

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

22 February 2002

AI Index AFR 54/006 /2002 - News Service Nr. 32/02

## **Sudan: Bombings of civilians are unacceptable**

The deliberate targeting of civilians is unacceptable and a gross violation of international humanitarian law," Amnesty International said today in a strong condemnation of a recent bombing by the Sudanese Air Force on the village of Bieh .

In the attack on 21 February, a government helicopter gunship killed 17 civilians, injured many others and disrupted a food distribution operation by the World Food Programme (WFP). The attack occurred despite a flight clearance agreement given by the Sudanese government to WFP operations on Bieh that day, under the framework of Operation Lifeline Sudan, the umbrella organization providing relief to civilians in southern Sudan.

"Once again, the Sudanese government has acted in complete disregard of its obligations under international law. We are all the more dismayed that the attack on Bieh targeted civilians already forcibly displaced in the conflict for oil resources between government and rebel forces," Amnesty International said.

The attack on Bieh, 50 miles south of Bentiu, the epicentre of oil activities in Western Upper Nile, follows earlier bombings of civilians in Akuem in the Bahr-el-Ghazal province on 9 February and in Nimne in the Western Upper Nile province. Two children died and several people were injured in the bombing of Akuem by a government military plane, hours after the WFP completed food distribution to civilians affected by the armed conflict. The Sudanese government expressed its regrets at the bombing and said it was due to a "technical fault".

Nimne was bombed on 9 February, killing five civilians, including a staff member of the international humanitarian agency Médecins Sans Frontières. The agency and civilians had evacuated Nimne on 1 February, after being warned of the movement of soldiers towards the village. Those who returned found that food supplies and houses were looted and that the agency's medical equipment and laboratory were destroyed.

The United States has suspended peace talks with the Sudanese government following the bombing on Bieh. The pledge to stop bombings of civilians was one of four confidence-building measures proposed by the recently appointed US peace envoy to the warring parties in Sudan. The government of Sudan refused the US proposition to establish a monitoring of aerial attacks on civilians but declared in January that it would suspend bombings for a month.

"The Sudanese government must immediately stop the deliberate or indiscriminate bombing of civilians and bring perpetrators of these human rights violations to justice," Amnesty International said.

The organization is also calling on the international community to press the Sudanese government to respect at all times international humanitarian law. It must ensure that all transfers of military, security and police equipment to the Sudanese government that may be used to commit human rights violations are halted. In particular, supply of aviation fuel to the Sudanese government's military air force must stop immediately, Amnesty International said. Oil companies with concessions in the Sudanese oilfields must ensure that their presence and contribution to Sudan's economy does not contribute to human rights violations against civilians.

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