still a lot that needs to be done to bring them closer to national and international norms. Our prison authorities are the first to admit that much more needs to be accomplished to improve prison conditions.

Improvements are under way in some jails. Unfortunately though, the press and the public have given the NCHR report a dangerous and inflammatory twist before examining it thoroughly enough.

The other day, Al Jazeera satellite station held an interview with me, in my capacity as the commissioner general of human rights in the country, about the report in question and the message it aimed to convey to the authorities in the country.

After talking about the report and mentioning that information about an inmate

dying after being beaten by prison guards was provided by inmates at Juweideh, I went on to say that since the government has appointed a judicial committee to investigate the death and injury of inmates at Juweideh, all sides must refrain from making final judgements about what really happened at the prison in question till the findings of that investigating body are made public.

I also emphasised that according to the information the centre possesses, the death of the inmate appears to be an isolated occurrence that does not provide the basis for concluding that such action is systematic or wide spread in the country.

I concluded by appealing for restraint and for not blowing the entire prison situation out of proportion. Unfortunately, Al Jazeera dropped everything I said except for the part informing about the death of an inmate at the hands of prison wardens. So much for fair and objective journalism!

It must be pointed also that the NCHR report concluded by recommending that an independent and neutral committee be formed to investigate the "charges and allegations" contained in the report.

The report's description of the information on prison conditions in Juweideh, the death of an inmate and the injury of eight others as "charges and allegations" is pending their verification by a judicious process.

This is the only fair and legal way to deal with charges of human rights violations within and outside prison.

Against this backdrop, all sides need to put the issue of prison conditions in proper perspective and wait till the judicial probe is completed and its findings disclosed before rushing to judge.