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Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing “Human Rights in Sudan”

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Good Morning. Thank you for attending this morning’s hearing on the dire human rights situation in Sudan and the multiple humanitarian crises besetting the country. I would like to extend a special welcome to the panelists – thank you for your time, your work, and your passion for upholding human rights in Sudan and around the world. I am grateful to lead the Commission with my fellow co-chair, Congressman Frank Wolf, who will be joining us shortly. Mr. Wolf is at a markup and will be joining us as soon as he is finished. I would also like to thank Denise Bell and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for organizing this hearing.

It is with great regret that the Commission finds it necessary once again to call a hearing on the Sudanese government’s ongoing campaign of massive human rights abuses against its own people in multiple regions of Sudan – in Darfur, in South Kordofan, in Blue Nile, and elsewhere. But we cannot turn our attention to Khartoum’s continual campaign of criminal and callous human rights abuses without looking at the massive human suffering they have caused. In Sudan, the two walk hand-in-hand.

Humanitarian crises plague Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. Today, over 2.3 million Darfuris are displaced, including nearly 300,000 as refugees in Chad. Many of these refugees have lived in Chad since as early as 2003. These refugee camps are the only home that thousands of children born there have known. They may never know their own land, Darfur. In 2007, I visited these

immense camps and heard first-hand the stories of death and despair that forced these people into exile. In South Kordofan and Blue Nile, over 1.15 million Sudanese are displaced and 200,000 more are refugees in South Sudan. In short, displacement and destruction continue unabated in Sudan.

Ten years after reports of Arab militias called *Janjaweed* committing atrocities in Darfur propelled the region into the headlines, state-sponsored abuses continue in Sudan's western region. Deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians by pro-government militias, aerial bombings, razing of villages, and looting and destruction of property and other civilian structures remain widespread. In 2004, the U.S. Congress called the state-sponsored violence genocide. The International Criminal Court agreed. President Omar al-Bashir is wanted for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes committed in Darfur.

In South Kordofan and Blue Nile, aerial bombardments have been the Sudanese government's signature tactic, to devastating effect. Bombs hit residential areas, schools and markets, health clinics and farm fields. Civilians have no protection or warning of these attacks and are forced to find shelter in caves in the nearby mountains or bush. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights paints a distressing picture of the human rights violations rising to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

These air strikes severely disrupt planting and harvesting – contributing to food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to water, and other negative health impacts – and obstruct access to basic services. Children go without school, and villages are emptied of their people. The aerial bombardments, combined with Khartoum's scorched-earth ground attacks and deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid, have led to chronic hunger and conditions conducive to famine. Rebel groups are not without blame. The SPLM-North has obstructed aid too and targeted civilians. But the overwhelming number of abuses and crimes are committed by the government of Sudan.

The government of Sudan must stop targeting civilians because of their ethnicity or who they voted for or where they live. The situation is complex – there is inter-communal violence and fighting over resources. But at heart lies an

authoritarian regime led by President Omar al-Bashir that marginalizes the periphery, turns the state's armed forces against its own people, and wages cyclical campaigns of divide-and-conquer to ensure he remains in power.

I am passionate about ending the human rights abuses and humanitarian crises in Sudan. I have been arrested three times outside the Sudanese Embassy here in Washington, DC, to protest the government of Sudan's actions against its own people, including the genocide that happened in Darfur.

In April, Congressman Wolf, Congressman Mike Capuano, and I reintroduced the Sudan Peace, Security and Accountability Act. It would create a comprehensive U.S. strategy to end serious human rights violations in Sudan, provide genuine accountability for persons who have committed or assisted in serious human rights violations, and support Sudanese aspirations for democratic reforms.

When I first introduced the bill during the last Congress, in March 2012, I referenced the words of outgoing U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan, Mukesh Kapila, who warned about Khartoum's actions in the Nuba Mountains. Without international intervention, he warned of a return to Darfur-like destruction in the region. A year later, nothing has changed, except more Sudanese are displaced, injured, hungry and malnourished, and live in fear or are killed.

The campaigns of armed conflict and deliberate denial of aid everywhere in Sudan devastates the soul and is wrong. We must act to end this cycle of violence. These circumstances demand urgent and continuous pressure from those of us who care passionately about human rights.

Today's witnesses will bring fresh knowledge from their time on the ground in Sudan and the refugee camps in Chad and South Sudan. They will bring their expertise on how to break this cycle of violence and to end the campaign of human rights abuses. But most of all, we look to them to provide knowledge and means to chart a path toward a comprehensive solution.

The United States, the world's champion of human rights, dignity, and freedom, must renew its efforts to forge the path toward a comprehensive peace solution that addresses the conflicts throughout Sudan and ends the massive humanitarian suffering. Let us resolve that what we discuss and learn here today will not go unheeded and that we all join together to stop the massive human rights abuses and human suffering in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and elsewhere in Sudan. Our conscience and their lives demand no less.