

= Francis Bok =

Francis Piol Bol Bok (born February 1979) , a Dinka tribesman and native of South Sudan , was a slave for ten years but is now an abolitionist and author living in the United States . On May 15 , 1986 , he was captured and enslaved at the age of seven during an Arab militia raid on the village of Nyamlel in South Sudan during the Second Sudanese Civil War . Bok lived in bondage for ten years before escaping imprisonment in Kurdufan , Sudan , followed by a journey to the United States by way of Cairo , Egypt .

Bok was aided by people of diverse cultures and faiths in his journey to freedom . His earliest steps towards the United States were helped by a Northern Sudanese Muslim family that believed that slavery was wrong and provided him a bus ticket to Khartoum . Upon arriving in Khartoum , Bok was aided by a fellow Dinka tribesman and members of the Fur people , and his trip to the United States was paid for by members of the Lutheran church . His first point of contact in the United States was a refugee from Somalia who helped him get settled in Fargo , North Dakota .

Bok has testified before the United States Senate and met with George W. Bush , Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice , telling them his story of slavery . He has been honored by the United States Olympic Committee , the Boston Celtics and colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada . Francis now lives in the U.S. state of Kansas , where he works for the American Anti-Slavery Group (AASG) and Sudan Sunrise , an organization that works for peace in Sudan . Bok 's autobiography , *Escape from Slavery : The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity and My Journey to Freedom in America* , published by St. Martin 's Press , chronicles his life , from his early youth , his years in captivity , to his work in the United States as an abolitionist .

= Childhood and abduction =

Francis Bok was raised in a large Catholic family of cattle herders in the Dinka village of Gurion in Southern Sudan . His father , Bol Buk Dol , managed several herds of cattle , sheep and goats . When Bok was captured at the age of 7 on May 15 , 1986 , he could not count beyond 10 and knew very little of the outside world .

Bok was captured after his mother , Adut Al Akok , had sent him to the village of Nyamlel to sell eggs and peanuts in the village market with some older siblings and neighbors . This was Bok 's first trip to the village without his mother , and it was the first time he was allowed to sell some of the family 's goods at the market .

Bok went to the market , where he heard adults say that they had seen smoke coming from nearby villages and had heard gunfire in the distance . People began fleeing the market as Francis saw horsemen with machine guns . The gunmen surrounded the market and shot the men in Nyamlel . The raiders were part of an Islamic militia from the northern part of Sudan that conducted periodic raids on the villages of their Dinka neighbors , who were Christians or animists of Sub-Saharan African descent .

= Life as a slave =

Seven year old Bok was captured by Giemma , a member of the slave hunting militia , who forced him to join a caravan of slaves , stolen produce , livestock and wares that the militia had captured in their raid of the Dinka settlement . When the members of the militia split up to return to their homes , Bok was taken by Giemma . Upon arriving at Giemma 's residence , Francis was beaten by his captor 's children with sticks and was called *abeed* . The word literally means " slave " and the stereotype is that of an inferior , demeaned , Negroid race . Francis was given quarters in a hovel near the pens of Giemma 's livestock .

Bok began a ten year period of slavery at the hands of Giemma and his son Hamid . He was forced to tend the family 's herds of livestock . He had to take them to pastures in the area and to local watering holes , where he saw other Dinka boys who were also forced to tend herds of livestock . He began to suspect that his life was going to change forever and that his father was not

going to be able to save him . His attempts to speak to the other Dinka boys were futile , as they were speaking Arabic , which he could not understand ; they also seemed afraid to speak to him .

According to Bok , as he grew older , Giemma and Hamid began to place more trust in his abilities as a herdsman . Care of the cattle , horses and camels was passed to Bok and he was able to spend more time alone with the animals . Previously he had been under the careful supervision of Hamid and sometimes Giemma . In addition to having him serve as his slave , Giemma forced Francis to convert to Islam and to take the Arabic name of Abdul Rahman , meaning " servant of the compassionate one . " In his autobiography , Francis states that although he was forced to convert to Islam , that he never stopped praying to God for strength to get him through his ordeal .

Bok tried twice to flee from slavery at the age of 14 . The first instance happened early one morning after he had been sent out with the cattle . Bok blindly ran down a road for several miles before he was captured by one of Giemma 's fellow militia members . Giemma 's peer returned Francis to the Giemma 's compound , where he was beaten with a bullwhip . Bok attempted to escape once again just two days later , when he fled in the opposite direction of his previous escape . He once again fled for several miles , this time keeping to the forest . He stopped for water at a local stream crossing , where he was spotted by Giemma who happened to be there as well . Giemma forced Francis back to his home , this time promising to kill him . Francis was beaten again , but Giemma chose not to kill him , as Francis had become too valuable to the family as a slave .

= = Escape = =

Francis Bok waited three years , until 1996 , before he tried to escape again . During the intervening three years he tended to the herds and regained Giemma 's trust . Giemma regularly praised Bok 's work with the animals yet still forced him to live a life of slavery .

