The Sudan Consortium

African and International Civil Society Action for Sudan

The impact of aerial bombing attacks on civilians in Southern Kordofan, Republic of Sudan

A Briefing to the Summit of the African Union, May 2013

The Sudan Consortium works with a trusted group of local Sudanese partners who have been working on the ground in Southern Kordofan since the current conflict began in late 2011. The incidents described below all occurred in late 2012/early 2013, with the most recent taking place on 19 March 2013. Each of these incidents has been documented and verified directly and personally by individuals known to us. Permission was received from the families and communities of those who died for the taking of the photographs included in this briefing.

We believe that this information provides strong circumstantial evidence that civilians are being directly and deliberately targeted by the Sudanese armed forces in Southern Kordofan.
Introduction

Since the outbreak of conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states in Sudan in 2011, multiple credible allegations have been made—and continue to be made—of the commission of human rights violations and atrocity crimes in, and related to, the conflicts. The allegations of prohibited conduct include: intentional attacks against civilians (in particular through shelling and bombing of civilian areas), unlawful killings of civilians, torture, forcible displacement of civilian populations, and persecution. In some instances these acts appear to have been committed as part of widespread or systematic attacks directed against civilian populations.

Although allegations of violations have been made against both sides of the conflict, the overwhelming majority of the allegations and other relevant information appear to implicate forces of the government of Sudan and aligned armed groups. The Government of Sudan is lawfully permitted to use force in response to armed action by others on its territory, the means and methods it may employ are not unfettered: a fundamental norm of international humanitarian law is that civilians should not be the object of attack. The human toll of this strategy has been enormous with some estimates of over a million and a quarter displaced internally and as refugees and hundreds of thousands facing a humanitarian emergency.

The most recent information available to the Sudan Consortium from partners on the ground in Southern Kordofan indicates that the Government of Sudan continues to pursue a deliberate strategy of waging war against the civilian population and of targeting the infrastructure and resources necessary to sustain this population in areas controlled by one of the opposition forces fighting the government, the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N).

These strategies – whether as deployed by the Government of Sudan in the Nuba mountains in the late 1980s and 1990s or in Darfur since 2003 – appear to reflect a decision on the part of those commanding the counter-insurgency operation not simply to attack military personnel, installations and related targets but to conduct a deliberate scorched earth policy aimed at displacing or destroying the civilian population in the communities from which the opposition fighters are drawn. Although conventional ground-fighting between opposing government and SPLM-N armed forces has taken place periodically, the relative military stalemate appears to have resulted in greater focus by the Sudanese government on using such strategies as a tool of the conflict.

Based on our analysis of a pattern of attacks over the last six months, and illustrated by the specific incidents documented below, we are deeply concern that:

- the Government of Sudan continues to launch direct aerial bombing attacks on civilian areas and the civilian population in Southern Kordofan – primarily through the use of crudely constructed (and inherently indiscriminate) barrel-bombs which contain a mixture of flammable liquid and pieces of scrap metal, which are rolled out of the back of Sudanese Air Force (SAF) Antonov bomber aircraft from high altitude.
- the attacks have resulted in the destruction of communal amenities and other essential civilian infrastructure necessary to sustain the basic survival of the civilian population, including water-points, markets, schools, clinics and places of worship.
- the timing and geographical spread in the pattern of these aerial bombing attacks appears to indicate a deliberate intention to disrupt the planting and harvesting of food crops, in addition
to food distribution (eg. the bombing of markets on market days) in SPLM-N held areas (see graph below).

In this context, and with farmers having been prevented in many places from cultivating crops through 2012, with the most recent growing season having been severely affected by drought, and with the ability to harvest affected by continued bombings, food insecurity has significantly increased. An assessment at the end of 2012 indicated that 81% of households in the SPLM-N controlled areas of Southern Kordofan survive on one meal a day, while 73% have no income to purchase food.\(^1\)

Despite the signature of a Joint African Union/League of Arab States/United Nations Proposal for Access to Provide and Deliver Humanitarian Assistance to War-Affected Civilians in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States in February 2012 and subsequent memoranda of understanding relating to the implementation of the agreement, the Government of Sudan continues to deny formal access by humanitarian organisations into those areas of Southern Kordofan which are currently under the control of SPLM-N.

Against the background of over 900,000 internally displaced persons in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile and over 200,000 refugees in South Sudan and Ethiopia at the end of 2012, the deteriorating situation has resulted in more than 12,800 new arrivals from Southern Kordofan at Yida camp in South Sudan between January and mid-March 2013. Arrivals are expected to continue and to increase significantly in May-June as the food security situation deteriorates further.\(^2\) Even in Yida camp the threat continues: last week, on the morning of Easter Sunday, our monitor in Yida camp watched, along with refugees who had recently fled their homes as a result of the bombing attacks in South Kordofan, as an Antonov bomber circled overhead.

