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TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION HEARING

*HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE: SUDAN'S ONGOING WAR AGAINST ITS OWN CITIZENS*

Chairmen McGovern and Wolf, distinguished Representatives, and fellow guests of the commission, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns about the unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Sudanese states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

Residents of these two areas live in a constant state of terror because of the Government of Sudan's campaign of violence against its own people. This includes indiscriminate aerial bombings that have made it impossible to plant and harvest crops—leading to a severe food crisis throughout the region.

The current situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile leaves no doubt that the Government of Sudan's methods and modalities are intended to create famine against all citizens in those areas. It is up to the U.S. and the international community to take appropriate and immediate steps to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of suffering Sudanese people.

Our organization, Samaritan's Purse, began working in Sudan in 1993. Our work in Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan began in 1998, and we conducted extensive humanitarian aid operations in those areas until the government cut off international humanitarian access in June 2011.

Over the last 20 years, I have made many trips to the country to oversee our efforts there, and I was witness to some of the darkest days of the civil war in the south and the atrocities in Darfur. Today I see that gruesome history repeating itself. Brutal attacks by the Sudanese Armed Forces and indiscriminate bombing—all against civilians—were major contributors to the famines that led to hundreds of thousands of deaths in southern Sudan in the 1990s.

Although the international community eventually launched Operation Lifeline Sudan, the Government of Sudan routinely manipulated and denied flight access to United Nations humanitarian agencies in order to use food as a weapon of war. These denials were frequently

carried out in coordination with the Government of Sudan's ground and air military operations against civilians.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, aid organizations frequently became the target of Sudan's aggression. On February 9, 2002, a World Food Programme distribution center in Akuem, southern Sudan, was bombed, killing two children and injuring more than a dozen others.<sup>2</sup> Just weeks later, a similar attack was carried out at another distribution center in Bieh in Upper Nile, while people were waiting in line to receive food.<sup>3</sup> The Government of Sudan has shown no hesitation in using food as a weapon to brutalize its citizens.

In June 2011, a new wave of violence swept over South Kordofan as the Sudan Armed Forces resumed fighting against the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). The Sudanese government bombed villages indiscriminately—destroying homes, markets, schools, churches, and mosques. Over 200 of Samaritan's Purse staff, including 12 expatriates, were stationed in the region and witnessed the bombings first-hand. Large numbers of civilians sought refuge in the rocky caves and crevices of the Nuba Mountains. Many remain in hiding today. In September 2011, the Government of Sudan launched similar attacks in Blue Nile State.

The Government of Sudan has cut off all humanitarian access to SPLM-N-occupied areas in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. Samaritan's Purse and other international aid organizations are unable to reach hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians who have no access to food, clean water, medicine, and other basic necessities.

We maintain communications with Sudanese national staff in both of these regions. One of our former staff, Ryan Boyette, remained in Nuba on his own when we had to suspend our operations there. Boyette founded Eyes and Ears Nuba, a network of citizen journalists who report from the frontlines on the atrocities committed against the Nuban people.

What we are seeing on the ground is evidence of an orchestrated campaign to terrorize and starve people. The indiscriminate bombing has displaced households and destroyed fields, disrupting the planting cycle of a people who depend on their crops to survive. The first wave of bombings in June 2011 corresponded with the beginning of the planting season. Farmers were forced to flee their homes instead of sow their crops. The violence continued and increased when I was in South Kordofan at the time of harvest in November 2011.

According to a rapid assessment conducted in South Kordofan in August 2012, the food security situation is deteriorating rapidly. The number of households surviving on one meal per day increased from 9.5 percent to 81.5 percent in just one year.<sup>4</sup> A December 2012 rapid needs

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<sup>1</sup> [Sudanese Government denies humanitarian access to 1,7 million people in southern Sudan](#). WFP. 05 Apr. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> [WFP deplors air attack on food distribution site in southern Sudan](#). UN News Centre. 13 Feb. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> [WFP condemns attack on civilians at food distribution in Southern Sudan](#). WFP. 21 Feb. 2002.

