

**Sudan: Blue Nile Civilians Describe Attacks, Abuses** Human Rights Watch 23 April 2012

Civilians are bearing the brunt of abuses in Sudan's simmering border conflict in Blue Nile state, Human Rights Watch said today, based on a research trip in April 2012 into Blue Nile. As in neighboring Southern Kordofan, which Human Rights Watch visited in August 2011, civilians in Blue Nile continue to endure Sudan's indiscriminate bombing and other abuses, even as new conflict between Sudan and South Sudan threatens to engulf the wider border area.

Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch in Blue Nile, which the government has largely shut off from the outside world, described indiscriminate bombings in civilian areas, killings, and other serious abuses by Sudanese armed forces since armed conflict broke out there in September 2011. The testimony indicates potential war crimes may have occurred, Human Rights Watch said.

The United Nations (UN) and African Union should insist that Sudan end indiscriminate bombing in civilian areas, and immediately allow aid into the state. The Security Council should urge the Sudanese Government to allow a full and impartial investigation by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into events in both Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, said Human Rights Watch. (...)

(...) Little information has emerged about events in Blue Nile. Sudan has not granted journalists, independent monitors, or aid groups access to Blue Nile state or to neighboring Southern Kordofan, where conflict erupted last June. Since the United Nations mandate for a peacekeeping operation in the region expired in July 2011, there have been no UN monitors on the ground to document the initial impact of the fighting on civilians in Blue Nile, where conflict spread in September. (...)

(...) The states of Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan, where violence began three months earlier, lie north of the border with South Sudan, and have populations who were aligned with the southern Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) during Sudan's long civil war. In both Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, conflict broke out amid increased tensions between Sudan's ruling National Congress Party and the northern sector of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) over security arrangements in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Darfur, set a June 1, 2011 deadline for all SPLA forces to leave Sudan. The northern sector of the SPLM, now known as SPLM-North, contended that the peace agreement gives the parties six months to withdraw after completing popular consultations, which had not yet occurred when violence broke out. The consultations are mandated under the peace agreement so that people in both states can decide on their system of governance while remaining part of Sudan. (...)

(...) Sudan has refused to sign an agreement with SPLM-North granting access for humanitarian aid for Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, as proposed by the United Nations, African Union, and League of Arab states

## Indiscriminate Bombing of Civilian Areas

(...) Refugees crossing into South Sudan have been hit by indiscriminate bombing at Guffa and Alfuj border crossings. On March 26, 8 bombs were dropped on Alfuj, where a group of several hundred refugees had gathered before crossing into refugee camps in South Sudan. The bombs injured four civilians and killed livestock. Human Rights Watch saw one crater at Alfuj and witnesses described several others in the bush where the refugees were staying, some distance from the town.

Sudan uses unguided munitions, often rolled out manually from Antonov cargo planes in a manner that does not allow for accurate delivery. Use of weapons in a civilian area that cannot accurately be directed at a military objective makes such strikes inherently indiscriminate, in violation of international humanitarian law, Human Rights Watch said.

International humanitarian law obliges both parties to the armed conflict to take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to the civilian population. SPLA-North fighters should not operate or initiate attacks from residential areas and to the extent feasible should avoid operating in populated civilian areas where their presence is likely to have a harmful impact on civilians, said Human Rights Watch.

## Impact of the Bombing

The indiscriminate bombing spread palpable fear among the civilian population in Blue Nile. In all areas visited in Sudan and South Sudan, including refugee camps in South Sudan, residents had dug foxholes for shelter in the event of a bomb attack.

Displaced people living in Blue Nile told Human Rights Watch they had limited access to food, water, and medicine and were surviving on wild fruits and plants. Their children have no access to school. (...)

(...) Sudan has a clear obligation to allow aid groups to access all parts of the state, Human Rights Watch said. The laws of war require all parties to the conflict to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, conducted without any adverse distinction.

## Attacks on Civilians, Killings

After fighting broke out in September in Damazin, Sudan's forces moved south, advancing on Kormuk, a rebel-stronghold they captured in November. Community leaders who fled to South Sudan told Human Rights Watch that Sudan government forces clashed with SPLA-North forces and conducted military operations in dozens of villages along the main road to Kormuk.

Following the government's takeover of Kormuk, forces also conducted military operations in villages around the Ingessana mountains. Clashes have continued in that area, with unconfirmed reports that on April 15 shelling by government forces killed 11 displaced civilians in Khor Maksa. (...)

(...) In line with international law, both Sudan forces and SPLA-North are required to take all feasible precautions to minimize civilian casualties during military operations, and deliberate targeting of civilians and extra judicial killings are always strictly prohibited, and constitute a war crime. (...)

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