

The Sudan Consortium  
*African and International Civil Society Action for Sudan*

## Human Rights Update: Concern over Protection of Civilians in Southern Kordofan<sup>1</sup> May 2014

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. All the attacks referred to in this report were launched against areas where there was no military presence and which were clearly identifiable as civilian in character. **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.**

During the month of May 2014, the government of Sudan (GoS) not only continued the intense military offensive that it began in [April](#),<sup>2</sup> it increased attacks on protected civilian objects, including medical facilities, schools, humanitarian infrastructure and agricultural activities.

Between 26 and 29 May, the Sudanese Air Force launched repeated bombing attacks against the undefended town of Kauda in Heiban County, Southern Kordofan (SK). As well as destroying numerous homes, the attacks caused extensive damage to the headquarters of the main humanitarian NGO operating in SK, and also damaged two schools and a village medical clinic. This represents the most intense sustained aerial bombardment of Kauda and its surrounding villages since the conflict began in 2011.

Earlier in the month, on 1 May, the Sudanese Air Force attacked the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Gidel, located close to Kauda. This is the main hospital in the opposition-held area of SK and provides essential medical care to over 150,000 people annually.<sup>3</sup> This is the first time the hospital has suffered a direct attack during the conflict, and the attack represents a particularly worrying departure from the norms of international law on the part of the Sudanese government.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sudan Consortium is not able to report on the situation in Blue Nile (BN) this month due to technical difficulties in obtaining the information from monitors on the ground. Updates on the situation there will be published as information becomes available.

<sup>2</sup> See Sudan Consortium, "The Impact of Sudanese Military Operations on the Civilian Population of Southern Kordofan, April 2014, available by [http://www.sudanconsortium.org/darfur\\_consortium\\_actions/reports/2014/Sudan%20Consortium%20SK-BN%20Update%20Apr\\_%202014%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.sudanconsortium.org/darfur_consortium_actions/reports/2014/Sudan%20Consortium%20SK-BN%20Update%20Apr_%202014%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Statement of the Bishop of El Obeid, 2 May 2014, available at <http://www.caritas.org/2014/05/sudan-targets-church-hospital-nuba-mountains/>

International law demands that civilians and civilian objects be protected from attack during armed conflict. Attacks on hospitals, schools and the compounds of humanitarian NGOs represent particularly egregious breaches of international standards on the protection of civilians, and the actions of the Sudanese Armed Forces in this regard may constitute a war crime.

Elsewhere in SK, the Sudanese government stepped up its targeting of the agricultural resources on which the civilian population depends for its survival. Between 15 and 21 May, the Sudanese Air Force dropped almost 200 bombs on the agricultural district of Tangal in Um Dorein County, causing extensive damage to farmland on 11 farms, and seriously disrupting the seasonal planting of crops. These attacks come at a time when the Sudanese government is severely restricting humanitarian access to Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile (SK-BN), and when (as reported above) their armed forces are targeting those few humanitarian organisations that are attempting to alleviate the suffering of the civilians who remain in opposition-held areas. Prevented by the GoS from accessing these areas, and therefore reliant on figures provided by the de-facto Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) authorities, the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that, in the month immediately prior to 18 May, 90,000 people had been displaced by the conflict in SK alone, and that a total of 800,000 people have been internally displaced or otherwise severely affected in SPLM-N-held areas since the conflict began in 2011. This is in addition to around 1.2 million people in government controlled areas of SK-BN who have been affected by the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

As we mark (on 5 June) the three year anniversary of the outbreak of the current conflict in SK, these reports from the Sudan Consortium's partners on the ground provide a stark reminder that the Sudanese government remains unaccountable for serious ongoing violations of international humanitarian law committed against its own population.

### **Attack on Hospital**

According to witnesses, at 10AM on 1 May, a Sukhoi-24 fast attack jet belonging to the Sudanese Air Force dropped five bombs on the compound of the Mother of Mercy Hospital, Gidel, SK. The bombs landed in the open ground between the hospital staff accommodation block and the main hospital building, shattering windows and causing extensive damage to the fabric of the buildings. Fortunately there were no casualties as a result of the raid, but, fearing another imminent attack, terrified patients and staff fled the hospital grounds, seeking shelter in the bush and in nearby caves.

