Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan’s Two Areas and Darfur
March 2015

SUMMARY

For civilians in many parts of Sudan, 2015 has already brought rising hostilities, mass displacement, and a deepening food crisis. The conditions are such that hundreds of civilians are fleeing across the Sudanese border to refugee camps in Unity State, where South Sudan’s civil war is still raging. They have made the judgement that the risks of remaining in Sudan, where they would continue to be subjected to intense aerial bombardment and shelling of civilian areas, and unsustainable livelihoods, were greater than any risks they might encounter in the conflict zone across the border.

Civilians in the “Two Areas” – Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile – have suffered from nearly four years of uninterrupted conflict that has internally displaced 1.7 million people, roughly half of the population. Meanwhile, the conflict in Darfur has thus far internally displaced 2.5 million, and has resulted in over 4.4 million civilians requiring humanitarian assistance, a level rarely exceeded in the history of the twelve year conflict. Both conflicts have seen civilians systematically targeted with regular reporting of killing, rape, destruction of property and community infrastructure, and loss of livelihoods.

Whilst violations occur on all sides, the Sudan government’s self-titled “Decisive Summer Campaign”, which sought to eradicate all armed rebellion within the country, made 2014 a particularly violent and destructive year. This campaign was renewed in December 2014 continuing into 2015, with the government proclaiming expected widespread civilian displacement, especially within the ‘Two Areas’.

As a result of the intensified conflict - which is still ongoing - 457,495 individuals were displaced in Darfur in 2014, which was the highest level of yearly civilian displacement seen in Darfur for almost a decade. Estimates suggest there are already over 100,000 newly displaced in Darfur in 2015 thus far. Furthermore, 2014 saw a spike in attacks on civilian communities destroying over 3,000 villages in a five month UN reporting period.

Similarly, civilians in the ‘Two Areas’ faced more frequent and targeted aerial bombardment and shelling in 2014 with some reports putting the rate last December as the highest ever recorded in a single month since conflict began.
This bombing continues to persist and clearly targets civilian structures, most recently the MSF hospital in Frandala, prompting the agency’s withdrawal. **Shelling has been reported daily for two months** in parts of Southern Kordofan amid further reports of an **unprecedented build-up of forces suggesting an imminent major ground and air offensive**. This will only cause further suffering.

With the international attention focused on a flawed national dialogue, this consolidated update is designed to shift attention to the realities affecting civilians on the ground in conditions of sustained or escalating severity. There are expectations of worse to come.

The international community is therefore urged to withhold political and financial support for the elections scheduled for 13 April 2015, and call for their postponement – this given the realities of war on the ground and the certainty that the humanitarian suffering will only be exacerbated with the increased violence that elections will bring and which will steal the current opportunity for the pursuit of genuine dialogue and sustainable peace.

**HEADLINES**

**Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile**

- **Hundreds fleeing war in Sudan to another war in South Sudan**: As a result of bombing, shelling and unsustainable livelihoods, many are fleeing from parts of Southern Kordofan over the border into South Sudan’s conflict affected Unity State.1

- **The worst may be yet to come**: Widespread fears exist amongst communities of a renewed ground offensive supported by aerial attacks. Preparations are underway and will build on the previous unprecedented offensive attempted at the start of the dry season.

- **Peak in numbers of bombs and shelling**: Over 1,500 bombs and shells were dropped on Southern Kordofan throughout December 2014 and January 20152, killing and injuring civilians in 57 separately recorded incidents3. More than 450 of these were dropped on civilian targets during December 2014 alone4. Sources on the ground report unprecedented shelling for two months every night in parts of Southern Kordofan (Karunga and Um Dorein County).

- **Consistent bombing and shelling of civilian areas**: There were 333 separate incidents of bombing and shelling attacks during 2014 in Southern Kordofan1. This resulted in 67 confirmed civilian deaths and 162 civilian injuries5.

- **Civilian structures targeted**: Aerial bombardment regularly targets civilian infrastructure including medical facilities (most recently in January 2015), schools, farms, markets and places of worship6;

- **Direct impact on food supply**: The number of bombings sharply increase in line with the agricultural calendar to coincide with the planting and harvesting seasons7. Large numbers of civilians face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity in Southern

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1 Each incident reflects the bombing of a particular village or location and does not account for the number of number of bombs or shells dropped
Kordofan and Blue Nile respectively, prompting a large number of civilians to flee their homes;

- **Massive displacement:** There are 1.7 million IDPs combined in government and SPLM-N controlled territories in the ‘Two Areas’ – roughly half of the total population. This equates to approximately 46 newly created IDPs every hour since the conflict began in Southern Kordofan, June 2011. An estimated 166,000 people became newly displaced throughout 2014;

