

**All Members of the African Union Peace and Security Council
Addis Ababa**

10 June 2014

Re: Call to end targeting of civilians in Sudan's conflict areas

Your Excellencies,

As a coalition of civil society groups from Africa and the Middle East providing assistance to civilians in South Kordofan and Blue Nile or supporting peace in Sudan, we write to Your Excellencies to ask you to intensify your efforts to foster peace in Sudan. **Specifically, we are calling on Your Excellencies to demand an end to the targeting of civilians in South Kordofan state.** We are deeply concerned that in just four days in May, the town of Kauda and surrounding villages, far from the frontlines of the conflict, were hit by nearly 60 bombs that damaged the offices of the main local humanitarian organization in the region and landed next to two schools. Earlier in the same month, the region's major hospital and two clinics were damaged in separate bomb attacks. **These attacks represent the largest sustained bombardment of civilian targets in the three year history of the conflict.** They have greatly increased the suffering of civilians who are too afraid to plant their crops and are hiding where they can in caves and foxholes.

As Your Excellencies are aware, these developments are part of an escalating military campaign across the Two Areas and Darfur in what the Sudanese Minister of Defense on 14 April 2014 called the onset of a **'Decisive Summer Operation' intended to "end the rebellion in South Kordofan, Darfur and Blue Nile"**. It is widely reported that government-sponsored militia in the form of Rapid Support Forces have been recruited and trained to end the rebellion.¹ According to the UN, the conflict between the parties has internally displaced or 'severely affected' over 900,000 people in rebel-held areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile.²

Your Excellencies, we are concerned that these actions are in violation of international law. We attach more detailed information, along with links to video and photographic evidence that shows the deliberate targeting of civilians by the Government of Sudan. **The escalation also coincides with the planting season, which if missed, will result in grave threats of hunger for the local population.** Your Excellencies, you will recall that 2014 has been declared by the Assembly of the African Union as the Year of Agriculture and Food Security, in honour of the late President Nelson Mandela.

Your Excellencies, the undersigned organisations seek to support the ongoing efforts of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel on Sudan and South Sudan and the African Union Peace and Security Council towards a peaceful, comprehensive and inclusive resolution of armed conflict in Sudan. We therefore respectfully urge Your Excellencies to:

- **Condemn the aerial bombings and the reported use of government-sponsored militia in the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to target civilians and civilian property** in Darfur and South Kordofan. Such tactics are detrimental to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.
- **Recognise** these recent attacks on civilians and their property as breaches of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

¹<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50783>

²This is an estimate provided to UN OCHA by the humanitarian wing of SPLM-N. Source: 19 May 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South%20Kordofan%20and%20Blue%20Nile%20Population%20Movements%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%2019%20May%202014.pdf>

- **Support an independent commission of inquiry into the alleged breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law.**
- **Call upon the Government of Sudan and other armed groups in Sudan to immediately and unconditionally halt all attacks on civilians and civilian property.**
- **Renew calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities by all parties to the conflicts** in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur as an essential precondition to any meaningful national dialogue which must address root causes to conflicts.
- **Demand that all parties to the conflict permit humanitarian access to conflict-affected populations regardless of where they are located in the Two Areas and Darfur.** All parties must ensure the safe, unhindered and immediate access of United Nations and other humanitarian personnel as well as the delivery of supplies and equipment, so that they can assist affected populations as quickly as possible.

We urge Your Excellencies to prioritise addressing the current upsurge in violence and attacks on civilians. Without such continued leadership and timely action, civilians will continue to lose their lives and the prospects for any comprehensive peace in Sudan will remain elusive. We stand ready to provide any further support to your noble endeavours.

