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Sudan: End bombings and allow humanitarian access into conflict regions

A call by the United Nations Security Council to allow for immediate and unhindered humanitarian access in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states is a welcome move, Amnesty International said today.

On Tuesday the Security Council ended months of silence on the conflict, with a press statement aimed at the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N).

"This call is a welcome and long overdue break from the silence on Sudan's aid blockade in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile," said Renzo Pomi, Amnesty International's Representative to the UN.

"The Security Council must now keep the pressure on Sudan's government to allow humanitarian access and further condemn the indiscriminate bombings and other human rights violations taking place in both states."

On 15 August 2011, the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights released a report on Southern Kordofan, based on research carried out by human rights monitors from the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), prior to the end of its mandate on 9 July 2011.

The report documented accounts of unlawful killings, mass destruction and looting of civilian property, as well as other incidents which could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Amnesty International calls on the Security Council to act on the report's recommendations, which included mandating an independent inquiry into the alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Southern Kordofan.

The inquiry should also look into alleged violations committed in Blue Nile, where conflict erupted on 1 September, after the report was published.

In both states, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have violated international humanitarian law by carrying out aerial bombardments from high altitudes using unguided munitions on civilian-inhabited areas. The consequences of such bombings are devastating to the civilian population.

Most recently, on 6 February, four bombs were reportedly dropped on and around a health clinic in Kurchi, Southern Kordofan, damaging the clinic and the few medical supplies that were left. The clinic is near Kurchi market, which was bombed on 26 June 2011, killing 13 civilians and injuring more than 20 others – mostly women and children.

The next day, three bombs were reportedly dropped on Alabo in Southern Kordofan's Nuba Mountains, where civilians had fled to caves and rough terrain in search of shelter from previous airstrikes.

Amnesty International visited the area in August 2011 and found that many of the displaced had abandoned their fields during prime cultivation time, and were living off dwindling food supplies that included wild fruits.

“Civilians continue to live in precarious conditions with insufficient food, shelter or access to healthcare and in fear of being bombed. It is essential for the civilian population from these two areas to receive impartial humanitarian assistance,” said Renzo Pomi.

Sudanese authorities have severely restricted humanitarian assistance to Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile since the conflicts began last year. More than 300,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, including some 130,000 refugees who fled to neighbouring Ethiopia and South Sudan due to intensified ground attacks by the SAF and SPLM-N.

Last week Amnesty International issued a briefing which documents how arms sales – mainly from China and Russia – are fuelling serious human rights violations in Darfur and several other areas of Sudan, including Southern Kordofan.

The existing arms embargo, which has proven to be ineffective, covers only arms transfers to the Darfur region.