

[Transcript] The Intelligence from The Economist / Genocide returns: slaughter in Sudan

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Hello, and welcome to The Intelligence from The Economist. I'm your host, Aurea Ogumbi.

Every weekday, we provide a fresh perspective on the events shaping your world.

Bowel cancer used to be seen as an old people's disease, but this misconception has meant that

cases in young people, which are on the rise, are being missed. Our correspondent digs into

what's being done to change that. And New York might be one of the filthiest cities in the rich

world. People leave their rubbish in bags on the pavement, and it invites rats, which is

not very pleasant. The city sanitation department has a new policy on bins, which could help.

But first,

today, we're bringing you a story of war that may be less well known,

but is no less horrifying than those in Israel and Ukraine.

It comes from Kinley Salmon, our Africa correspondent. He's been speaking to

survivors of the conflict in Sudan. A warning, the stories they've told him are disturbing.

Hanan Kamis is a Sudanese woman. She's part of a Black African community in West Darfur called

the Masalit. And she and her 23-month-old baby boy, Sabir, had been living in what had become a

war zone, the city of Elginina. And in mid-June, the gunfire and the rockets just became too much,

and Hanan decided she had to flee. So she hoisted her baby Sabir onto her back, strapped him on, and started walking from Sudan towards neighboring Chad.

But on the way, fighters who, she says, were wearing the uniforms of the Rapid Support Forces,

or the RSF, swooped down on them, suddenly blocking the road and surrounding them.

She told me that some of the young fighters were barely more than teenagers.

They shouted that men couldn't pass, and then they dragged the men in her group

to the side of the road and told the women just to run.

But before she could run, a young gun-toting fighter spotted that she had Sabir wrapped on her back,

and he shouted, we don't allow any men to flee to Chad. Then he grabbed open the

shawl that was strapping Sabir to her back and shot him in the head.

Hanan told me, immediately, my child died.

I met Hanan in a refugee camp in Chad, just over the border from Darfur in Sudan.

And in that same camp, four other mothers tell of similar horrors

wrought on their babies while they were trying to escape Darfur.

And later, a humanitarian worker texted me to say that 68 other mothers in that camp,

so that their children were deliberately killed by Arab militias or the Rapid Support Forces.

That camp, of course, is just one of many of Sudanese refugees in Chad.

Darfur, where they're fleeing from, is a huge region. It's largely

arid, but with a population of around 10 million, and much of it has once again become a lawless zone.

And these Arab militias seem to be, in particular, murdering massive men,

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really, as we've seen so horrifyingly, pretty much regardless of their age.

To even reach the border of Chad and Sudan, I had to take a special UN flight from the capital of Chad. That only got me piled away. There, in a sort of arid heat, I crammed onto another UN aircraft, this time a heavy helicopter. We all put on earmuffs and flew to a town called Adre right on the border. It's there in Adre that hundreds of thousands of refugees have been crossing

and have crossed into Chad, desperately looking for safety.

And as you drive around Adre, it is just a sprawl for miles of makeshift camps, tents and huts made of sticks, or perhaps UN tarpaulins. There are children and women, in particular, everywhere, far fewer men. In Adre and around, I spoke to dozens of refugees. Everyone had harrowing stories of loss on of desperate escapes. One man had lost 18 members of his extended family, another had lost 10. And so the devastation in Adre is, it's hard to comprehend.

This violence in Darfur hasn't come out of nowhere. It's linked to a broader war going on in Sudan between the Sudanese armed forces, the proper army, if you like, and the rapid support forces, the ISF, which is a paramilitary rival faction of the military, who are fighting each other in a brutal civil war. And that's pulverized much of Sudan's capital city, Khartoum. But in Darfur, where Hanan is from, though there have been sort of skirmishes in fighting between those two rival factions of the military, most of the violence has been by Arab militias and the ISF, whose stronghold is Darfur, against the Masalit tribe, this black African ethnic group. And it's been against Masalit civilians to a very large degree. And the killing has been very extreme. And the UN is investigating credible reports of 13 mass graves in the city of El-Janena. The ISF seems to be trying to get rid of anyone in Darfur who doesn't agree with them or who might rival them in what is their power base. But taken together, that systematic violence against the Masalit looks very clearly like genocide in Darfur.

