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Sudan: The human price of oil

Massive human rights violations by Sudanese security forces, various government allied militias and armed opposition groups, are clearly linked to foreign companies' oil operations, Amnesty International stated as it released its report *Sudan: The human price of oil* today.

“The civilian population living in oil fields and surrounding areas has been deliberately targeted for massive human rights abuses -- forced displacement, aerial bombardments, strafing villages from helicopter gunships, unlawful killings, torture including rape and abduction,” said Maina Kiai, Amnesty International’s Director for Africa.

“Foreign companies* are turning a blind eye to the human rights violations committed by government security forces and their allied troops in the name of protecting the security of oil-producing areas,” Amnesty International said.

“Respect for human rights should be the central issue for any company which is involved in a war-torn environment such as southern Sudan -- the silence of powerful oil companies in the face of injustice and human rights violations is not neutral.”

Around the town of Bentiu, government troops reportedly cleared the area using helicopter gunships, some allegedly piloted by Iraqi soldiers, and aerial cluster bombardment by high-altitude Antonov planes. In addition, government troops on the ground reportedly drove people out of their homes by committing gross human rights violations; male villagers were killed in mass executions; women and children were nailed to trees with iron spikes. Reports from other villages claim that soldiers slit the throats of children and killed male civilians who had been interrogated by hammering nails into their foreheads.

Rebel forces have also carried out attacks and raids on civilians in attempts to gain control over oil-rich areas. A former commander stated that these forces had summarily executed scores of civilians, raped and abducted women and burned and destroyed homesteads.

Military tactics such as the destruction of harvests, looting of livestock and permanent military occupation of the area, are being used to prevent the return of the displaced population. *The risk of famine to displaced civilians is heightening since no harvests can be expected.*

Chinese workers were apparently involved in the displacement of civilians during the construction of the pipeline. Sudanese civilians who escaped attacks reported that the Chinese workers were armed and appeared willing to use their guns.

Mujahedin fighters from Afghanistan and Malaysia have been reportedly used to protect the staff and property of companies involved in building the oil pipeline. Helicopters flown by foreign pilots have been used to ferry armed opposition troops to areas in which

fighting was taking place; these troops are alleged to have subsequently carried out atrocities against civilians.

“Companies are responsible for the impact of their operations on the local community,” Amnesty International said. The alleged involvement of security firms, as military advisors and trainers for the troops of the government-allied South Sudan Defence Force (SSDF) raises further questions as to the extent to which the involvement of the oil companies is directly or indirectly contributing to the conflict, the organization said.

There is increasing evidence that **child combatants** are being used in the conflict. A former commander of a rebel force, employed by the government to protect oil installations, informed Amnesty International that child combatants are commonly used as fighters. Children are also being taken from the streets of Khartoum and forcibly recruited to the Popular Defence Force, without their parents’ knowledge and most of them are sent to the frontline.

There is a clear connection between the new-found oil wealth and the government’s ability to purchase **arms**. Polish tanks arrived in Sudan on the day of the first export shipment of oil. Further arms transfers to Sudan from China and Bulgaria have also been reported.

Amnesty International does not condemn companies that work in countries where there is a high level of human rights violations, but it asks that they:

ensure that their operations do not contribute to human rights abuses and promote respect for human rights;

raise with the Government of Sudan the conditions for the return of those civilians forcibly displaced from their homes in Western Upper Nile and Unity States;

to ensure adequate human rights training for any security personnel they employ to protect its staff and business interests and to ensure that all security personnel adhere strictly to international human rights standards;

to give guarantees that the company’s infrastructure will not be used for military purposes that would result in human rights abuses.

In particular the organization invites the many foreign companies operating in Sudan to engage in a positive dialogue to promote human rights, including **Lundin Oil AB* (Sweden), *Petronas* (Malaysia), *ÖMV-Sudan GmbH* (Austria), *Sudapet* (Sudan), *Talisman Energy* (Canada), *Agip* (Italy), *Elf-Aquitainei* (France), *Gulf Petroleum Company* (Qatar), *National Iranian Gas Company* (Iran), *TotalFina* (France), *Royal Dutch Shell* (The Netherlands) and *China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC)*. *CNPC* is in turn owned by the People’s Republic of China. In addition, *Denim Pipeline Construction Ltd* (Canada) and *Roll’n Oil Field Industries* (Canada) which have been involved in construction work in the oilfields and on the pipeline. The UK-based companies *Weir Pumps Ltd* and *Allen Power Engineering Ltd* have contracts to provide and maintain the oil pumps. The main part of the 1,600 kilometre-long pipeline was built by companies from the People’s Republic of China, who were sold the pipeline tubing by the *Europipe* consortium. German-based *Mannesmann* (which holds one third of *Europipe* consortium shares) supplied more than 500km of pipes.

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