

### Note to Editors

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#### Enslavement in Sudan

--'Our People Were Turned to Ash'—Victoria Ajang

As introduced and quoted by Nat Hentoff in *The Village Voice*, New York, March 29 - April 4, 2000

Victoria Ajang, a native of Southern Sudan, testifies that she twice escaped Sudanese government slave raids and now lives in Kansas. 'I am here by myself, with only my children,' she says. (The government in the north of Sudan is the National Islamic Front.)

She told her story to Congress on May 27 of last year. Ajang and the American Anti-Slavery Group are urging American pension and mutual funds, along with cities and states, to get rid of their stocks in Talisman Energy, a huge Canadian oil company. Talisman is a partner of the Sudanese government, which is deeply involved in the enslavement of black Christians and animists. "The dispute over oil," Victoria Ajang begins, "first became an issue of life and death for me in 1983. That year the government began its program to pipe oil from our land in the south up to the north. Students in my town were quite upset about our resources being diverted by the government, and so they held a protest march outside the local school. But the government would not tolerate this.

"On a summer night, the government militia forces suddenly swooped in on our village. We were at home relaxing, in the evening, when men on horses with machine guns stormed through, shooting everyone. I saw friends fall dead in front of me. While my husband carried out our little daughter Eva, I ran with the few possessions I could grab. "All around us, we saw children being in the stomach, in the leg, between the eyes. Against the dark sky, we saw flames from the houses the soldiers had set on fire. The cries of the people forced inside filled our ears as they burned to death. Our people were being turned to ash."

Ajang and her family jumped into a river at the edge of town, and escaped. She continues her story: In another village, "it was a Sunday evening, the 25th of July, in 1992. At that time, I was pregnant with my fourth child. After services, we gathered on the church grounds for singing and drumming. But then suddenly armed forces and government

militias attacked. They were shouting, 'Allah Akbar! God is great!' This time it was impossible to grab anything, except the hands of my children. All around us we saw people who had been dancing just minutes earlier, now lying dead outside the church. "Unlike the raid in 1983, I fled with my three children in one direction, while my husband ran off in another direction. I have never seen or heard from him again. My aunt, Laual, aged 45, was dragged off by soldiers, along with her three grandchildren. I know that my aunt died soon after being repeatedly raped by the soldiers. I know this because her grandchildren not only saw her die, but also witnessed her rape. My neighbor, Batul Adam, was captured as well. Her beautiful daughters were taken captive and given to northern masters. "There is a powerful ideology that drives these slave raids. In the government's mentality, all blacks are slaves. Whether Christian, Moslem, or animist, we should be slaves forever. We are inferior beings who must submit or be killed."