The hospital, which is situated on the edge of the small settlement of Gidel, and whose buildings are easily identifiable from the air, appears to have been deliberately targeted as part of the Sudanese government's self-proclaimed "Decisive Summer Operation" intended to "end the rebellion" in SK-BN and Darfur.<sup>5</sup> This is the first time that the hospital – run under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese of El Obeid – has been attacked in the three years of conflict, and the perception that the hospital was deliberately targeted by the Sudanese government as part of its military campaign is reinforced by the fact that numerous witnesses report seeing an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) – otherwise known as a

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<sup>4</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "South Kordofan & Blue Nile: Population Movements Fact Sheet," 19 May 2014, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/South%20Kordofan%20and%20Blue%20Nile%20Population%20Movements%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%2019%20May%202014.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Sudan Vision, "Defence Minister Declares Start of Decisive Summer Operation to End Rebellion," 14 April 2014, available at <http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/details.html?rsnpid=234529>

drone – circling the hospital in the days prior to the bombing, apparently carrying out reconnaissance of the facility in preparation for the attack.<sup>6</sup>

The Sudan Consortium’s partners have also stated that they were informed by the SPLM-N authorities in SK that the camera fitted to the UAV which crash-landed in Delami County in April 2014 contained pictures of Gidel hospital stored on its memory card, but this could not be verified directly.



**The pictures show a Sudanese UAV which crash-landed in Delami County in April 2014. The picture on the right shows the camera mounting used on the UAV.**

On 2 May, the day after the initial attack on the hospital, Gidel itself was targeted again by the Sudanese Air Force. This time, a lone Antonov bomber made three deliberate passes over Gidel, dropping a total of eight barrel bombs on the settlement. The fundamental inaccuracy of this method of delivery, which involves rolling crude unguided bombs out of the back of aircraft from high altitude, meant that the Antonovs did not succeed in hitting the hospital, although one man was injured by shrapnel and several nearby homes were damaged.

The use of these barrel bombs, which are inherently indiscriminate, on areas populated by civilians, and where there are no legitimate military targets, would constitute a breach of international humanitarian law even if the hospital had not been located in the settlement. The use of barrel bombs has been explicitly condemned by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)<sup>7</sup> in the context of the current conflict in Syria, and their use in that conflict has also been categorised as a war crime by several western governments, including the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> The Sudanese government is using barrel bombs against its own population in a strikingly similar manner to that of the Syrian government– the only difference being that those in SK suffer fewer casualties from these attacks as they do not live in as densely populated urban areas as their Syrian counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Sudanese government have been using UAV’s for surveillance and targeting purposes over SK since the start of the conflict, with several reportedly having been shot down by SPLM-N ( see e.g. Sudan Tribune, “SPLM-N rebels say unmanned drone shot down in S. Kordofan,” 3 May 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article50856>)

<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014) paragraph 3. Available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47204>

<sup>8</sup> Reuters, “Britain calls Syrian barrel bomb attacks a war crime,” 13 January 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/01/13/us-syria-crisis-barrel-bombs-idUSBREAOC19F20140113>

<sup>9</sup> Since the conflict began in 2011, the Sudan Consortium’s partners on the ground have recorded 183 civilians killed and 404 injured in air strikes, primarily as a result of barrel bombs dropped by the Sudanese Air Force. The actual

The attack on the Mother of Mercy Hospital prompted strong international criticism, with statements of condemnation being issued by the American and Canadian embassies in Khartoum,<sup>10</sup> and by the Delegation of the European Union to Sudan.<sup>11</sup> In addition, on 22 May the US Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, speaking at a press conference for African media organisations, accused the Sudanese government of “unconscionable violence” in carrying out attacks on civilians and civilian objects.<sup>12</sup>

In response, the Sudanese government denied the allegations,<sup>13</sup> and resumed its campaign of bombing civilian targets in and around Kauda, including of hospitals and schools on 26 May.