- **The government acknowledges it is causing more displacement:** Following the resumption of the Decisive Summer Campaign in the middle of December 2014, the government of Sudan’s Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) announced in mid-January 2015 they anticipated the displacement of 145,000 civilians from SPLM-N-held territory to government controlled locations;

- **Chronic restrictions on humanitarian access since 2011:** Negotiated access is still lacking. Violence and insecurity has “either internally displaced or severely affected” over 2 million civilians since 2011;

**Darfur**

- **40% of the population is displaced:** There are an estimated 2.4 million civilians currently displaced in Darfur, 1.4 million of whom are children;

- **2014 displacement levels are unprecedented:** 457,495 civilians were cumulatively displaced in 2014. This averages at 1,253 per day, and is the highest annual total on record for the past 8 years. 60% of those displaced are children;

- **Estimates of over 100,000 newly displaced in 2015:** Since January 2015, 41,304 new IDPs have been assessed and verified by the UN and aid organisations. Relief agencies have reported that a further 63,900 IDPs are awaiting verification;

- **Numbers needing humanitarian assistance are amongst the highest levels ever:** 4.4 million civilians require humanitarian aid – this represents 73% of the total population of Darfur. Numbers needing assistance have rarely exceeded this level in 12 years.

- **Thousands of villages destroyed:** 3,324 villages were destroyed over a five month period from December 2013 to April 2014. This destruction continues.

- **Acute food insecurity persists:** Despite improved harvests around much of Sudan, the benefits are not felt by IDP households, and, as such, large portions of the IDP population in

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**According to available UN figures, numbers range from the 2 million mark at the start of the conflict to levels around 4 to 4.5 million most years since 2006 with one peak at 4.7 million in 2008.**

http://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/un-humanitarian-chief-calls-continued-cooperation-sudan
Darfur will remain in Stressed (Phase 2) acute food insecurity through to March 2015\(^{21}\). See below for the FEWS Net Food Security Outlook through until June 2015\(^{22}\):

![Figure 1: Food Security Update – January to March 2015](Image 4)

![Figure 2: Food Security Update – April to June 2015](Image 7)

The “Decisive Summer Campaign”: rising violence in Darfur and the ‘Two Areas’

Violence in the ‘Two Areas’ and Darfur has been rising steadily since 2013, making 2014 one of the most dangerous on record for civilians. For example, the Sudan Consortium data showcases a 48% increase in incidents of bombing and shelling of civilian targets in the ‘Two Areas’ in 2014, as compared to the previous year\(^{23}\). Meanwhile, in Darfur the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) increased the number of attacks on armed opposition groups by 25% in a ten month period in 2014, as compared to attacks in the previous year\(^{24}\).

This upsurge in conflict experienced in 2014 was the direct consequence of the government’s declared “Decisive Summer Campaign” that began in April 2014. Although it did not defeat the rebels by the end of the summer as planned, it displaced large numbers of civilians, damaged civilian infrastructure and increased food insecurity. In mid-December 2014, the government announced the continuation of the “Decisive Summer Campaign” which is characterised by the aerial bombardment of rebel controlled civilian communities, combined with ground attacks. These tactics resulted in widespread displacement and civilian harm. For example, since the middle of December 2014, fighting in Jebel Marra in North Darfur has led to the creation of 41,304 newly verified IDPs,\(^{25}\) though many more have been reported\(^{26}\).
Another feature of the “Decisive Summer Campaign” is the deployment of the Rapid Support Forces or RSF. According to the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan, the SAF “are still maintaining their strategy of fighting a proxy war” utilising the RSF to try and crush various armed groups. The RSF is widely understood to be the reincarnation of the infamous Janjaweed militias which the UNSC demanded Sudan disarm and demobilise back in 2004. Major ground offensives in the “Two Areas”, led by the RSF in April and May 2014, resulted in the internal displacement of 116,000 civilians. The Panel further stated that Darfur had witnessed “a significant increase in reported armed violence by unidentifiable groups or other militias”, as well as “criminal activities where armed violence has been a factor.” Civilians have been disproportionately affected by this significant increase in the violence.

New technology has resulted in more direct targeting of civilians and greater civilian harm

Up until recently, aerial bombardments in Sudan were characterised by the indiscriminate use of unguided munitions, such as the internationally condemned barrel bombs, which were manually rolled out of Antonov transport planes. With no targeting system in place these bombs caused widespread damage, destruction and devastation to civilians and civilian infrastructure. However, towards the end of 2013, the SAF acquired second hand Sukhoi SU-24 and SU-25 jets from the government of Belarus which are able to fly faster and lower than the Antonov’s. This new aircraft also enabled the SAF to “deliver a wider range of more deadly and destructive weaponry, including parachute-retarded bombs (FAB 500), and S-8 rockets.” With the increased technical capability of this newly acquired weaponry, indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population have given way to more direct civilian targeting. These attacks have destroyed schools, places of worship, farms, markets and hospitals.

