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Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to testify today and to the committee for continuing to focus on the situation in Sudan. Human Rights Watch has worked on Sudan for more than 20 years, documenting abuses during the country’s long civil war, during the Darfur crisis, and following the secession of South Sudan.

The human rights situation in Sudan has deteriorated markedly over the past two years since South Sudan’s independence, with new conflicts erupting in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states in 2011 resulting in massive displacement, widespread deprivation, and indiscriminate attacks causing numerous civilian deaths.

Political tensions between Sudan and South Sudan and cross-allegations of supporting or harboring each other’s rebels have further fuelled these conflicts. They also underscore the interlinked nature of Sudan’s internal and external challenges. In recent weeks, fighting between government and rebel forces has spread to Northern Kordofan, leading to abuses against civilians and massive displacement; relations between Sudan and South Sudan quickly soured, with oil exports and economic gain again hanging in the balance.

The Sudanese government remains highly repressive, with a draconian national security apparatus that targets real or perceived political opponents – including students – for arbitrary arrest and detention, ill-treatment and torture. Authorities routinely restrict and censor media and have blacklisted journalists for writing about sensitive topics. They have also shut down nongovernmental organizations that promote democracy, ostensibly for receiving foreign funding, and have closed a number of ethnic Nuba groups and religious groups.

In the conflict zones of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudan continues to bomb indiscriminately in civilian areas and use ground forces to attack villages and burn and loot homes and other civilian property. The bombing and fighting has killed and maimed people including young children at village markets, water points, schools, and clinics. It has driven hundreds of thousands of people to refugee camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia, and to other locations in Sudan. The government blocked international agencies from providing humanitarian aid to rebel areas, causing massive deprivation and suffering.

Today, I would like to focus my remarks on the situation in Darfur, 10 years after major fighting erupted between rebels and government forces triggering Sudan’s horrifically abusive anti-insurgency war that ultimately took an estimated 300,000 lives and forced an estimated two million people to flee their homes.

Inter-ethnic conflict: a government responsibility

Although the dominant political conflict in Darfur is fighting between government and rebel forces, numerous other inter-ethnic conflicts with political dimensions also feature in Darfur and have intensified this year with attacks at a gold mine in North Darfur and fighting in several locations in Central and South Darfur between various groups. Of the 300,000 newly displaced this year, nearly 200,000 fled inter-ethnic fighting.

These conflicts are said to reflect weak or absent law enforcement, and Sudanese authorities have repeatedly said they do not control these “tribal” fights. But this analysis overlooks the Sudanese government’s responsibility. No matter what the root causes of inter-ethnic fighting – and there are many – the Sudanese government has a responsibility to protect its civilians and to prosecute those responsible for committing criminal offenses.

Moreover, the government has not been a bystander in these conflicts. Massive attacks are being carried out against civilian populations by forces using government equipment and involving government security officials – of which senior government officials should be aware. They include known militia leader Ali Kosheib, who is wanted on an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity in West Darfur in 2003-4. Not only has the Sudanese government failed to prosecute him locally or surrender him to the ICC, it has also apparently promoted him to a commander position in the abusive Central Reserve Police.

Inter-ethnic fighting in Darfur today should be understood as a consequence of Sudan’s support for certain ethnic groups to fight alongside the government, the so-called “*Janjaweed*” militia, and of failing to rein them in, disarm them, or provide any accountability for past serious crimes.

Kosheib Involved in Attack on Abu Jeradil

Let me describe just one example of the inter-ethnic fighting in which the government is clearly involved. Last month, I went to the Chadian border with Sudan, where I had the opportunity to interview dozens of witnesses to recent fighting in Central Darfur. More than 30,000 people had recently arrived in the area following massive attacks in April on mainly ethnic Salamat-populated areas near the border.

I interviewed members of several ethnicities in addition to Salamat families, and talked to community members including women, traditional leaders and political figures, as well as Chadian forces that routinely patrol the border area. I also interviewed men who had been rounded up and detained by the attackers, and could report details about their identities.