***An unexploded parachute bomb, dropped in the grounds of Elrifi Hospital, Kauda – 28 May 2014***

On the morning of 28 May, Sudanese Air Force Antonov bombers again attacked the settlement of Gidel, damaging a primary school and injuring two pupils. Later the same day, Sukhoi jets attacked Kauda, dropping three parachute bombs onto the compound of Elrifi Hospital. Fortunately, in anticipation of such an attack, the hospital had been re-located from central Kauda some months previously, and there were no patients or medical staff present at the time of the bombing.

With terrible irony, these attacks came in the same

month that the Office of the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict launched a Guidance Note on Attacks on Hospitals and Schools (Guidance Note),<sup>14</sup> which is intended to provide civil

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casualty figures are likely to be significantly higher, as the monitors are not able to access many parts of SK for reasons of personal security, and difficult terrain.

<sup>10</sup> US Embassy in Khartoum, “Press statement on the bombing of South Kordofan Hospital,” 8 May 2014, available at [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/sudan/231771/PDFs/statement\\_sk\\_hospital\\_2014-05-08\\_final\\_3.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/sudan/231771/PDFs/statement_sk_hospital_2014-05-08_final_3.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Delegation of the European Union in Sudan, “European Union Delegation concerned on the aerial bombardments of civilian objects in South Kordofan,” 8 May 2014, available at [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sudan/press\\_corner/all\\_news/news/2014/20140508\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/sudan/press_corner/all_news/news/2014/20140508_en.htm). The Embassy of Norway also associated itself with the statement made by the EU.

<sup>12</sup> US Embassy in Khartoum, “Excerpts of Remarks made by U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Ambassador Donald Booth,” 26 May 2014, available at [http://photos.state.gov/libraries/sudan/709062/press\\_releases/excerpts\\_of\\_remarks-by-ambassador-booth\\_5222014.pdf](http://photos.state.gov/libraries/sudan/709062/press_releases/excerpts_of_remarks-by-ambassador-booth_5222014.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Sudan Tribune, “Sudan rejects US-Canada condemnation of S. Kordofan bombings,” 16 May 2014, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article51037>

society organisations with the best monitoring and reporting tools to prevent and end such attacks. The Guidance Note is intended to assist with the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1998 (adopted in 2011) which emphasises the particular effect that attacks on hospitals and schools have on the lives of children.

### **Attack on Humanitarian NGO Compound**

At 10AM on 26 May, Antonov bombers of the Sudanese Air Force began an attack on the town of Kauda in Heiban County. During the course of the next hour and a half, the aircraft made several passes over the town, dropping a total of eight bombs. One of these bombs hit the compound used by a locally-staffed humanitarian NGO, which has a major role in providing assistance to vulnerable populations in SK. Five people working in the compound were injured (with victims variously suffering shrapnel wounds, smoke-inhalation, and the effects of shock) and several NGO buildings and offices were damaged.



**Humanitarian NGO Office damaged by bomb attack, Kauda, 26 May**

As with the hospital previously attacked in Gidel, the NGO compound is clearly visible from the air, is located some distance from the centre of civilian population, and has no military presence or protection. It is evidently not a legitimate military target, but the fact that it seems to have been singled out as part of this attack on Kauda once again adds force to the allegations that the Sudanese government is implementing a deliberate military strategy that aims to undermine the ability of the civilian population to subsist and survive.

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<sup>14</sup> Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and Armed Conflict, “Act To Protect: Guidance Note on Attacks against Schools and Hospitals,” 20 May 2014, available at <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/launch-of-the-guidance-note/>

## Attacks on Schools

The indiscriminate use of unguided and highly destructive weapons on civilian settlements continues to severely disrupt children's education in SK, not least because school buildings are regularly hit in bombing raids. During the attacks on Kauda and Gidel in May, three schools were reported to have suffered damage, with two primary school pupils being injured. Each attack adds to the incremental sense of fear and anxiety experienced by pupils, parents, and teachers and inevitably has an adverse impact on the ability of these children to receive a meaningful education.