Taking Southern Kordofan as a microcosm of this increased effectiveness, and by utilising data compiled by the Sudan Consortium, it is evident the higher risks faced by civilians as a result of this recently acquired weaponry. 2014 saw an increase of 55% in civilian deaths in comparison to 2013, and an increase of 17% in civilian injuries. January 2015 has meanwhile witnessed a dramatic 186% increase in civilian injuries on the previous year as a result of bombing and shelling attacks.
In the Nuba Mountains an intense bombing campaign was reported over December 2014 and January 2015 as some 1,500 bombs and shells were dropped. In December alone, more than 450 bombs, rockets and artillery shells fell on civilian targets. This is the highest number recorded in a single month since conflict began. The relentless bombing and constant SAF aerial presence in the skies above civilian homes, schools, farms, markets and hospitals is the biggest obstacle to stable civilian life in the ‘Two Areas’.

This intense use of aerial bombardment was followed by a large government ground offensive which reached within 20km of the SPLM-N civilian administrative capital of Kauda. Reports indicate that further confrontations are planned as both sides look to make territorial and military gains during the dry season. Indeed, sources on the ground are fearful that the worst is yet to come with a major resumption of the ground offensive preceded (and later accompanied) by a bombing campaign; perhaps the latter prior to elections. The government’s HAC has predicted that some 145,000 civilians will be displaced from SPLM-N-held territory to government controlled locations by the violence. Confirmation of figures and assessment of the humanitarian situation is difficult to fully quantify due to restricted access to rebel-held territory.

The humanitarian situation is further compounded by repeated attacks on basic services including healthcare facilities in rebel held territory. On the 1st May 2014, Sudanese war planes bombed the Mother of Mercy Hospital in Southern Kordofan on consecutive days. Any notion this attack could be an accident was dispelled the following week when a health facility run by the medical organisation MSF was hit by another Sudanese bombing raid. That same MSF facility was struck again as recently as January 20th 2015. This prompted MSF-France to suspend their services to the population in Southern Kordofan, and resulted in MSF-Belgium pulling out of their life saving work in Sudan altogether. The decision to do so was made in conjunction with the fact that “access to people trapped in conflict areas has been systematically denied by the authorities in Sudan.”
In addition to the physical quantifiable effects of the relentless aerial bombardments on the civilian population and infrastructure, there is also an important psychological element. The constant bombardment and mere presence of an Antonov or fighter jet circling above civilian homes is wearing away the capacity of civilians to cope. Fearful of bombings, civilians are discouraged from tending their farms, attending schools, or even remaining in their homes\textsuperscript{44}, with many in Southern Kordofan feeling compelled to spend their days hiding in nearby caves for protection, or ensuring their being in close proximity to a foxhole\textsuperscript{45}.

Since the middle of December 2014, to escape the renewed offensive, civilians have been fleeing Southern Kordofan and Sudan altogether by entering Unity State in South Sudan. Yida, a border town, already shelters some 80,000 Sudanese refugees, and is currently experiencing an influx of hundreds of civilians a week according to a source at the UNHCR\textsuperscript{46}. To make this journey refugees are fleeing across highly contested and insecure borders into an area of South Sudan that is itself subject to ongoing conflict and instability. Their decision to flee to a highly unstable area in a neighbouring country is an indication of their intense desire to improve their personal security and access to food.

### Darfur – protection of civilians and displacement

During a five month period from December 2013 to April 2014, \textit{3,324 villages were destroyed}\textsuperscript{47}. On the ground sources report such targeting and destruction is still ongoing. The UN Panel of Experts have attributed the blame for the targeting of civilians on all participants to the conflict, though have singled out the government and their aligned militias as being particularly culpable:

\begin{quote}
“The strategy of the government appears to consist of: (a) \textit{collective punishment of villages and communities} from which the armed opposition groups are believed to come or operate; (b) \textit{induced or forced displacement} of those communities; and (c) \textit{direct engagement}, including aerial bombardment, of the groups when their location can be identified.”\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Of all of the operational armed forces in Darfur, the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) led RSF have been singled out numerous times for their violations of international human rights and constant infringement upon civilian security\textsuperscript{49}. Indeed the UN Panel of Experts noted that the deployment of the RSF to Darfur “significantly altered” the dynamics of the conflict “and at one stage, threatened to produce levels of violence, chaos and confusion not seen in Darfur since 2004.”\textsuperscript{50}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Net Number</th>
<th>Cumulative (Year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>989,920</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>853,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>270,000</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>317,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>175,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>268,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>114,000</td>
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The Panel also stated numerous case studies showcasing violence against the civilian population perpetuated by armed opposition groups. One such example concerns an SLA-MM attack on Taweisha and the surrounding area which caused “significant damage to civilian infrastructure... [Displacing] [o]ver 81,000 people”. Additionally such groups operate illegal checkpoints severely hampering civilian movement whilst engaging in acts of extortion, amongst other forms of banditry.

