

'My husband was slaughtered in front of me'

As millions face violence, famine and disease in Sudan, *Closer's* Antonia Hoyle met pregnant Fatima Adem who revealed the true human suffering amid the unfolding disaster...

IT'S A SCENE OF QUIET desperation. In the baking 42°C heat, a heavily pregnant woman rests under a filthy sheet supported by two sticks – her makeshift home. Her two malnourished sons play in the dust, subdued by the searing temperature.

Fatima Adem, 25, is a month away from giving birth. But, in February this year, she was raped and forced to watch as her husband was shot dead and her home destroyed. And, even more sickening, when Fatima was raped, she didn't know she was already pregnant with her third child.

Fatima has no family, money or means of supporting herself or her children as the threat of famine looms. And she has no one to protect her. For even here, in the "safe" refugee camp in Darfur where she lives, disease

lurks in every corner. And, horrifically, she's endured yet another violent rape – this time at the hands of the camp police.

Tragically, she's not alone. An estimated 1.2million Sudanese, most of them women, have lost everything in the last 18 months, caught in the middle of a bitter African war.

But Fatima and her two sons, Abdullah, six, and Osman, four, are considered lucky – they're alive.

One of the worst humanitarian disasters the world has ever seen, the slaughter in Sudan has sent shock waves across the globe.

More than 50,000 people have lost their lives in a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing. Aid agencies predict more than 300,000 people will die this year from famine and disease alone, as two million face immediate food shortages.

Conditions among the 147 makeshift camps are dire. The UN says that over half of the refugees are short of food, 93 per cent lack sanitation, 67 per cent have no water and 88 per cent are without shelter.

The situation has become so desperate that, last week, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw flew to Sudan to see the disaster for himself.

A 30-day UN deadline for



Antonia visits Fatima and her son Osman, victims of the violence in Sudan

Sudan to restore order in the country and ease the humanitarian crisis expired this week, with the threat of international action and sanctions if it has not been met.

But, for many like Fatima, it's too little too late. "I don't think things will improve," she says, barely noticing the flies crawling over her face. "I just wish the fighting was over."

But seven months ago, Fatima was leading a peaceful life. She and her husband, Abdullah, owned a farm in the Si mountains in western Sudan.

Although Darfur, the region they lived in, had always been poor, the couple lived well from the cows, donkeys and camels they kept.

Their lives could have

continued comfortably, if violence hadn't erupted in Darfur in February 2003.

After years of being denied proper healthcare and education by the ruling Arab government, Africans protested with a series of armed uprisings.

In response, the government suppressed them with force – helped by other Arab groups, also known as the Janjaweed.

Within months, the Janjaweed became brutal bandits, scouring the Darfur countryside on horseback, destroying the property and lives of ordinary African people.

It was the middle of the day when several armed Janjaweed burst into Fatima's home.

"My husband was on the farm





Fatima doesn't want to return to her farm where she lost her husband, home and livelihood

and the children were outside," she remembers. "The men grabbed me and ripped off my earrings and necklace. Then one raped me.

"I was too terrified to protest. I knew these men existed, but my family had never been a part of the rebel uprisings."

As Fatima lay sobbing, her husband walked back into their house. Within seconds, one of the thugs had shot him dead and set fire to their home. The group then escaped on horseback.

"I felt empty and sick," she says. "I was also scared they'd come back to hurt my children. So, an hour later, I'd hidden them in a sari and fled barefoot."

Most who have fled their homes are women, as men are considered a threat to the Arab regime and killed.

Although the Sudanese government isn't directly involved in the atrocities, they've done little to stop the Janjaweed.

Fatima fled to El Fashir, the capital of north Darfur. The journey, across rocky desert terrain, took 10 days on foot. "My feet were blistered and raw," she remembers. "My back ached from carrying my children. But we had to get to safety."

They were placed in Abushock camp by authorities, known as the "Hilton" because of its relatively good facilities. Set up last April, it now holds nearly 50,000 refugees.

Despite its comparative comfort, shelters are sheets thrown over a few sticks, water is limited and monthly food

rations consist of rapeseed oil, corn and flour. Each toilet is shared by 20 people.

But, for the women living there, the Sudanese police who patrol the camps are the biggest danger. Exhibiting monstrous cruelty, they've not only stolen Fatima's food – they've raped her too.

"One of the policemen came into my shelter a few months ago and raped me," says Fatima.

"I was scared but, after the last rape, I wasn't surprised. Several of my friends here have been raped and beaten by the police as well."

Reports of retribution are common, making women reluctant to report rapes in the camp.

Diseases like cholera and

malaria are rife, as families are forced to share the limited lavatory facilities. Children are particularly at risk, and Fatima will soon have another child to look after.

"I discovered I was pregnant a couple of months ago," she explains. "I'd been too busy worrying about my other children to realise before. Now I'm scared for the health of my unborn baby."

She has good reason to worry. Even though her camp has a clinic, many babies now die of malnutrition before they reach six months.

Tragically, life for these women is likely to get worse. It the rainy season in Sudan now and flooding could ruin crops – and spark a widespread famine

The British government has pledged over £60m to help the crisis. They're also putting pressure on the Sudanese government to cut their ties with the Janjaweed and improve security in the camps.

For women like Fatima, these changes won't come a minute too soon.

"I don't want to go home," says Fatima. "The Janjaweed might attack again and there's nothing for me to return to anyway."

"But staying here is dangerous too. I'll always have the fear of being raped again."

Most of all, she's worried for her children.

"My life has been torn apart," she says. "I couldn't stand for the same to happen to theirs."

"I want them to have a future free from fear and fighting – a future where they will be safe."

By Antonia Hoyle in Sudan



The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) is raising funds to help people like Fatima driven from their home in Darfur. To make donations call 0870 606 0900 or visit www.dec.org.uk