



SUCCESS STORY

Court in Darfur Convicts Two Government Soldiers of Child Rape



Darfurian women carrying out their daily household chores are often the victims of violence.

USAID/OTI supports the UNDP Legal Aid Network's efforts to promote access to justice in Darfur – especially for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

July 2008 – In March 2008, two 14-year-old girls walking in a wooded area on the outskirts of Nyala, South Darfur's capital, were approached by two government soldiers who informed them that the area was not secure. The girls reluctantly agreed to be escorted to safety, but grew increasingly fearful as they were guided away from the direction of town. Upon reaching an empty school building, the soldiers raised their weapons and ordered the girls to undress. According to the girls' testimony, the events that followed happened too quickly for them to do anything but scream in resistance.

Rape has become a common feature in Darfur, where more than five years of violent conflict has led to a general breakdown in law and order. As part of its effort to combat violence against women in Darfur, USAID's Office of Transition

Initiatives (OTI) supports the UNDP Legal Aid Network to promote access to justice – especially for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The network consists of 60 Darfurian lawyers who provide legal advice and representation to those in need, and who also fight impunity by strengthening the justice system and by ensuring that it adheres to basic legal standards. The challenge is colossal; SGBV has been widespread in the region, but the total number of cases is unknown. In the past three years, only about 50 rape convictions have been secured.

After the assault, the girls struggled to return to their homes. The girls' families were outraged and grief stricken, but they were too poor to hire an attorney. However, the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) legal aid services enabled them to bring the case to the attention of a respected lawyer. With diligent pressure, the lawyer took the case to court, filed charges, and convinced the military authorities to strip the soldiers of the customary immunity. (Under Sudanese law, the military, the police, and national security forces typically enjoy immunity from prosecution.) The court sentenced both men to 10 years imprisonment and 10 lashes.

Despite the success of the USAID/OTI-supported UNDP Legal Aid Network, numerous obstacles to accessing justice in Darfur persist – not least of which is the deep mistrust Darfurians have for the institutions that are tasked with ensuring their safety and security.

USAID/OTI supports the UNDP's efforts to ensure the basic rights of vulnerable civilians and to mitigate the impunity so often enjoyed by perpetrators.