

By David Steynberg



# Darfur – Orphans Of War

## A child's fight for survival.

**I**n mid February, president of humanitarian organisation Make Way Partners, Kimberly Smith, had a discussion with an orphaned girl named Kristina under a mahogany tree in southern Sudan. This is teenage Kristina's story of how she found herself at Darfur's only orphanage available to children displaced by a seven-year-long war.

My name is Kristina. When the Arabs attacked my village in 1998, they raped and killed my mother. I was only about four years old, but I remember very well what they did to my mother. My father was a doctor, and he tried to help our soldiers. But when the Arabs killed my mother, he took me and ran far away to Ethiopia. He was a good man and tried to keep me safe. But we travelled for many months by foot and so many people died along the side of the road. I remember when my father would get tired and have to put me down, I was always tripping over the dead people because my legs were too small to lift them high over the piles of bodies.

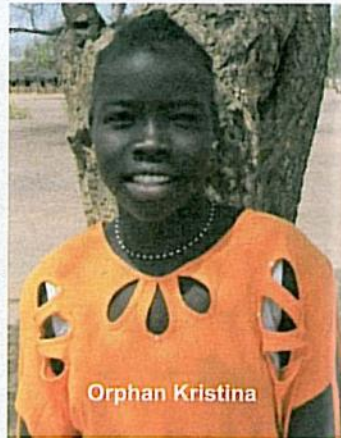
We stayed in Ethiopia until the war reached there, too. So then my father fled with me trying to get back to our village. He hoped maybe it would be safe there by then. It took us many more months of walking, and I almost drowned as we crossed many of the rivers. They were so rough and my father was starting to go a little mad so he couldn't hold onto me very well anymore. Finally, we made it back to Nyamlal. But shortly after that he died. Some grown men helped me to bury him, but then they left me alone. I heard them say, 'There are simply too many orphans to worry about this one'. But, 'this one' was me, and I was worried. I lay alone on top of my father's grave for many days just waiting for the hyenas to eat me, or to starve to death so that I would not be alone anymore, but with my mother and father. After

some days I grew tired of crying and began to go out into the bush looking for leaves to eat. I ate them, but they made me so sick that I just crawled back on top of my father's grave. Then one day a man came walking by. He found me sitting on my father's grave. He told me his name was James Lual Atak – he asked me my name and where my parents were. I told him they were dead and I was alone. He said, 'Come follow me. I will take you to New Life Ministry (NLM), and if you will follow the way I teach you, you will grow strong and you will not be alone anymore'. I did not know what NLM was, but I wanted to grow strong and not be alone anymore, so I went with him.

At first, at NLM, we (me and the other orphans) didn't have any proper food, but James Lual Atak taught us the right way. He taught us to pray. He taught us to read and to write, and then one day Mama Kimberly came to visit us.

All I remember about her the first time I met her is that she kept crying. I thought, 'This woman will never be able to help us because she is always crying'. But then after she left, Lual Atak told us she'd left us money for food. Since that day, the food has never stopped. Even now that we are so many (500 orphans) the food never stops. I read in the Bible about Manna – I think it is like that. Only now we get 'pigeons' too, because we have a weekly bull slaughter for meat. Today, Mama

Kimberly told me about how many people pray for me and all my friends here at NLM. She also told me that you are the ones who send the money so that we can eat everyday, learn about God, and have a safe home to live in. Sometimes, I still go visit my father's grave where I used to sleep, and I feel sad. I am glad I don't live there anymore. I know that he doesn't live there either, but He lives with Jesus, where I will one day, too. Thank you for loving all of us orphans, and for raising us up properly! 99

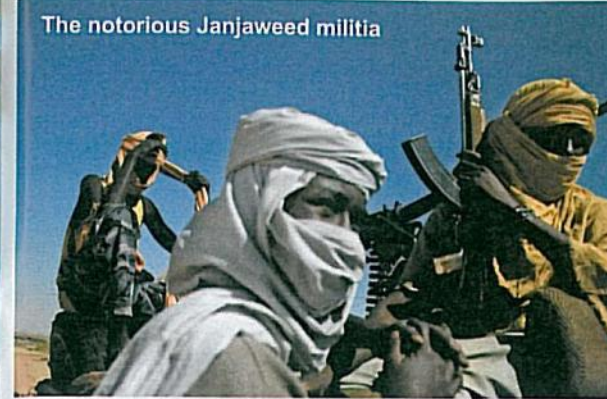


Orphan Kristina

## Darfur's first and only orphanage built by Make Way Partners



The notorious Janjaweed militia



## History Of The War

FOR decades, an Arab militia group called the 'Janjaweed' from the northern region of Africa's biggest country Sudan, has been involved in a clash over land against non-Arab Sudanese farmers in the south of the country. For five decades in Sudan, more than four million people have been killed by the Janjaweed, been victims of human trafficking when they were captured by the slave raiders or have died of thirst and starvation in an on-going war, according to Kimberly Smith, president of Make Way Partners which is assisting orphans displaced by the conflict.

