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Sudan: Risks to civilians increasing in Southern Kordofan

A humanitarian emergency is unfolding in the Sudanese state of Southern Kordofan, as forces from the North and South continue to launch attacks in civilian areas, Amnesty International warned today.

Tens of thousands of people are fleeing their homes as fighting continues between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and elements of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of South Sudan, which broke out on 5 June across the state.

Amnesty International has received reports from residents of the besieged towns of Kadugli and Dilling that the SAF, as well as Sudanese security forces in plain clothes, have been searching streets and houses, arresting and killing people suspected of supporting the SPLA.

Amnesty International condemns these reported unlawful killings.

"[Soldiers] were rushing out of everywhere onto the main road, asking 'are you SPLA?' They checked our things to see if they could find any documents which they consider link us to the SPLA. [If they do] they will capture you," said a Kadugli resident.

One person who fled Kadugli to Khartoum told Amnesty International, "On the way [out of Kadugli] I saw thousands of people walking towards the UN compound. They don't have food or water."

A number of the attacks are indiscriminate, including aerial bombardments and artillery fire by the SAF. Bombings have been reported in five villages south of the state capital Kadugli, and in Talodi, Heiban, Kaudo, and other towns.

"The Sudanese government must urgently put a stop to these indiscriminate attacks, and in particular must stop the bombing of areas populated by civilians and allow humanitarian agencies access to deliver assistance to the civilian population," said Erwin van der Borcht, Africa Programme Director for Amnesty International,

Access to the population by humanitarian agencies is severely restricted in the region. The majority of international NGO staff have been evacuated, and there are severe shortages of food, water, and medical supplies.

The UN has estimated that between 30,000 and 40,000 people have fled Kadugli out of an original population of 60,000. Dilling town and a number of villages surrounding Kadugli are also reportedly deserted.

Looting and destruction of property have been widespread. Civilian homes and NGO offices have been raided.

"Fierce fighting has been impeding international agencies from delivering humanitarian assistance to the civilian population," said Erwin van der Borcht. "Both parties need to take necessary precautions to avoid

civilian casualties. The UN peacekeepers of the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) must take action to protect civilians and ensure the security and freedom of movement of UN personnel and of humanitarian workers.”