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Arms trade fuels violations in Sudan conflict

UN member states must act to control arms shipments to volatile regions like Sudan's Southern Kordofan, Amnesty International said today ahead of a week of talks on a global Arms Trade Treaty.

China, Russia, and the USA are among those who have provided weapons or military training to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the official army of South Sudan, which marks its independence on 9 July.

Analysis by Amnesty International has linked Russian-made aircraft to indiscriminate airstrikes in the past month that led to civilian deaths and injuries in the regional capital Kadugli and other areas in Southern Kordofan.

"Civilians are being killed and injured in Southern Kordofan with weapons manufactured by governments overseas who fail to rigorously assess the potential humanitarian and human rights risks before doing business with armed forces," said Erwin Van Der Borgh, Director of the Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"In their negotiations on a global Arms Trade Treaty next week, big powers like China, Russia, and the USA must support the rule that no weapons or munitions are sold to forces who pose a substantial risk of committing serious human rights violations."

Arms to Sudanese forces

In Southern Kordofan, the Sudanese Air Force has recently used Russian-made Antonov aircraft and Sukhoi SU-25 fighter jets, 14 of which were exported from Belarus to Sudan in 2008 and 2009, according to UN data.

Expert analysis of images of rocket fragments from airstrikes on 14 and 25 June has determined that the S-5 57mm rocket and USSR 240mm air-launched rocket were used. While it has not been possible to identify the rocket supplier, it is known these munitions can be fired from MiG-21 or SU-25 jets or from Mi24 attack helicopters.

According to satellite imagery, all of these aircraft as well as an Antonov aircraft were present at the El Obeid airbase in Northern Kordofan on 28 June. Sudanese Air Force attack helicopters are maintained by a Russian company and Sudanese Mi-24 pilots have been trained in Russia.

Sudan's military has in the past used Russian-made Antonovs for indiscriminate aerial bombing in its western Darfur region.

China has been one of the main suppliers of conventional arms to the SAF. In 2008 and 2009, China sold Sudan more than US\$23 million worth of artillery as well as nearly US\$11 million worth of tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles and US\$1.8 million worth of military firearms, according to UN data.

China only reports the export of sporting and hunting shotguns and rifles over the same time period.

Arms to the SPLA

Fighting between the SPLA and armed opposition groups since January 2011 has killed hundreds of civilians and displaced more than 10,000 people in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei States in South Sudan. SPLA forces have been responsible for serious violations, including unlawful killings and the destruction of homes and other civilian properties. Amnesty International has called for accountability for abuses by soldiers, police, and other security forces in South Sudan.

The Ukraine transferred a major shipment of arms to the SPLA through Kenya and Uganda in 2007 and 2008. The weaponry and munitions included tanks, anti-aircraft guns, multiple rocket launchers and automatic rifles.

The US government has reportedly provided US\$100 million a year worth of military assistance to the SPLA in South Sudan. Little has been published about the nature of this assistance, but a December 2009 diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks refers to “our training program for the SPLA, including combat arms soldier training.”

It is vital that any US military training to the SPLA reinforces human rights principles.

“The role of the big powers in supplying arms and military training that is stoking conflict in Sudan underscores the urgency for an Arms Trade Treaty with teeth. The treaty must include effective measures to ensure states comply with and enforce all of its provisions,” said Brian Wood.

“The permanent members of the UN Security Council must now throw their political might behind efforts to make the treaty effective to save lives and prevent human rights abuses, or risk undermining its purpose and jeopardising the whole process.”

Amnesty International is calling on states negotiating the Arms Trade Treaty to include procedures to implement a prohibition on arms transfers when there is a substantial risk of serious human rights and other violations. The treaty must also criminalize illicit trafficking and those involved in breaking arms embargoes, the organization said.

Notes to editors

Further background information on arms supplies to Sudan can be found here:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR54/022/2011/en>

An Amnesty International delegation is attending the next stage of the Arms Trade Treaty talks next week (11-15 July) at the UN in New York.

If you are interested in an interview or briefing with Amnesty International’s experts on the arms trade, military, security and policing please contact the Amnesty International Press Office.