Drought, famine and desertification have all added to the tension over land use between the African farmers and Arab herders, who use rape, murder and pillaging as intimidation tactics against the villagers. Ironically, however, nearly the entire population of Sudan is Muslim – non-Arab Muslims and Christians have all been dragged into this conflict.

It is therefore not surprising that resistance through force was inevitable, and in February 2002, rebel groups drew first blood against a Sudanese army garrison, following it up in 2003 with the seizure of the garrison town of Tine in western Sudan on the Chadian border. In that same year, two opposition groups called the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) rose up in Darfur, attacking government troops in the northern Darfur capital city of al-Fashir, destroying bombers and gunships, killing 75 soldiers, pilots

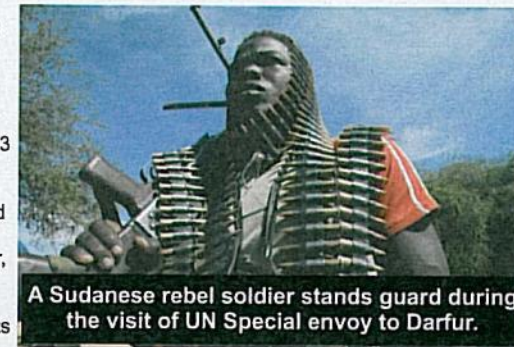
and technicians, and capturing 32 army personnel, including the commander of the air base. The rebels cited the Sudanese government's inability to protect local villagers from nomadic Arab groups as reasons for the attack. Further attacks against the government's military by the SLA saw the rebels win 34 of the 38 engagements.

But this is when things turned ugly. The Arab government's three-pronged counter-insurgency arsenal against the rebels was assembled, and included beefing up military intelligence, making use of the air force and bringing the Janjaweed on board. Despite denials

by the Arab government, much evidence suggests the Janjaweed militia were supplied with arms and artillery, and were given free reign to attack and pillage non-Arab villages in Darfur, displacing hundreds of thousands of villagers.

The rebel groups, however, are not exempt from the atrocities committed against villagers, committing rape, abductions and murder themselves. The conflict hit international crisis levels when, in the Spring of 2004, 100 000 refugees fled across the Sudan-Chad border chased down by Janjaweed militia.

Unbelievably, though, the average person on the South African street has no idea that this war continues to leave raped women bleeding next to their dead husbands and their daughters taken only to be used as child brides or sold into trafficking rings.



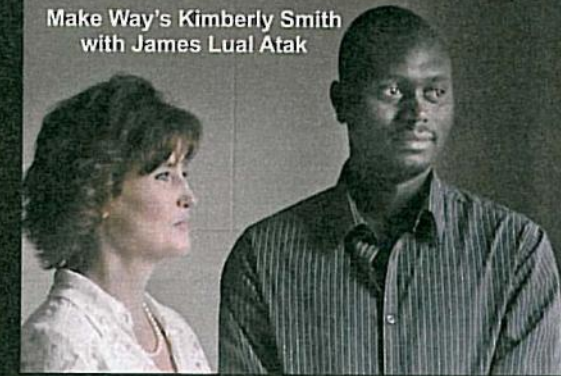
A Sudanese rebel soldier stands guard during the visit of UN Special envoy to Darfur.

## The Products Of War

TODAY, as the sands of the Sahara continue to shift in the wind:

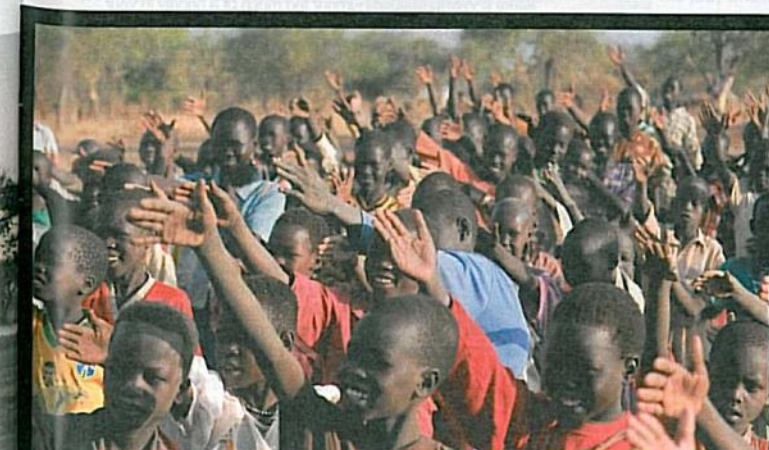
- Some 300 000 men, women and children have died.
- Up to 2.6 million people have been displaced.
- Over 200 000 Darfur refugees occupy neighbouring Chad.
- Southern Sudan is the poorest nation in the world, with one of the highest per capita rates of victims of human trafficking and enslavement.
- Up to two million women and children have been taken to Northern Sudan as slaves.

Make Way's Kimberly Smith with James Lual Atak



## Can You Help?

THERE are many, many more Kristinas still roaming the vast expanses of Darfur, alone, scared and traumatised. Visit [www.makewaypartners.org](http://www.makewaypartners.org) for more on how you can get involved in Darfur.



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