<sup>4</sup> [Rapid Food Security and Nutrition Assessment: South Kordofan](#). The Enough Project. Oct. 2012.

assessment in Blue Nile State found that three communities reported 1,712 deaths from starvation.<sup>5</sup>

The food security situation will only get worse in the coming months. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, many areas within both South Kordofan and Blue Nile are currently in stressed or crisis phases. Several areas within both states are projected to reach the emergency phase between July and September of this year.<sup>6</sup>

Currently, over 71,000 refugees are registered in the Yida refugee camp in Unity State and approximately 117,000 are registered in camps in Meban County, Upper Nile State of South Sudan.<sup>7</sup> Samaritan's Purse runs extensive water, food, and medical programs in the Yida refugee camp as well as in the camps in Meban County. Our staff routinely hear first-hand accounts of the depth of suffering in South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

The situation is especially critical for vulnerable groups like the elderly and young children. Four-year-old Waida weighed only 14 pounds when she reached Yida. Her mother told the staff at our nutrition stabilization center that the family had lived on mostly bugs and leaves for months. They were constantly running from bombs, so there was no way to be able to grow food. They had walked for over a week to reach Yida.

We were able to save little Waida, but I often think of the thousands of starving children like her who haven't made it to safety. How many of them will never be able to make it across the border? How many of them will die because the international community refused to take real action?

Yes, while the international community is wringing their wrists over what should be done to resolve this conflict, people are dying because no cross-line or cross-border humanitarian access corridor has been established. The Government of Sudan will not allow it.

This is the regime that has harbored Osama Bin Laden, supported terrorist organizations, and is led by an indicted war criminal.<sup>8</sup> I urge the Obama administration and members of Congress to intervene immediately on behalf of the Sudanese people.

I don't believe that another agreement between Sudan and South Sudan, or the SPLM-N or Sudan Revolutionary Front, is the answer. Sudan historically uses agreements to obstruct peace, buy time, and confound all parties involved. Decades of broken agreements have led to a loss of faith in any future agreements. The citizens of Sudan are tired of being killed by their own government.

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<sup>5</sup> *Rapid Needs Assessment: Blue Nile State*. Grey Areas Consortium. Dec. 2012.

<sup>6</sup> [South Sudan Food Security Outlook](#). FEWSNET. Accessed 15 June 2013.

<sup>7</sup> [Registered Refugee Population: Unity and Upper Nile States](#). UNHCR. Accessed 15 June 2013.

<sup>8</sup> [State Sponsors: Sudan](#). Council on Foreign Relations. 02 Apr. 2008.

If we look at the challenges that face South Kordofan and Blue Nile—displacement, malnutrition, lack of clean water and sanitation, and lack of medical care—it comes back to a single cause: aerial bombing. The bombing forces people to flee their homes. The bombing destroys fields and disrupts the planting cycle. The bombing drives people into the rocks and crevices of the Nuba Mountains and away from improved water and sanitation facilities.

The bombing needs to stop and the bombing can be stopped. The destruction of air traffic control facilities in a few military airports in Sudan will inhibit the government's ability to continue their violent attacks on the people of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The Government of Sudan's ability to launch these air attacks can and should be destroyed.

An end to the bombing will not only put an end to the constant state of terror that the people of South Kordofan and Blue Nile have lived in for years; it will enable them to regain their livelihood as they come out of hiding, return to their homes, restore their fields, and resume crop production.

Such a resolution does not require a major commitment or a no-fly zone. It only requires the political will to recognize that a government that kills its own people has no legitimacy to rule. As President Obama said in reference to the crisis in Syria in a statement released on February 4, 2012:

"Every government has the responsibility to protect its citizens, and any government that brutalizes and massacres its people does not deserve to govern."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ["Statement by the President on Syria."](#) The White House: Office of the Press Secretary. 04 Feb. 2012.

# North and South Sudan