This is not the first time that war, and according to many genocide, has come to Darfur, and in particular to the Masalit.

This is Abdul Aziz, another Masalit man I spoke with near Andrei. He was just 10 years old and living in village in Darfur when the last major fighting against black Africans took place.

Some of these men, he says, were also wearing military uniforms.

Arab militias like these were sent by the government back then. They were sent partly after armed groups from black African tribes, including the Masalit, had rebelled against the Arab-dominated government in Khatun. But in response, the Janjuwit, these Arab militias, they didn't only attack rebels, they attacked civilian villages, they torched houses, they shot anyone who lived there, and they abducted the 10-year-old Abdul Aziz.

He told me with tears in his eyes that one night he managed to escape and make it back home to his village.

In the roughly two years that followed from 2003 to 2005, millions fled Darfur, perhaps 170,000 people died. The vast majority of them from hunger and disease. But Abdul Aziz and his parents survived and managed to flee to a refugee camp in Chad.

In 2011. And how was life there? It was very difficult. Many of the refugees who fled Darfur back in 2003 to 2005 never returned to Sudan. But Abdul Aziz did go home and he tried to rebuild a life there. But in April of this year, of course, fighting in Sudan restarted.

Abdul Aziz tells me that this time the fighting was even worse. He, his wife, and their two young

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children were forced to flee again to Chad. And that's where I found them in a refugee camp just outside of Adre. All the time, you know, we were being attacked by different sites and they said, we don't want to see him as a live tribe. So even in that time, I don't know where my wife and my kids.

As he's telling me of his ordeal, he rolls up his translate to show me the scar from the bullet that hit his leg as he was fleeing just a few months ago.

This is the shorting of the gun. Just two, three months ago? Yeah, in Al-Chunena.

When they find just black person, they can, there's no question. Yes, they can shoot you.

Almost everyone else I spoke to talked of, you know, sustained targeted attacks against the Maslip people. The accounts of the atrocities by Arab militias and by the RSF are really the worst I've ever heard. Another man I met by the name of Ali described to me how when the fighting started,

he first fled his house in a Maslip area of Al-Chunena, this city in West Afor, because it was being targeted and he hid in a derelict building in another part of town.

But he described for me through an interpreter how he saw with his own eyes from his hiding place a group of eight men forced to lie down by the rapid support forces, the RSF, and then shot in the back as they lay on the ground.

He tells me that before shooting the the prone men, the killers said, you are Maslip, you are not allowed in this town.

But the atrocities go much, much wider.

Sitting on mats outside in the heat of the day in Andrea, I spoke with a woman's rights activist named Zahara and she wept as she recounted how a 27-year-old university student that she knew was gang raped in front of her mother. The woman was told that the baby will be Arab by the men raping her and that she should bring it to the Arab part of town when he's born.

The fighting and the killing in West Afor seems even more one-sided than it did back in 2003 when the conflict began with rebel attacks against the government and the atrocities went on in the context of an ongoing war. This time the Maslip did try to defend themselves with weapons from a local police station as the fighting broke out, but they were quickly outgunned. And what's really striking and horrifying this time is just how targeted the killing is.

People being asked their ethnicity and killed at roadblocks, that's reminiscent of genocide and Rwanda in 1994. Almost everyone I spoke to and Andrea told me that the road and the paths to Chad were littered with black bodies. In parts of West Afor there has been at least a lull in violence since those terrible peaks in June, but that is partly a result of the rainy season and the mud that comes with it, which has made it more difficult for the RSF or Arab militia to mount large-scale attacks in other towns and villages, but those rains are now ending and many now expect Sudan will see an uptick of violence as the dry season makes such attacks possible once again. It's just extraordinarily difficult to imagine that peace is going to come to Darfur anytime soon, but for people like Abdulaziz who have fled Darfur not once but twice to go back again is just a distant dream. When I see the freedom I can go back, but there's no freedom now. I cannot go back.