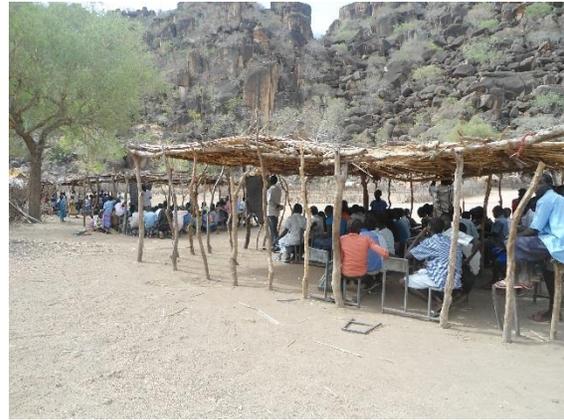
**The classroom of Uruma Model Primary School, Delami County, after being hit by rockets fired from a Sudanese fast attack jet aircraft in February 2014**

In addition to the destruction of school buildings, the ongoing conflict has also forced the departure of large numbers of qualified teachers (many of whom have sought relative safety in refugee camps across the border in South Sudan) and has disrupted efforts to train new teachers to replace them.

The ongoing offensive, and consequent internal displacement of the civilian population within SK, is exacerbating the strains on the already fragile education system. The problems are exemplified by the case of Tunguli Model Primary School in Delami County, where for the last year, seven teachers have been attempting to provide education for 825 pupils – of which more than 200 are orphans – with class sizes ranging between 100 and 180. The teachers do not receive a salary, and, aside from the limited financial contributions received from parents, have no money to purchase textbooks, stationery or other basic teaching equipment.

However, even the efforts of the teachers and pupils at Tunguli were unable to prevent the temporary closure of the school during May. The daily threat of artillery shelling and air attacks on civilian areas experienced as part of the ongoing offensive made the risk of attending school too high to bear. Other schools in nearby villages of Yunis, Sabat and Deri were also forced to close during May, as increasing numbers of families face the decision as to whether they should join the swelling ranks of internally displaced within SK, or seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

Whilst those who remain in opposition-held areas of SK are doing their utmost to maintain a basic level of education for the next generation, the longer the conflict continues the more likely it is that families with young children will feel obliged to join those already in refugee camps across the border in South Sudan, where education can be provided by international and local NGOs.



**Of the 825 pupils attending classes at Tunguli Model Primary school, more than 200 are orphans. The temporary classrooms have been set-up next to a cliff face, in order to allow the pupils to seek shelter in caves during bombing or shelling attacks.**

### **Targeting agricultural production**

Whilst the bombing attacks on Kauda and Gidel during May demonstrated with particular clarity the level of disregard shown by the Sudanese government towards the fundamental principles of international law, the broader campaign against civilians in other parts of SK continued unabated during May.

In Um Dorein County, which lies south-west of Kauda, civilians living in the administrative unit of Tangal endured constant attacks both by aircraft and artillery shelling during the eight-day period from 15 to 22 May. In this period, Tangal was shelled 25 times and was hit by 14 separate air strikes (with five of these bombing raids taking place on 19 May alone).

The scale of these attacks – launched against areas where there was no opposition military presence – is overwhelming. The Sudanese Air Force deployed both Antonov bombers and Sukhoi fast attack jets to target these areas, populated only by civilians, and dropped in excess of 200 bombs on Tangal over the course of these eight days. The number of civilian casualties inflicted during these attacks was mercifully low (four killed and three injured), but the attacks seem to have been primarily aimed at disrupting agricultural production, with 11 farms being hit and damaged, and numerous livestock killed.

The strategy of targeting agricultural production is consistent with patterns previously observed in this conflict, whereby the Sudanese Air Force has timed its attacks in order to disrupt or prevent crop planting and harvesting, with the apparent intention of increasing food insecurity and, ultimately, of forcing the civilian population to flee opposition controlled areas in search of food.

