

Background: Lost Boys of Sudan

The extraordinary story of how the boys of Sudan became lost starts with the origins of daily traditions of migration in Sudanese society. It is very common practice in Sudan the boys would be initiated into manhood followed by, young adolescent boys in southern Sudan becoming mobile. The boys were organized into small groups of their peers and, they would

leave home for a period to look after cattle. They would also head for the towns or cities to go to school or to seek their fortune, before eventually returning home. When Sudan experienced times of stress like most African families many would send their children elsewhere to find safety, food, work and schooling. Unfortunately this Sudanese tradition during the war process escalated dramatically. Fearing they would be targeted as potential combatants, many boys left their villages and headed for cities such as Juba and Khartoum hoping to find work or schooling. The cities became saturated with migrants; the boys often had to resort to begging or petty crime. Some boys set out for refugee camps in Ethiopia traveling with friends or relatives, others slipped away on their own at night. Few had any idea of what lay ahead of them. They believed the trek would last only a few days and discovered that they faced a harrowing journey of 6 to 10 weeks. Continually under threat, they would flee for their lives, losing their way in the wilderness. Often they lost everything en route—blankets, sheets, shoes, clothes and pots—to soldiers, swindlers or bandits. Many fell victim to killer diseases. Others were so weakened by hunger and lack of sleep that they could go no further and sat down by the roadside—prey for lions and other animals. The survivors who reached the camps in Ethiopia started to lead a relatively peaceful life. This peace was short lived due to change of government in Ethiopia in May 1991 they had to flee again, back to camps in the Sudan. This time the journey was during heavy rains, and many perished crossing the swollen rivers or were hit by aerial bombardment. The luckier ones made it to a camp where they received help from the International Committee of the Red Cross. This relative security was shattered again late in 1991 when fighting erupted around them, and they and children from other camps were on the move once more, eventually heading for Kenya. Since 1992, UNICEF has managed to reunite nearly 1,200 boys with their families. But approximately 17,000 remain in camps in the region. The Lost Boys fled their homeland of Southern Sudan because of conflict, between the Sudanese government and a rebel group called the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. However, just as the war in the south appears close to resolution, another major conflict has broken out in the far west of Sudan, in a province called Darfur. But even as horrible as the situation in Sudan continues to be, it is by no means the only area of the world where people are forced to flee their homes in search of safety elsewhere. It is estimated there are 35 million displaced people in the world today.

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How many displaced people are there? Where are the major populations? What are the trends?

The majority of people who are displaced fall into one of two categories: refugees or internally displaced people (also called "IDPs"). Refugees are people who, in order to escape conflict or persecution, have fled across an international border (as the Lost Boys fled to Kenya, for example). Once across a border, they seek and generally receive the assistance and protection of the United Nations, through its refugee agency called the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). UNHCR responds as quickly as possible to new instances of refugees anywhere in the world. It establishes refugee camps in which inhabitants are fed, sheltered, provided with health care and other fundamentals and generally taken care of until they are able to return home or until another permanent solution is found for them – like being resettled in a new country. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of refugees (including the Lost Boys) end up staying in camps for years, even though the goal of the camp system is to provide emergency protection and assistance and help refugees to safely and voluntarily return home as soon as possible. Internally displaced people, or IDPs, flee their homes and villages for reasons very similar to refugees – conflict or persecution. Unlike refugees, however, instead of crossing an international border, they stay within their home country. There are many reasons why IDPs may choose to stay in their home country: voluntarily (to remain close to family, to farms, etc.); because they are too frightened to cross a border; because their own government will not allow them to leave; or because they are prevented from crossing by authorities on the other side of the border. There is no fixed UN agency similar to UNHCR that protects and assists internally displaced people – instead, each IDP crisis is managed in a different way, often causing confusion and generally meaning that IDPs do not benefit from the international system in the same way as refugees. Historically, those fighting wars were supposed to do everything they could to avoid harming civilians. More recently, however, this rule has been broken with increasing frequency. And more worryingly, civilians are now often the targets of the wars themselves – because of their race, religion or ancestry, because those fighting want to take over land or resources, because they are thought to support an enemy, or for no reason at all other than pure destruction and evil. Particularly in poor countries with weak governments, civilians that have become the targets of conflict often have little alternative but to flee. Sometimes they go far away and stay for long periods of time -- this was the case for many Afghan refugees

in Pakistan and Iran, as well as for the Lost Boys. Other times, as in Colombia, people may flee somewhere closer and come home when they think their attackers have left. Too often, they have to repeat the process over and over, as conflicts continue over years or even decades. In 2004, according to the US Committee for Refugees, there were just under 12 million refugees and 23.6 million internally displaced people throughout the world. The majority of the displaced – both refugees and IDPs – are found in Africa. In fact, Africa hosts more IDPs than all other continents combined. Civilians fleeing violent, long-standing conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and throughout West Africa account for the majority of Africa's displaced. But displacement is not limited only to Africa. The war in Colombia has uprooted nearly three million people, and there are still tens of thousands of people displaced from the wars in the Balkans – even almost ten years later. Though more than two million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan, there are still more than one million left in Iran and Pakistan. And there are smaller – but no less desperate – refugee and IDP populations in almost all regions of the world: Russia, Turkey, Iraq, India, Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and others. In the last decade, while the number of refugees has been slowly declining, the number of IDPs has greatly increased. There are various reasons for this trend. First of all, the majority of post-Cold War conflicts have tended to be internal conflicts rather than wars between states – the wars in the Balkans, for example, rather than the war between Vietnam and the US. When conflicts arise within a state, it is much more likely that people fleeing the conflict will stay within that state, though fleeing to a region where they feel safer. But it is also true that countries neighboring conflicts, or countries that have in the past welcomed refugees from far-away wars, are becoming less willing to allow people to cross their borders. This reluctance is tied to a variety of concerns, mostly associated with cost and security issues. As the number of displaced people continues to increase, how will poor and war-ravaged countries be able to cope? Should the U.S., for example, continue to take in more people like the Lost Boys, or should the displaced stay in camps until there is peace in their home countries? Do the U.S. and other wealthy countries have the responsibility to help those who cannot help themselves, or must the governments or rebel groups fighting the wars be held accountable for the consequences – including displaced civilians? The United States has traditionally resettled more refugees each year than all other countries in the world combined. In

recent years, however, resettlement in the U.S. has declined dramatically. As the resettlement program – along with nearly all other immigration programs – is revamped in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, it is important to keep in mind that refugees like the Lost Boys are not the only people that benefit from refugee resettlement. Because of the program, American citizens themselves benefit enormously from the chance to learn from and work or go to school with people from all over the world, with vastly different life experiences – a key cornerstone of the American story.

Summary: Choose 2 countries that have refugee or IDP's and provide similarities and differences between the 2.

35 Million Displaced People

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