Please accept, Your Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Signatories:

1. Action pour les Droits Humains et l’Amitié (ADHA)
2. African Centre For Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)
3. Algeria League for Defence of Human Rights
4. Arab Coalition for Sudan (ACS)
5. Arab Foundation for Civil Society and Human Rights Support
6. Arab Institute for Democracy (Tunisia)
7. Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
8. Arab Organisation for Human Rights (Libya)
9. Arab Organisation for Human Rights (Mauritania)
10. Arab Program for Human Rights Activists (APHRA)
11. Assistance Mission for Africa (AMA)
12. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO)
13. Conscience International (CI)
14. Darfur Bar Association
15. Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre
16. Governance Bureau - Sudan
17. Human Rights First Saudi Arabia
18. International Centre for Policy and Conflict (ICPC)
19. International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)
20. Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (KACE)
21. Kush Incorporated
22. Media Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (Shams Centre) - Palestine

23. New Sudan Council of Churches
24. Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (NRRDO)
25. Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO)
26. South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN)
27. South Sudan Human Rights Society for Advocacy
28. Sudan Consortium
29. Sudan Democracy First (SDFG)
30. Sudan Social Development Organisation UK (SUDO UK)
31. Sudanese Development Initiative (SUDIA)
32. Union des Ressortissants Rwandais au Sénégal (URRS)
33. West African Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Network (WARIPNET)
34. Zarga Organisation for Rural Development (ZORD) - Sudan

Copied to:

H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson, African Union Commission

H.E. Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson, AU High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan

Haile Menkerios, UN Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan and UN Ambassador to African Union

Annex:

Multiple, credible and verified sources from the ground, accompanied by [video footage](#) and [photographs](#), show almost 60 bombs were dropped from Antonov and Sukhoi planes over four days commencing 26 May. During these attacks, the main local humanitarian organisation in the Nuba Mountains (Nuba Relief Rehabilitation and Development Organisation – NRRDO – in Heiban County) and the adjacent area were struck. Many of the bombs landed in the Kauda market place where people shop, drink tea and pray in the local mosque; others fell near a school. This followed the bombing of the Mother of Mercy Catholic Hospital in nearby Gidel on 1st May, the main hospital in the Nuba Mountains. **These installations are clearly civilian and humanitarian. Kauda is in the heart of SPLM-N territory but far from the front lines. We therefore judge that their targeting constitutes clear violation of international humanitarian law.**

Your Excellency, the bombing which includes the increased use of parachute-retarded bombs against civilians, has been accompanied by the scaled up use of heavy shelling by both long range and highly indiscriminate multiple launch rocket systems. This is well documented in Rashad, Abisseya and recently Dalami counties. The U.N. reports that over 100,000 people have reportedly been displaced from these areas in the last month.³ There are further reliable reports through monitors on the ground which indicate **systematic looting, destruction of grain stores and water boreholes, and the burning of houses in areas previously under rebel control**⁴. It is widely reported that government-sponsored militia in the form of Rapid Support Forces have been recruited and trained for such activities.⁵

Your Excellency, the upsurge in attacks has left civilians traumatised and terrorised. They are being kept from cultivating their land during the vital planting season currently underway. It appears that hunger is being used as a weapon of war as reported during the 1989-2002 conflict in the Nuba Mountains. Finally, the current situation is all the more precarious because of the crisis in South Sudan, which has disrupted what minimal supply lines existed for communities in Nuba to receive goods from outside the Two Areas.

Credible reports show violations are also conducted on the rebel side.⁶ Monitors on the ground nevertheless focus on what can be reported away from the frontlines (mostly from displaced communities) and on the most serious violations.

For further information on this letter, please contact Martha Bakwesegha-Osula at bakwesegha-osula@crisisaction.org or +254 (70) 753 3770

³ <http://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-south-kordofan-and-blue-nile-population-movements-fact-sheet-19-may-2014>

⁴ Sudan Consortium: Impact of Conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, Republic of Sudan, April 2014

⁵ <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50783>

⁶ <https://radiotamazuj.org/en/article/two-killed-south-kordofan-capital-comes-under-fire>