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Dame Deborah James, a British teacher turned journalist was just 35 when she was diagnosed with bowel cancer. Hello, I'm Deborah James. I've always known her as a bowel babe. She died six years later after documenting her life with the disease and raising more than 11 million pounds for bowel cancer research and awareness. I thought actually maybe some good can come out of this because I thought I feel so awful. I just wanted to share the problem. Talking about it is sharing it. How young she was when she was diagnosed really shocked people, but cases like hers are actually becoming more common. Emily Steinmark writes for our US digital team.

Bowel cancer is the world's second most lethal cancer. Cases in high income countries have actually fallen in older age groups since the mid 80s. In America, which is quite representative through high income countries, rates among the people that are over 75 have more than halved and you see the same thing in people between 65 and 74. But for young people, those age between 15 and 39, it's almost doubled in the last 20 years. And young people are less likely to be screened so that number is likely even higher than we think. That's really worrying. What's causing this increase in bowel cancer amongst young people? We don't really know. It's kind of unclear, but it fits with a general increase in worldwide cancer cases in the under 50s, what we call early onset cancer. And we know that bowel cancer has previously been linked with unhealthy lifestyle, poor diet, a number of genetic dispositions. But why it would be rising in young people is less clear. There are some studies that have suggested that it could be to do with the gut microbiome. So younger people that have bowel cancer tend to have a slightly different profile of the bacterial communities that live in their gut. But it's still not a clear cut thing. There's also the fact that tumors take decades to grow. And so a lot of these factors, whether it's to do with diet and exercise or even chemical exposures, those sorts of things would be going all the way back to childhood if we're looking at people that are getting cancer in their 20s and early 30s. And you mentioned earlier that young people are less likely to be screened. Why?

So really because we thought that bowel cancer was an old person's disease, they just haven't really been screened that's exacerbating the problem, especially because bowel cancer and younger people can really easily be missed because the symptoms overlap quite a lot with symptoms you'd see in very common health issues like irritable bowel syndrome.

So if you have a young person coming in, say they're 30, and they have changing bowel habits, they have abdominal bloating, they just generally don't feel very good, the sort of front of mind thought there isn't bowel cancer. And so they will not be tested, they will not be screened, and it will take quite a long time before their cancer is found. And at that stage, they're in a much worse position. It's what happened with Dame Deborah James. It's also what happened with Chadwick Boseman, an actor who died when he was 43 but had bowel cancer in his 30s.

And the pandemic has exacerbated this problem because low screening sort of didn't happen generally, but it's now increased in the over 50s and it's making a significant impact. So we know that screening works. It's just that it's not catching these people in their younger years. And is anything being done to change that? So in a number of countries, universal screening age is being brought down. In America in 2021, they brought it down from 50 to 45. And in Britain, they're gradually lowering it from 60 to 50. So finally, it will be 50 in 2025.

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And the US preventive task force says that screening at 45 would prevent 24 to 28 deaths from bowel cancer per 1000 screened adults compared to no screening at all. So we do know that this is going to go in and save some of those people. However, some doctors and actually some of the people that initially suggested screening should be lower to 45 in America worry that it's not low enough and that more needs to be done to cover the people that are under 45 and who might have bowel cancer. And is the screening itself a difficult process? Would it be difficult to extend this to more people? Screening is actually quite simple in the first instance.

The first line is an at home stool sample test that you then send off and then a lab will look either for blood or it will analyze the DNA and see if there's anything that looks off. And then the next stage is then a colonoscopy. That's a bit more involved and there are some risks associated with that. But generally, the risks are quite rare. The main thing holding us back, however, is a lack of understanding about why young people are facing this increase. And that kind of makes it difficult to work out who needs to be tested and not because it's a lot of effort and money. Some people might find it really very invasive to have this kind of test. And so people want to make sure that we have a clear picture of who needs to be screened before that sort of stuff is rolled out. Emily, thank you so much for coming on the show. Thank you.

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out more. It might sound like just another rubbish pickup, but in reality, it's New York's attempt to finally clean up its streets. Right now, most residents and businesses pile their rubbish by the curb. That causes filthy pavements and attracts rats. So many rats that tapes of them have gone viral.