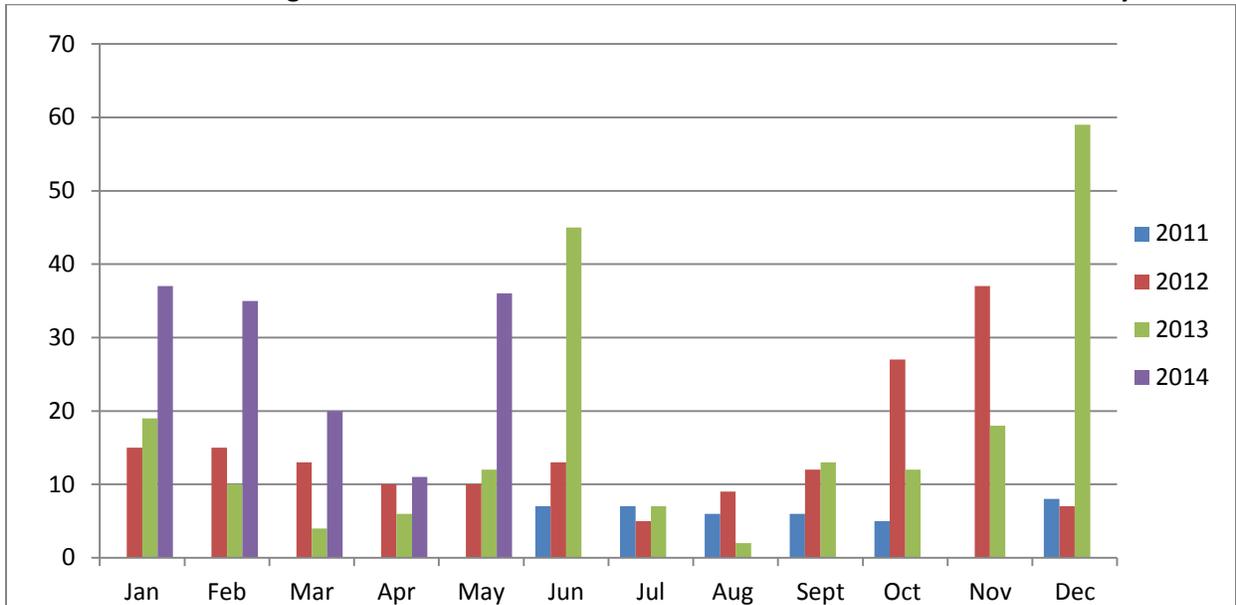
Given the current situation, where up to two million people are currently internally displaced or “severely conflict affected” and where 40% are already facing emergency levels of food insecurity as a result of the conflict,<sup>15</sup> the Sudanese government, in violation of international law, continues to severely

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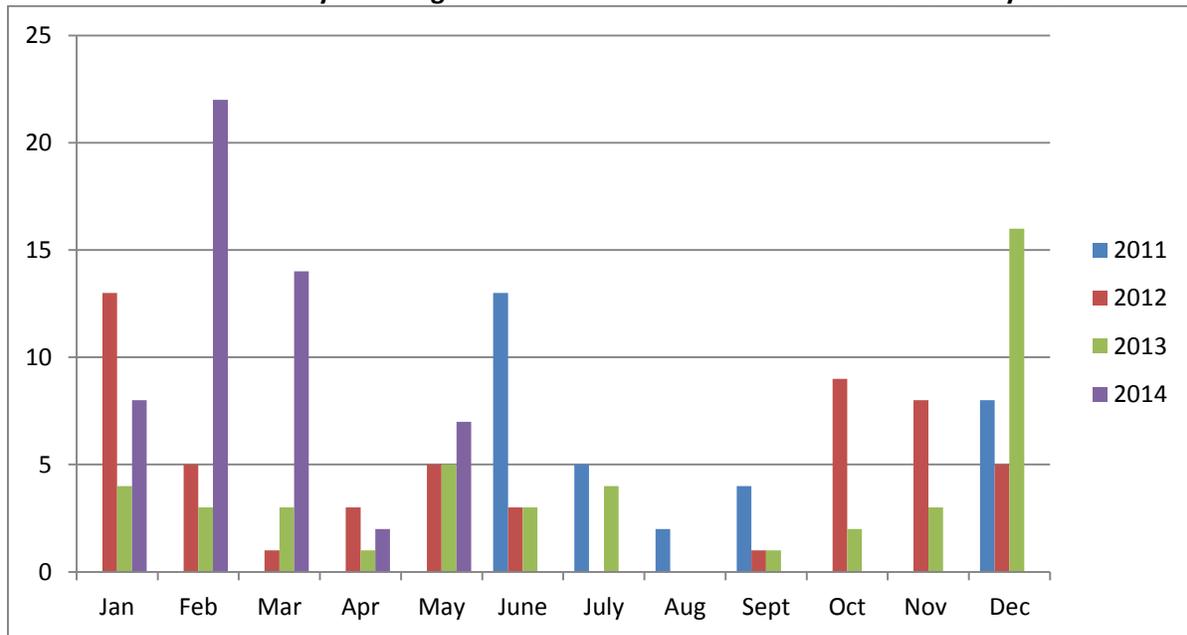
<sup>15</sup> FEWSNET, “Food insecurity worsens as peak lean season approaches,” May 2014, available at <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/sud%C3%A1n/food-security-outlook-update/thu-2014-05-29>

