

## **Sudan Liberation Army-Khamis Abaker (SLA-KA)**

Khamis Abaker enjoyed a reputation as a strong village defence leader in the Masalit wars of the 1990s. Arrested in 1999 and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for armed rebellion, Abaker escaped in 2003, joined the insurgency in Darfur and was chosen as vice-chairman of the SLA, representing the Masalit tribe. Although he retains some influence as the 'historic leader' of the Masalit, his long absence from Darfur, based mostly in Eritrea, and the ambiguous nature of his positioning among the rebel factions have damaged his reputation including among the Masalit.

Most Masalit were driven off their land in 2002–03, before the conflict in Darfur came to international attention, and by early 2004 most of the fighters loyal to Abaker had been pushed into Chad. In 2007, Abaker chaired a short-lived coalition, the **United Front for Peace and Development**, widely seen as an Eritrean creation at a time of rapprochement between Asmara and Khartoum. (The Masalit were the first Darfurians to join the Sudan People's Liberation Army en masse, enrolling in the Eritrean-based New Sudan Brigade in the late 1990s, in hope of organizing a Masalit defence force to fight off Arab attacks.) Divided and displaced, the Masalit currently pose no military threat and lack leadership.

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