

Rights Group: Sudanese Arab Militiamen Use Rape As A Tool Of War To Terrorize Black Africans In Darfur

By RodriqueNgowi

Associated Press Writer

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) - Sudanese Arab militiamen rape women and girls as young as eight in the violent campaign intended to hurt, humiliate and drive out black Africans from the troubled region of Darfur, a human rights organization said Monday.

The Sudanese Janjaweed Arab militiamen sometimes torture and break limbs of women to prevent them from escaping rape, abductions and sexual slavery, Amnesty International said in the report titled: "Sudan, Rape as a weapon of war in Darfur."

Thousands have been killed and more than a million black Africans have fled their homes in the face of attacks by the government-backed Arab militiamen known as Janjaweed, or "horsemen" in the local dialect.

The Janjaweed "are happy when they rape. They sing when they rape and they tell that we are just slaves and that they can do with us how they wish," a 37-year-old victim, identified only as A., says in the report.

Sudan on Saturday ordered that committees of women judges, police officers and legal consultants investigate rape accusations and help victims through criminal cases in the Iraq-sized Darfur region.

The Arab militiamen routinely kill black African men in the western region and target women and girls for sexual violence, Amnesty International said, citing hundreds of interviews human rights workers conducted in camps sheltering people who fled the atrocities in Darfur.

"Women and girls are being attacked, not only to dehumanize the women themselves but also to humiliate, punish, control, inflict fear and displace women and to persecute the community to which they belong," the London-based group said.

"In many cases the Janjaweed have raped women in public, in the open air, in front of their husbands, relatives or the wider community," the group said. "The suffering and abuse endured by these women goes far beyond the actual rape ... survivors now face a lifetime of stigma and marginalisation from their own families and communities."

Women in Darfur who have undergone female genital mutilation are at an even greater risk of injury and face higher risks of infection by HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, the rights group said.

Darfur's troubles stem from long-standing tensions between nomadic Arab tribes and their African farming neighbors over dwindling water and agricultural land. Those tensions exploded into violence in February 2003 when two African rebel groups took up arms over what they regard as unjust treatment by the government in their struggle with Arab countrymen.

Aid workers and refugees accuse the government of arming and providing air support to the Janjaweed, who have torched hundreds of villages in a campaign equated with ethnic cleansing. The government denies any involvement in the militia attacks.

There are also reports that the Sudanese government is integrating members of the Janjaweed into army and police units deployed around Darfur, said Erwin Van der Borgh, Amnesty International's deputy head of the Africa program.

The United Nations estimates up to 30,000 people have been killed in Darfur, but some analysts put the figure much higher. The death toll

could surge to more than 350,000 if aid doesn't reach more than 2 million people soon, the U.S. Agency for International Development has warned.

Pressure has mounted on Sudan to end the slaughter. The

latest peace talks ended prematurely Saturday after rebels walked out saying the Sudanese government must first disarm the Janjaweed.

The rebels were also seeking government commitments to allow an international inquiry

into the killings, prosecute those responsible, lift restrictions on aid workers and release prisoners of war.

The peace talks began after a concerted diplomatic push by the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and U.S.

Secretary of State Colin Powell, who visited the region earlier this month.

Powell said Friday that he expects to hear from U.S. experts next week on whether Sudan officials should be charged with genocide.



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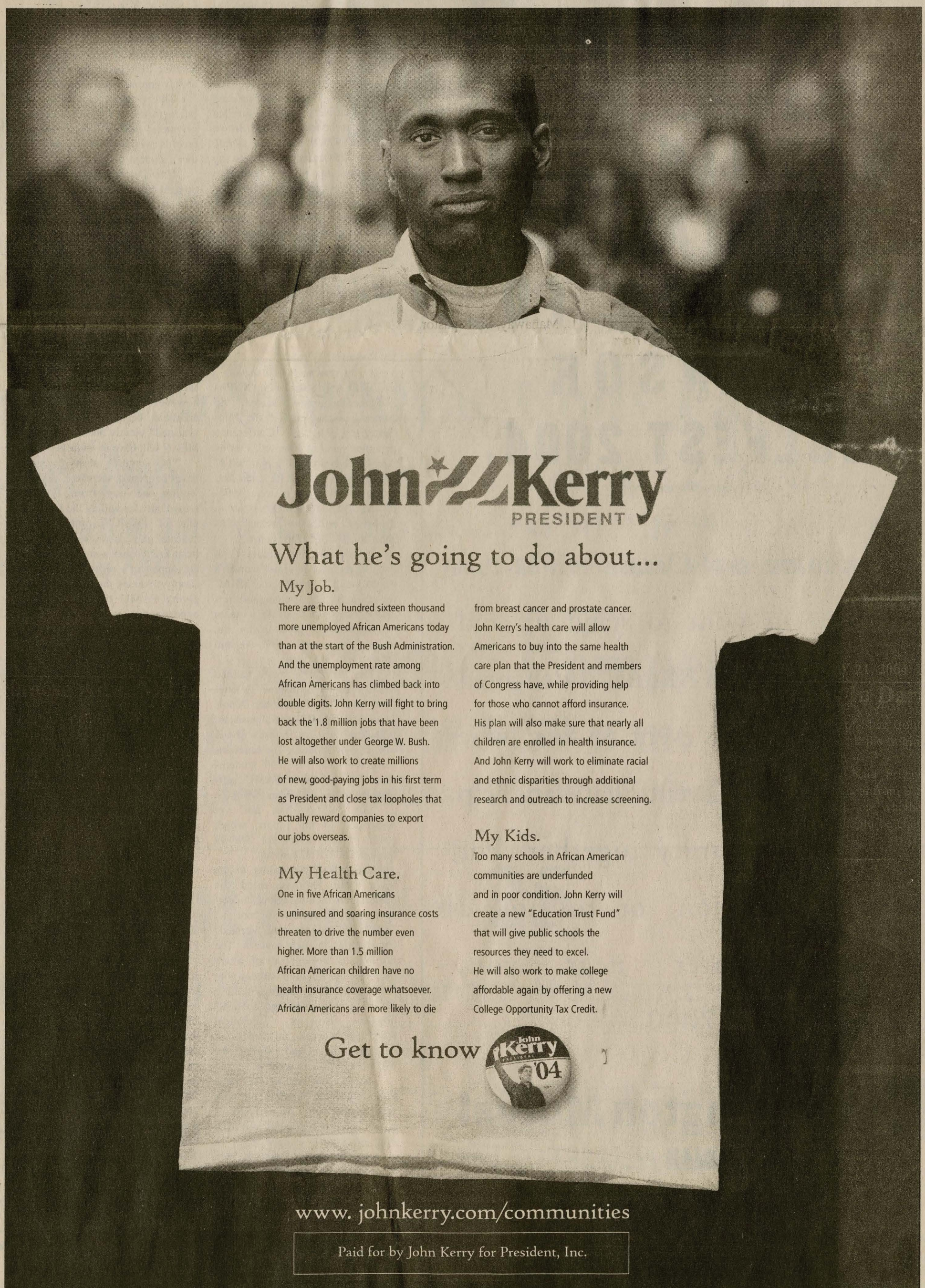
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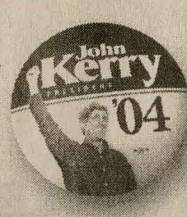
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