

Sudan: Civilians Describe Toll of Attacks Human Rights Watch 11 December 2012 The Sudanese government's indiscriminate aerial bombardment and shelling in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states has killed and injured scores of civilians since the conflict began more than a year ago, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Government forces have raided villages, burned and looted civilian property, arbitrarily detained people, and assaulted and raped women and girls.

The 39-page report, "Under Siege," is based on five research missions to the hard-to-access rebel-held areas in the two states and to refugee camps in South Sudan. It documents the government's indiscriminate bombing and other attacks on civilians since conflict between the government of Sudan and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) broke out in June 2011 in Southern Kordofan following disputed state elections. The report also describes the effect of Sudan's refusal to allow humanitarian assistance into rebel-held areas. Hundreds of thousands of people are displaced inside the two states, surviving on very little, while more than 200,000 have fled to refugee camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

"Sudan's indiscriminate bombs are killing and maiming women, men, and children, who are running scared and going hungry," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The international community should end its silence and demand an immediate end to these abuses." The United Nations, African Union (AU), League of Arab States, the European Union (EU) and its member states, along with other key countries such as the United States, China, South Africa, and Qatar, should forcefully press Sudan to end the indiscriminate bombing immediately and stop blocking access to aid. They should call on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to establish a commission of inquiry into violations by both government and rebel forces since the conflict started. Researchers have also received reports of violations by rebel forces, such as indiscriminate shelling of government-held towns, but could not access government-held areas to confirm the reports.

Those responsible for serious crimes should be held to account and subject to targeted sanctions, such as asset freezes and travel bans, Human Rights Watch said. The need for accountability for mass crimes is especially pressing in Sudan, where President Omar al-Bashir; Ahmed Haroun, the Southern Kordofan governor; and Abdulraheem Mohammed Hussein, the current defense minister, are already subject to arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for atrocities committed in Darfur. The ICC prosecutor will brief the UN Security Council on progress on the court's Darfur investigation on December 13.

Indiscriminate Bombing and Attacks

On a research mission to Blue Nile in October 2012, Human Rights Watch found evidence of indiscriminate bombing and shelling since the start of the conflict. (...) In Southern Kordofan, which Human Rights Watch also visited in late October, researchers also found evidence of indiscriminate bombing. (...)

Indiscriminate bombing violates fundamental principles of the laws of war, which require warring parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians at all times, and to target only combatants and military objectives. The bombs used by Sudan are unguided and often dropped from Antonov cargo planes or high-flying jets in a manner that cannot meaningfully distinguish between soldiers and civilians. In Blue Nile in particular, Human Rights Watch found evidence of the use of barrel bombs, which are crude, improvised devices filled with nails and other jagged pieces of metal that become deadly projectiles upon impact. (...)

People with real or perceived links to the SPLM-North risk arrest in government-controlled towns. Dozens of suspected members of the party, which was formally banned in September 2011 when fighting spread to Blue Nile, are in detention in Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile, and elsewhere in Sudan. (...)

Deepening Humanitarian Crisis

— Inside the rebel-held areas visited by Human Rights Watch in both states, researchers found displaced civilian communities sheltering in the bush, or in the hills near boulders and caves, or in other places they had moved for safety. Everyone the Human Rights Watch researchers encountered was surviving on dwindling food reserves and had little or no access to clean water or basic medicines and healthcare. Sudan has restricted movement into and out of rebel areas and continually denied access to independent humanitarian aid groups seeking to provide food and services, effectively blockading the rebel-held areas. This policy has prevented civilians from accessing medicine and other supplies and personnel, such as doctors or teachers. The clinics and schools the researchers found, some of them damaged by bombing, had been closed or abandoned. Sudan's bombing and refusal to allow food and aid into the states has pushed more than 200,000 people from these states into refugee camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia. But the camps' close proximity to the border with Sudan, where conflict is ongoing, and the presence of armed soldiers from various armies in and around the camps, continue to pose threats to civilian safety. Refugee women and girls spoke of the continued threat of sexual violence. (...)

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