|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sudan has been involved in civil war fueled by religious, ethnic and regional strife since the mid-1980s. Thousands of children have experienced mind-numbing horrors and intense hardship. Their story has been dubbed the***Lost Boys of Sudan*** because they arrived at Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya without parents.The name, borrowed from the children's story "Peter Pan," describes a generation of Sudanese boys driven from their tribal villages by a devastating civil war between north and south Sudan. Most of the "boys" - which, regardless of age, is how they still refer to one another -- are from the various tribes of Southern Sudan and most are orphans. Approximately 26,000 Sudanese boys were forced by violence from their southern Sudan villages in the late 1980s. | Lost Boys of Sudan |

|  |
| --- |
| Their villages were attacked mostly at night. The boys, some as young as 4 years old, ran into the surrounding forest (girls were more likely to have escaped or died with their parents, or have been enslaved). They then started walking to a refugee camp in Ethiopia, where they stayed until the Communists overthrew the government in 1991 and forced the young boys to leave at gunpoint. Chased by Ethiopian government tanks and armed militia, the boys frantically tried to cross the River Gilo, where thousands drowned, were eaten by crocodiles or shot.Those who survived the river crossing walked for more than a year back through Sudan to Kenya. Only half of the original boys, about 10,000-12,000, survived the journey, arriving at Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya in 1992. The majority of them were between the ages of 8 and 18 (most of the boys don't know for sure how old they are; aid workers assigned them approximate ages after they arrived in Kenya).They walked for days, then weeks, then months and finally for over a year. They walked anywhere from 700 to 1,000 miles, first to Ethiopia, then back to Sudan, then south to Kenya, looking for safety. Ten and eleven year olds were the elders. Seven and eight year olds became each others' parents, binding one another's wounds, sharing sips of muddy water, burying their dead. When the littlest ones became too weak or tired to continue, the older boys picked them up and carried them. Some boys, too exhausted to go on, simply sat down and died of starvation or dehydration. Others lagged behind, becoming easy prey for lions.In 2001, intolerable living conditions in the refugee camp gave the United States government reason to resettle some 4,000 of these now young men in America. Today, about 120 "Lost Boys" have made Chicago their new home. It is no small irony that several of the boys who came to Chicago were on flights to USA on 9/11 and thought they were bringing the war with them; they were diverted to Canada where they stayed for a few days before they were allowed to enter the U.S. |

|  |
| --- |
| Their spirit of hope remains strong through their unyielding faith in God, and their intense desire to become educated. They are bright with hope, full of smiles, and ready to become contributing members of their new communities, while helping to rebuild their communities in Southern Sudan. |