Yesterday, the internet blew up over this video of a rat carrying a whole slice of pizza down the stairs of a subway station. There it is. He's dragging his slice down the stairs.

Crazy thing is that video was actually taken by another rat. It's like, hey Tony, now New York City is midway through a campaign to rid the city of vermin and catch up with the rest of the world. New York City is doing something revolutionary for New Yorkers.

Rosemary Ward writes about New York for The Economist. It has rediscovered the rubbish bin. A massive overhaul of the sanitation department is underway with the primary goal to move black rubbish bags off the city's pavements and into sealed garbage containers.

Okay, before we get into the policy, it's probably an obvious question, but doesn't New York already have containers for its rubbish? It's not an obvious question. It begs the question. New York has been at a step with its peers domestically when it comes to rubbish pickup.

Cities like Chicago have alleyways for bin men to go down. Elsewhere like Paris, Barcelona, Milan, all use containers. And some cities in the Netherlands and South Korea even have submerged ones. But New York wasn't always so far behind. From the 1930s through almost all of the

60s, New Yorkers use trash cans, metal containers like the one Oscar the Grouch lives in on Sesame Street. But then in 1968, there was a sanitation strike and everything changed.

Every moment that goes by, the situation gets more serious. There's 10,000 tons of garbage

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that are left on the streets every day. Piles of rubbish went uncollected for nine days. The piles were so bad that the city distributed black plastic bags for the overflow. And within a few short years, those plastic bags just ended up being part of the formal collection process.

Okay, so now the city's finally moving on. What's the plan for this program?

The program is pretty extensive. By March, most businesses will be required to put trash into sealed containers. And by next autumn, almost all residents will have to do that as well.

And that's about 95% of New York City's residents. The city has already implemented similar rules specifically for businesses in the food industry like restaurants, supermarkets and bodegas.

Once this entire program's in place, about 70% of New York's waste will be in containers.

Surely people have been disgusted by the rubbish on the pavement for a while.

Why is this all changing now? New Yorkers have been grossed out for decades.

They've endured it and in many ways have accepted it. But New York's Mayor Eric Adams, who was elected in 2021, has met at his mission to do something about New York City's dirty streets.

No more tripping over black bags during the rush hour. No more watching these bags litter our sidewalks. What really seemed to get Mr. Adams committed to dealing with rubbish

was the thousands of complaints from New Yorkers about rats. It's pretty common to see swarms of rats crawling, playing, eating out of the piles of black rubbish bags on the city streets.

I've even seen them in playgrounds. So when Mr. Adams entered office in 2022,

he declared rats public enemy number one. It is expensive enough to live in a city

with our families and children. We don't need outside tenants like rats in our homes terrorizing us every day. He hired a ratsar, which got plenty of attention for the job posting.

It called for someone with a killer instinct to fight rats. Even more crucially,

he hired Jessica Tisch as a sanitation commissioner. Bags of trash and the rats

represent a united axis of filth that conspires to challenge our city's success. Ms. Tisch took

inspiration from the police department where she worked for 12 years. Three decades ago,

city crime began to fall when policing changed from responsive to more preventive tactics,

and they relied on crime statistics to spot problem areas. She's doing the same thing,

using calls into the customer service phone line. She's very serious about trash.

And have any of these efforts worked, the new efforts by the sanitation department,

but also just the mayor's office more broadly? It's early days, and not all New Yorkers are

convinced. Some are concerned it isn't worth the cost. Restaurants say the containers are taking up space that rather use for sidewalk seating. We talked about earlier how one of the big changes

coming is garbage bins for residents. There's a pilot program testing that in a really dense area.

We don't have the results yet, but the early data from the rest of the trash mitigation efforts

are really promising. Calls to the city's customer service line about rats fell by a fifth over the

summer in areas that the city is focusing on, which they call rat mitigation zones. The decrease

in rat complaints was 45%. Sanitation is one of those few things entirely under municipal control,

so it's completely under the city's power to do something about it. It just hasn't done it

in decades. And if Mr. Adams and his department succeeds, New York could be a model for the thing

it was so late to adopt, the rubbish bin. Rose Marie, thank you so much for coming on the show.

Oh, thank you so much.

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