



One Hundred and Fourteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing
“Human Rights Violations in South Sudan”
Rayburn 2172 - Friday, July 10, 2015 - 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Good Morning. On behalf of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, I would like to welcome everyone to this very important hearing on the dire human rights and humanitarian situation besetting the young country of South Sudan.

I have the honor of co-chairing the Commission with my esteemed colleague, Congressman Joe Pitts, whose presence I welcome today. I also welcome the other members of the Commission who have joined us this morning.

I extend a special welcome to our witnesses – thank you for your time, your work, and your passion for upholding human rights in South Sudan and around the world. I also want to recognize the members of the diaspora organization *South Sudan Women United* who are in the audience today, and thank them for their efforts, through their churches, to promote peace and reconciliation in South Sudan.

Finally, I thank the Commission staff for organizing this hearing.

We are here today to discuss the grave human rights and humanitarian situation in South Sudan, the world’s newest country. Yesterday marked the fourth anniversary of the founding of the independent Republic of South Sudan, on July 09th, 2011, after nearly 40 years of war between the Sudanese government and southern insurgents. I supported South Sudan’s struggle for independence, and I remember the hope that blossomed when the referendum on independence passed with nearly 98% of the vote.

But today, for a huge share of the South Sudanese population, that hope has been replaced by utter despair. In December 2013, less than three years after independence, a political dispute erupted between President Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, and former vice president Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer, and quickly escalated. Since then, more than 2 million South Sudanese have been forced to flee by violence -- about 17% of the country’s estimated total population. 1.5 million people are internally displaced, and another 600,000 have fled as refugees to neighboring countries. Two-thirds of those who’ve fled are minors, under the age of 17. The UN has

estimated that 4.6 million people – nearly 40% of the population – will face life-threatening hunger by July 2015; that is to say, by right now. This is not the future for which the people of South Sudan voted.

What kind of violence are we talking about that could generate such a massive humanitarian crisis? The U.N. Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) reported that “from the very outset of the violence, gross violations of human rights and serious violations of humanitarian law have occurred on a massive scale. Civilians were not only caught up in the violence, they were directly targeted, often along ethnic lines.” The State Department’s list of conflict-related abuses includes ethnically-targeted killings, torture, disappearances, child soldier recruitment, and sexual violence. In the event that list is not sufficiently vivid, in May UNICEF informed the world of brutal and horrifying killings of South Sudanese children, with reports of boys being castrated and left to bleed to death, girls as young as eight gang raped and murdered, and children tied together before their attackers slit their throats, while others were thrown into burning buildings.

To complicate things further, the South Sudanese government recently kicked out U.N. humanitarian coordinator Toby Lanzer after he talked publicly about the food crisis in the country. Mr. Lanzer had sought to address the growing humanitarian crisis in South Sudan and ensure that South Sudanese civilians receive life-saving aid. His expulsion comes on top of the systematic denial of access for humanitarian actors to civilian populations by all sides of the conflict; it is a cynical move that can only exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation.

On July 4th, our independence day, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote about the unimaginable stories of rape, castration and mass murder committed by the government of South Sudan, a government that the United States helped install. The role we played leaves us with a special responsibility. President Obama is about to travel to Africa. He should take the time to talk to some of the survivors of this newest incarnation of the Sudanese conflict, and finding some way to stop the violence in South Sudan should be among his top priorities. Meanwhile, maybe it’s time we leave aside the diplomatic niceties involved in organizing humanitarian aid, in favor of just massively dropping in food. Would the South Sudanese shoot down U.S. planes bringing aid? Would we then have enough reasons to sanction the country’s top political leaders?

I am profoundly troubled that we need to be here today, but I remain deeply committed to making sure that we in Congress are doing as much as we can to provide for the basic needs of the South Sudanese people and to protect their fundamental rights. For this reason, I look forward to the testimony of our distinguished witnesses, and in particular, their recommendations as to what further actions the U.S. Congress can and should take to put an end to the conflict in South Sudan and redress its terrible consequences.