As mentioned previously, unprecedented levels of displacement have been observed in Darfur over the past year – the table to the left shows the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Displaced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>380,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>316,254</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>41,304</td>
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Sexual and Gender Based Violence

One subject which characterises the precarious situation of civilians living in Sudan’s conflict zones is sexual and gender based violence. Barely a week passes where there are no reports of sexual violence; indeed SUDO have compiled numerous incident reports detailing both government, allied militias and rebel forces active involvement in these acts on their website.

In December 2014, Human Rights Watch released the findings of an investigation into government abuses in Blue Nile. During their interviews with refugees, almost half stated they had experienced sexual violence themselves, had an immediate relative or neighbour who had, or had witnessed sexual assault. The number and the manner of the rapes suggests that sexual violence may be part of the government’s counter-insurgency strategy. A clear example of the use of rape as part of the counter-insurgency strategy was revealed further during the shocking incident of mass rape in Tabit, North Darfur. An investigation led by Human Rights Watch into the atrocities documented 27 first-hand accounts of rape, in addition to credible information relating to a further 194 incidents of rape. Interviews with two soldiers who were present at the time revealed they had direct orders to rape the women of the village “because the women were rebel supporters.” The government of Sudan has denied any rapes took place in Tabit, and have furthermore blocked UNAMID from returning to the site to undertake a comprehensive investigation, following an initial fact finding mission just over a week after information about the rapes was made public.

Humanitarian Access

The Two Areas are distinguished by the government’s severe restriction of humanitarian access to SPLM-N-controlled areas. Even the UN has not had access to SPLM-N territory, though access to government-held areas has improved, albeit from a low base. Talks between the two warring parties has yet to resolve this issue of humanitarian access affecting hundreds of thousands of lives. Restrictions on international access also mean that comprehensive independent humanitarian assessments cannot be carried out. A particular casualty is that even following reports of the rising risk of polio in the region following two cases in Unity State, South Sudan, no polio vaccinations for vulnerable children have been possible since the conflict erupted in 2011.
In Darfur, the government’s refusal to grant access to UNAMID to undertake a detailed investigation into the Tabit rapes is systematic of the difficulties the mission faces in responding to emergency situations. On a day to day basis, access is restricted by a variety of factors with OCHA noting that “a timely and effective response [to emergency situations] is hampered by a lack of protection partners on the ground and a denial of timely access to areas of concern.” During 2014 and into 2015 insecurity has seriously hampered access due to security forces, armed movements, and inter-tribal conflicts. The Decisive Summer Offensive in 2014 and again in 2015 has restricted access for aid agencies to access many affected areas, as well as led to denials of access by the authorities.

Conclusion

After four years of conflict in the Two Areas and twelve years in Darfur, which conflicts many argue have never been worse, the need for concerted efforts from the international community to secure a cessation of hostilities and foster an inclusive and sustainable peace are needed now more than ever. Unprecedented shelling is ongoing in parts of the Two Areas and most importantly preparation is underway for a major ground and air offensive that will only increase civilian suffering. Darfur has of late experienced the highest levels of displacement for the best part of a decade and the numbers needing assistance have only rarely been exceeded during the length of the conflict. With international attention focused on what Sudanese civil society considers to be a flawed political process lacking any credibility, this consolidated update is designed to challenge this approach, and reiterate the realities affecting civilians on the ground in conditions of sustained or escalating severity. And on top of this, there are expectations of worse to come.

Notes:

56 OCHA, South Kordofan & Blue Nile: Population Movements Fact Sheet, 19th May 2014. Accessed 09/02/2015,
57 OCHA, South Kordofan & Blue Nile: Population Movements Fact Sheet, 19th May 2014. Accessed 09/02/2015,
58 Radio Dabanga, UN Calls for Ceasefire for Polio Shots in Blue Nile, Kordofan, 7th November 2014. Accessed 03/03/2015
59 OCHA, Sudan: 2014 Population Displacement in Darfur, 26th May 2014. Accessed 07/03/2015,
61 OCHA, Darfur: New Humanitarian Needs and Aid Delivery Fact Sheet, 15th July 2014. Accessed 06/02/2015,