Bok finally escaped from Giemma when he was 17 years old by walking through the forest to the nearby market town of Mutari . Bok went to the local police department to seek help , and asked the police to help him find his people . Instead of helping him , the police made him their slave for two months . Bok escaped from the police by simply taking their donkeys to the well , tying them , and leaving them behind as he walked into the crowded marketplace .

Bok asked a man with a truck to give him a ride out of Mutari . The man , a Muslim named Abdah , agreed to help him . Abdah thought that slavery was wrong and agreed to transport Bok to the town of Ed @-@ Da 'Ein in the back of his truck amongst his cargo of grain and onions . Bok stayed with Abdah , his wife and two sons for two months while Abdah tried to find a way to take Bok to Khartoum , the capital city of Sudan . When he could not find a friend to provide passage to Khartoum , Abdah bought a bus ticket to Khartoum for Bok . Francis Bok arrived in Khartoum with no money , no place to go , and did not know where to turn . Fortunately for Francis , another stranger helped him find his way to his fellow Dinka tribespeople in Khartoum in the Jabarona settlement .

= = Journey to the United States = =

Jabarona was filled with Dinka refugees who had fled the fighting in the south of Sudan and were forced to live together in sub @-@ standard conditions . Bok settled among people who were from the Aweil area of North Bahr al Ghazal and began using his Christian name of Francis once again . Bok was quickly arrested by the Sudanese police for telling his friends and neighbors that he was a slave . Slavery in Sudan is a subject that was largely denied by the government in Khartoum and anybody that spoke of it could be arrested or even killed . Francis was interrogated numerous times while he was imprisoned and each time he denied that he was a slave . He was finally released from prison after seven months . Once he was released Bok decided that he must leave Sudan . Through the help of some Dinka tribesman he was able to acquire a Sudanese passport on the black market and obtain a ticket for passage to Cairo .

Upon arriving in Cairo in April 1999 , Bok was directed to Sacred Heart Catholic Church . This church was well known among the Dinka in Khartoum as a place of refuge in Cairo . While staying at

Sacred Heart , Bok began to learn some English and made important contacts among the Dinka population of Cairo . He also began practicing his Christian faith without fear of reprisal . He eventually moved out of the church compound and into an apartment with other Dinka who were also seeking UN refugee status in order to leave Africa for the United States , Great Britain or Australia .

Bok applied for and received UN refugee status on September 15 , 1999 , and after several months of waiting , the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service agreed to allow Francis to move to the U.S. Bok flew from Cairo to New York City on August 13 , 1999 , and from there he flew to Fargo , North Dakota . His journey was sponsored by Lutheran Social Services and a United Methodist Church , both worked together to provide an apartment for Francis in Fargo and helped him find a job . Bok worked several jobs , making pallets and plastic knobs for the gearshift of cars . He heard of a large population of Dinka in Ames , Iowa , and moved to Ames after several months in Fargo . It was while living in Ames that he was contacted by Charles Jacobs , founder of the American Anti @-@ Slavery Group based in Boston , Massachusetts .

= = Work as an abolitionist = =

Jesse Sage , associate director of the American Anti @-@ slavery Group , and Jacobs persuaded Bok to move to Boston to work with the AASG . He was initially hesitant to leave his new friends in Ames , but according to Bok , the people at AASG were persistent . He arrived in Boston on May 14 , 2000 , AASG helped him find an apartment . A week after moving to Boston , he was invited to speak at a Baptist church in Roxbury and was interviewed by Charles A. Radin of The Boston Globe . Two days after his speech in Roxbury , Bok was asked to meet with supporters of AASG on the steps of the United States Capitol in Washington , D.C. He returned to Washington on September 28 , 2000 , and became the first escaped slave to speak before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations . Francis was invited to Washington again in 2002 for the signing of the Sudan Peace Act and met with President George W. Bush . It was during this trip to the White House that Bok became the first former slave to meet with a U.S. President since the 19th century .

Francis Bok has spoken at churches and universities throughout the United States and Canada and he has helped launch the American Anti @-@ Slavery Group 's website iAbolish.org at a Jane 's Addiction concert before an audience of 40 @,@ 000 on April 28 , 2001 . Perry Farrell was a key early supporter of the iAbolish movement . Bok has also been honored by the Boston Celtics and was chosen to carry the Olympic Torch past Plymouth Rock prior to the 2002 Winter Olympics . His autobiography , *Escape from Slavery : The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity and My Journey to Freedom in America* , was published in 2003 by St. Martin 's Press .

Bok currently lives with his wife , Atak , and their two young children , Buk and Dhari , in Kansas . He is now working in the AASG 's first extension office in Kansas . He also works with Sudan Sunrise , a Lenexa , Kansas @-@ based organization that seeks to work for peace and unity in Sudan .