

**African Union must pressure Sudan to allow food aid into Kordofan and Blue Nile** Zach Vertin

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On Sunday, heads of state from across the continent convene for the annual African Union Summit in Addis Ababa. Africa's most pressing concerns will be discussed this week, but one looming crisis is missing from the agenda.

War continues in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile regions of neighbouring Sudan, where a humanitarian catastrophe is in the making. Experts predict some conflict areas will reach extreme levels of food insecurity — barely shy of a famine designation — just one month from now.

On the heels of a famine that devastated the Horn of Africa, the AU is now faced with an opportunity. With Khartoum denying access, and the US exploring alternative means of emergency relief, African states can take the lead in negotiating a solution, achieving not only a humanitarian imperative in Sudan but also a political one for Africa.

Since June, Khartoum has been engaged in an air and ground war with opposition forces; first in Southern Kordofan and later in Blue Nile — two states that aligned with other marginalised regions during the country's long civil war. (...)

In addition to the disruption of movement, trade, and livelihoods in conflict areas, the government has deliberately prevented humanitarian operators from accessing affected civilians, doing anything to prevent assistance from making its way into the hands of rebel forces or their supporters. (...)

Africa now has a chance to deliver on two fronts.

AU leaders with contacts in Khartoum should privately advise the NCP that negotiated access is both necessary and in its interest. International intervention will be politically bad for Sudan's regime, as it will appear weak and belligerent at a time when it needs external co-operation to

find its way out of an economic quandary.

At the same time, for those African states leery of foreign infringements on sovereignty or continuing perceptions of AU ineptitude, now is the time to take ownership and demonstrate resolve by forging a regional solution that incorporates multilateral efforts already underway. (...)

The AU should use this week's summit to extend a detailed proposal to partner with the government and international relief teams in providing critical access. Meanwhile, it should quietly engage Khartoum both on a plan itself and on the political imperatives.

Commitment should simultaneously be sought from opposition forces to allow civilians to access assistance and ensure the safety of relief personnel and independent monitors.

An opportunity has presented itself, not only to mitigate a crisis and ensure regional stability in the near term, but also to bolster the AU's reputation and role in global affairs in the long run.

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