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\(^2\) While food insecurity remains the primary driving force behind the increasing flow of refugees, many also cite what they see as the deliberate attempt by the Government of Sudan to destroy the social and community infrastructure necessary to sustain the civilian population, particularly as regards the provision of adequate healthcare and education.
Links between the pattern of bombing attacks and planting and harvesting times

The graph below shows the number of bombs recorded by our partners as having been dropped on civilian targets in a representative county - Delami County - over the whole of 2012. The data shows a clear increase in the number and intensity of attacks in the weeks leading up to the planting and harvesting times, at the beginning and end of the rainy season. These general patterns of attacks appear to be replicated throughout SPLM-N held Southern Kordofan. The effect of such targeting has been both to destroy substantial amounts of newly planted and and/or mature crops, but more significantly, has deterred farmers from cultivating crops their fields at critical times during the crop cycle, for fear of being killed or injured in an aerial attack.
Sample incidents documented in 2013

Women and children killed in bombing raid on Eiri village, Heiban County

The village of Eiri lies in the county of Heiban and lies approximately 1.5 hours (by road) west of Kauda, the largest centre of population in SPLM-N controlled territory in South Kordofan.

The village is located in a fertile area adjacent to a river. The villagers are also able to grow crops in the fertile soil close to the river. The village serves as a water point for the 300 families who live in the immediate vicinity.

Eiri is entirely civilian in character and there are no military bases or other potential military targets located in or near the village. The area is not close to a front line or near any other area of confrontation between military forces.

In late December 2012 the village was targeted by an Antonov bomber aircraft of the kind used by the Sudanese Air Force (SAF). Flying at high altitude, and having circled the area several times, the aircraft dropped one bomb on the village.

The bomb struck a small compound in which four children were playing, destroying the family home and killing all four children, along with the mother of two of them.

The village of Eiri has been similarly targeted at least three times in the last 12 months.
Destruction of communal amenities in Kakrai village, Um Dorien County

Karkrai village is located in Un Dorein County in South Kordofan State. Its current population numbers around 313 families (approx. 1560 individuals.)

The village contains a prominent water tower, which is used as a water point for surrounding settlements. It also contains a Catholic Church and a medical clinic.

On 26 January, 2013, a market day, Karkrai was the subject of a deliberate and sustained bombing attack by a lone Antonov bomber aircraft. Over the course of the day, the aircraft dropped 13 bombs on the village (four in the morning, nine in the afternoon).

At the beginning of the attack, the villagers sought shelter some distance from the village, and did not suffer any casualties. However, the bombs damaged 26 houses, destroyed crops, killed livestock, and damaged the village’s water tower.

Despite the village having been regularly targeted by similar bombing raids in recent months, the majority of the population of Karkrai refuses to be intimidated into leaving. Of those families who have left –most of whom have re-located to Yida refugee camp in South Sudan – their prime motivation has been the search for food.
Deliberate and systematic bombing of civilian targets, Hadara village, Delami County

The village of Hadara is in Delami County. It has a population of around 300 families (1500 people). The village has no strategic significance, has no SPLM-N presence and is located nowhere near any lines of military confrontation.

On 19 March, 2013, after circling the village, for almost four hours, a SAF Antonov bomber began to bomb the village. According to witnesses, the bombing was deliberate, systematic and methodical. The first bomb struck the village at 12:15 pm, and the aircraft continued to circle at high altitude, dropping 8 bombs one after the other at intervals of approximately 5-10 minutes. By the time the last bomb fell at 1:00 pm, 3 people had been killed, and 13 injured. The dead and injured included five women and two children.

The bombs also killed significant numbers of the villagers’ livestock (seven cows and nine goats) destroyed six houses, and damaged several community buildings including the village school and mosque. Following the attack the entire village hid for almost three days into the surrounding bush, many sheltering in dry stream beds. Although many have now returned to the village, up to 250 still remain in the bush, in fear of further attacks.
Destruction of girls school and targeting of market, Al Buram village, Al Buram County

Al Buram village is the administrative capital of Al Buram county and a major population centre. Although it was the site of an SPLA-N military base at the start of the current conflict, that base was relocated away from this populated area in late 2011 in order to reduce the risk to civilians, after the base was targeted on several occasions by SAF.

However, despite the removal of these military targets, SAF continues to target Al Buram village on a regular basis. In February, for example, Al Buram was bombed on 5 separate occasions – on 2nd, 3rd, 9th, 20th and 26th.

The 4 bombing raids over the period 2nd-20th February did not result in any deaths or injuries, but instead targeted the administrative and community infrastructure. Amongst those buildings destroyed was the Al I Buram Girls Secondary school.

However, whilst the school was empty on the day it was hit, the bombing attack on 26th February coincided with the regular market day in Al Buram.

Just before 10 am that day, five bombs were dropped in succession in and around the market, which, as usual on a market day has attracted traders and customers in Al Buram from outlying areas. One bomb landed directly on a market stall in the central market area. Four adult males were killed and one 13 year old boy injured.

The pictures below speak for themselves.