restrict humanitarian access to the conflict areas. This disruption of the means of agricultural subsistence for the civilian population will have grave humanitarian consequences.

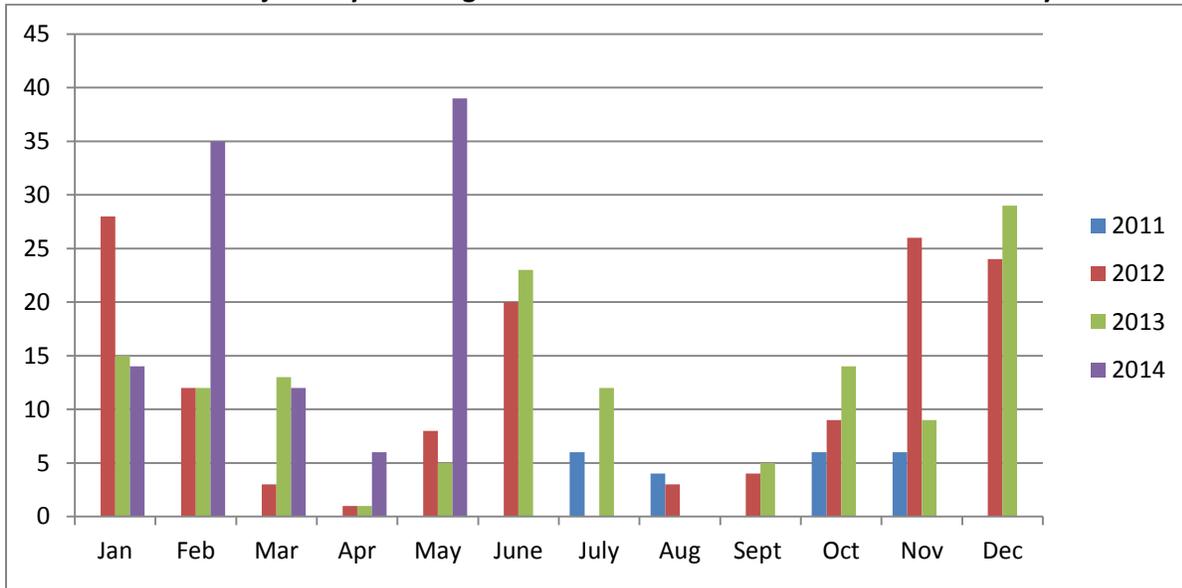
**Number of bombing attacks on civilian settlements in Southern Kordofan June 2011-May 2014**



**Civilians killed by bombing attacks in Southern Kordofan: June 2011 - May 2014**



**Civilians injured by bombing attacks in Southern Kordofan: June 2011 – May 2014**



### Conclusion

For the last three years, the people of SK have been left at the mercy of a government that appears intent on their destruction. Three years is too long, and the international community must take urgent action now to protect the civilian population and lay the groundwork for peace in SK-BN. The international community, and in particular African states, as Sudan's neighbours, must take collective action to address the conflict. In this context, the international community should work through the UN and the African Union to condemn the indiscriminate aerial bombardments, and the seemingly deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools, and the agricultural land that provide the basic means of subsistence for the civilian population.

The international community should recognise the attacks on civilian targets as breaches of international law and mandate a full investigation with a view to ensuring that those responsible are called to account for their actions. They must insist on unfettered humanitarian access for those who would offer life-saving assistance. And finally, they must call for a ceasefire and facilitate a comprehensive, and internationally-monitored, peace agreement.