Based on the research, a picture emerged of a coordinated attack starting on April 5 at a town called Biltebe, and continuing for several days or weeks as the attackers continued to loot and burn properties. The attacks destroyed entire villages and killed more than 100

Salamat civilians and injured at least as many. Most of the residents fled the area either to Chad or elsewhere in Darfur, and have not returned. Aid groups have not been able to access the area.

Witnesses identified the attacking forces as ethnic Misseriya, Ta'isha, and Rizzegat Arabs. Many wore khaki uniforms, or parts of uniforms, and rode in government cars belonging to the Central Reserve Police or the Border Intelligence, both of which are auxiliary forces that absorbed former Janjaweed militia. The known militia leader Ali Kosheib, wanted by the International Criminal Court, was seen in one of these vehicles at the scene of the attack on the town of Abu Jeradil.

Abu Jeradil is 30 kilometers south of the town of Um Dukhun, and was the scene of the largest attack on April 8, when large numbers of heavily armed men, most wearing khaki uniforms, arrived in two phases, first on foot and then in vehicles. They shot indiscriminately, burned homes and shops, stole livestock, and looted goods. Salamat men said they fought back using rifles but were far outnumbered and outgunned by attackers armed with various types of rockets, anti-aircraft weapons, rocket propelled grenades, and other weapons that witnesses and observers believe could only have come from the government.

Human Rights Watch could not independently verify these weapons were used, but through satellite imagery analysis we were able to confirm the extent of the damage from that attack: nearly 3,000 huts or structures were destroyed, most likely by fire, over a 25 square kilometer area. Such large-scale destruction requires a large attacking force working for several days and would suggest a deliberate intent by the attackers to drive out the population of the area.

Sudan's regular armed forces did not intervene to protect the population. While a few dozen Sudanese soldiers at Abu Jeradil remained in their barracks and provided protection to some civilians, many police and other security forces fled with the rest of the civilians. Evidence suggests Sudanese authorities prevented the African Union-United Nations peacekeeping force, UNAMID, from taking action to protect civilians.

Whether there was an intent by Sudanese government officials to push the Salamat off their land is an open question. One of the root causes of the fighting is a longstanding land dispute between the Salamat and the Ta'isha, whose members include Ali Kosheib and the current minister of finance. Many observers speculated that the government allowed these coordinated attacks to appease former militia leaders.

Human Rights Watch has called on the Sudanese authorities to fully investigate the attacks and hold those responsible to account. The UN should also investigate the attacks. We have also urged the UN Security Council, which will consider UNAMID's mandate next month, to condemn the attacks and remind Sudan of its responsibility to protect, and impose additional international sanctions on individuals found responsible.

Recommendations to the United States

The international responses to Darfur remain halting and divisive, without apparent consensus on the Sudanese government's role in ending abuses and improving accountability. Various members of the African Union and UN Security Council routinely block language that condemns new attacks against civilians or threatens sanctions, while Sudan's supporters such as Qatar have funded development projects without clear benchmarks for how their support can improve rights protections.

In this difficult environment, the United States should:

- Promptly appoint a special envoy and re-engage a wide range of regional and international actors.
- Recognize that Sudan's human rights abuses are interlinked and seek simultaneous pressure to end to abuses in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and broader political repression in Sudan.
- Work with regional bodies, particularly the African Union, to ensure that any political process contains specific human rights and justice measures, and that these go beyond the symbolic formation of an investigation committee and insist on dismantling and disarming militia and holding perpetrators of abuses accountable.
- Press for the government of Sudan to surrender individuals such as Ali Kosheib who are wanted by the International Criminal Court.
- Engage with China to further its own interest in a stable Sudan by pressing for an end to international humanitarian and human rights law violations in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.
- Press the UN Security Council to call on the AU-UN peacekeeping mission to bolster human rights monitoring and reporting at the next mandate renewal, and to state clearly that individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses will be subjected to targeted sanctions.