

# Sudanese Refugees

## Why the Sudanese Refugees Arrived in San Diego

Sudanese refugees started arriving in numbers in San Diego more than 12 years ago. The families arrived from villages that had been strafed by aircraft machine-gun fire and later burned out by the Janjaweed horsemen. Many of the families arrived with additional children belonging to their sisters and brothers who had been killed in the attacks. Some 40% of the group with whom the Network labors, are single women families, often headed by a grandmother who has rescued the children.

These single parent families still need the assistance of the Network, sometimes for years, as they struggle to keep jobs and care for the children. Often these heads of family develop little facility in English and jobs are hard to keep.

Most of the families arrived between 1996 and 2007. They barely survived with the assistance of the government funded resettlement agencies described under



Since 2004 The Episcopal Refugee Network has served many additional Sudanese families who were sponsored by their refugee relatives who were already living in San Diego.

The San Diego relatives who sponsor them rarely have sufficient resources to feed another 5 -6 months.

There are estimated to be over 3,500 Sudanese refugees now living in San Diego. Many continue to be supported in times of emergency by the Refugee Network as they are impoverished families living in the low-cost housing areas of town.

The “Lost Boys” started arriving about 2002. Ninety-eight Lost Boys came to San Diego and their life stories led to media coverage of their heroic marches across Sudan to Ethiopia and then back south to Kenya and finally to the refugee camp at Kakuma. The Episcopal Refugee Network served many of these Lost Boys through the delivery of furniture and household goods.

A further important element of the Network's services has been the development of tutoring programs whose aim is make children more successful in their school work, especially those handicapped by lack of English as they enter middle and high schools in San Diego. The two tutorial programs – Sudanese and Karen/Burmese are described separately on this website.

### **What Historical Events Led To Such Large Numbers Of Refugees From Southern Sudan And More Recently, From Darfur?**

The photos in this slide show were taken in refugee camps in Chad and in destroyed villages in Darfur, they offer a rare view of the refugees, the ruined homes they have left behind, and the camps in which they are struggling to repair their lives.



Photos by Michael Wadleigh. © gritty.org for Physicians for Human Rights

Newspaper accounts over the years have kept Americans aware of Sudan's civil war that has killed some 2 million people in the last 20 years. In 2005 a 6-year peace agreement was signed by the Government and Rebel forces. Recent battles near Abyei indicate the fragility of this peace. The

attacks in Darfur in the West continue and the Network has served a number of recently arrived Darfur families.

The roots of the war go back to the granting of independence from British rule in 1956. The two halves of the country, as administered by the British, were Northern and Southern Sudan. Politically, they were a contrast between a basically "trader" Islamic North and a traditional agricultural South and they were treated differently by their colonial rulers.

The North was given much greater independence to practice Islamic statecraft and missionary work was prohibited there. The South was a series of protected tribal groups, between whom the British had enforced a peaceful semi-tolerance of each other. Many of the Southern tribes had been converted from animism to Christianity by British approved missions and schools run mostly by Anglicans, Presbyterians and Catholics, with other smaller missionary groups as well. The Muslims of the North saw themselves linked through a long history with the Islamic states of the North – Egypt and Libya in particular and regarded Black Africa as lacking the ability to run a civilized government.

Many in the South had been schooled in British- mission schools while some of the tribal leaders' children had attended overseas schools and colleges. Their view of a democratic form of government was quite different from the view of the government in the North. The tensions existed from the first day of independence and civil war was a somewhat natural result as the South resisted the attempts of the North to impose Shariah law and northern economic and political domination.

The South's most accepted sociologist and historian, Frances Mading Deng (PhD. Yale), now of the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C. describes the situation this way:

“The politically dominant and economically privileged northern Sudanese Arabs, although the products of Arab-African genetic mixing and a minority in the country as a whole, see themselves as primarily Arab, deny the African element in them, and seek to impose their self-perceived identity throughout the country. - - - The ruling Arab minority thus seeks to define the national character along the lines of their self-perception, itself a distortion of their composite identity as a mixed Arab-African race in which the African element is more visible, but actively denied. - - - Only through mutual recognition, respect and harmonious interaction can the Sudan achieve and ensure a just and lasting peace. - - - Tragically, this has remained a mirage since independence.” (p.515)