

Sudan: Crisis Conditions in Southern Kordofan Human Rights Watch 4 May 2012 The Sudanese government forces are conducting indiscriminate bombings and abuses against civilians in the Nuba Mountains area of Southern Kordofan, Human Rights Watch said today. Such attacks may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, and are creating a humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by the government's denial of access to humanitarian agencies outside government-controlled towns, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights Watch researchers went to the region in mid-April 2012 and interviewed victims and witnesses in three areas. They consistently described almost-daily aerial bombardment by government forces, the destruction of grain and water sources that are critical to their survival, arbitrary detentions, and sexual violence against women.

(...) Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) are locked in an armed conflict in Southern Kordofan state and neighboring Blue Nile state, both of which lie north of the border with South Sudan, which gained independence in July 2011. Communities in both states were aligned with the southern rebels during Sudan's 22-year civil war.

The Sudanese government forces' actions are serious violations of international humanitarian law, Human Rights Watch said. The government should immediately halt indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas, rein in abusive forces, and release civilians captured and now arbitrarily detained by its forces.

On May 2, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution condemning recent cross-border violence between Sudan and South Sudan, but failed to condemn Sudan's indiscriminate bombing inside its own territory in areas such as Southern Kordofan. The UN Security Council and the African Union should unequivocally condemn these attacks, insist that Khartoum free all civilians unlawfully detained and facilitate access for aid agencies, Human Rights Watch said.

The civilian deaths and injuries from aerial bombing investigated by Human Rights Watch occurred mostly in civilian areas, where witnesses indicated that there was no apparent military target or presence of rebel fighters at the time the attacks occurred.

In recent weeks, fighting between Sudanese and South Sudanese forces in the oil-producing area of Heglig has overshadowed the ongoing crisis in Southern Kordofan, where conflict between the Sudanese government and remnants of the Sudan People's Liberation Army first erupted in June 2011, and in Blue Nile, where the conflict spread in September 2011. Human Rights Watch also visited Blue Nile State in April.

Human Rights Watch's most recent research in Southern Kordofan builds on research in the region in August 2011. The April visits were to El Buram, Um Durein, and Heiban, three localities where the government bombing and humanitarian needs are severe. Human Rights Watch visited some areas that were particularly hard hit by fighting in December and February such as the towns of El Taice and Troji, where government soldiers destroyed boreholes and other sources of water and destroyed grain supplies as they withdrew.

Human Rights Watch found that Sudan's bombing campaign across the Nuba Mountains has killed and injured scores of civilians over the past 11 months. In one such attack, a bomb from an Antonov plane hit Halima Kafi's home in El Taice, in El Buram, in March. Her brother was inside. "The bomb fell on the house, and we couldn't find a single piece of my brother," she said. Her 9-year-old daughter, Asia, also died immediately. Her 8-year-old son Khamis lost an arm; and 14-year-old Nafisa had shrapnel wounds all over her body.

Thousands of Nuba civilians are hiding from bombs, shelling, and missiles in mountain caves, afraid to return home. Many displaced people interviewed by Human Rights Watch said their homes had been destroyed by the bombing and fighting, and they had lost all of their belongings, including cattle and other livestock looted by government soldiers. The fear of being hit by aerial bombardment prevents civilians from going about their normal lives, including preparing fields for cultivation.

The loss of last year's harvest, coupled with the Sudanese government's refusal to allow humanitarian assistance into the Nuba Mountains, has created severe food shortages and prompted many civilians to flee the area.

More than 350,000 people are estimated to be internally displaced within Southern Kordofan, according to Sudanese civil society and humanitarian groups. At least 25,000 have fled to refugee settlements in South Sudan. According to the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR), an average of over 200 refugees arrived in the Yida refugee camp daily during April, and there has been a marked increase in cases of malnutrition among recent refugee arrivals.

The Sudan government has permitted UN staff to go to Kadugli, in Southern Kordofan, and Damazin and Roseiris in Blue Nile, but has blocked humanitarian aid to the most severely affected areas and rebel-held areas in both states since the conflict began.

The laws of war require all parties to the conflict, including the Sudanese authorities, to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian assistance for civilians in need. Although the Sudanese authorities have a right to control the delivery of aid, they may not arbitrarily deny access to humanitarian agencies and must allow access to humanitarian organizations that provide relief on an impartial and non-discriminatory basis if the survival of the population is threatened.

Human Rights Watch has repeatedly called on the United Nations and African Union to demand an end to indiscriminate bombing in civilian areas and humanitarian access to populations in need in both Southern Kordofan and neighboring Blue Nile State, and to authorize an independent investigation into serious crimes against civilians in both states.

(...) *Sections that follow include:*

- **Details of attacks on civilians and on their means to survival, arbitrary detentions, and other abuses follow.**
- **Indiscriminate Bombardment**
- **Arbitrary Arrest and Detention**

- **Sexual Violence**
- **Denial of Access to Essentials of Life**
- **International Response**
- **Background** Read the [full press release](#) .