



On Jan. 9, the people of South Sudan began their week-long referendum to decide whether to separate from the Arab-Muslim North and form an independent country. But Achol Yum Deng didn't vote. Though she has more reasons to seek separation from the North than most of her countrymen, she couldn't register: Since 1998, Achol was a slave serving her master in the North and was only liberated just before the voting began.

The war booty of a man named Adhaly Osman, Achol was threatened with death, gang-raped, genitally mutilated, forced to convert to Islam, renamed "Mariam," and racially and religiously insulted. She lost the sight in one eye when her master thrashed her face with a camel whip for failing to perform Islamic rituals correctly. This mother of four saw two of her children beaten to death for minor misdemeanors. She also lost the use of one arm when her master took a machete to it in response to her failure to grind grain properly.

Achol is one of 397 slaves whose liberation was facilitated and documented by Christian Solidarity International and the American Anti-Slavery Group in the state of Northern Bahr el Ghazal as voting commenced.

