

# Civil Society groups urge African Union to act on Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile crisis

Thursday 24 January 2013

## **Joint statement issued by over 350 African civil society organisations**

**23 January 2013**

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To our African Leaders

On the eve of the next African Union (AU) meeting on the Sudans, we appeal to you to do all you can to end the violence and restore peace to the people of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile in Sudan. The war that has raged between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) for over 18 months cannot be allowed to claim more lives and endanger the chances of peace in the wider region. The time for resolute action and strong leadership is now.

Nearly one million people are already affected and the situation is getting worse as both parties launch new dry season offensives. Intense and indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilian areas by the Sudanese Armed Forces is terrorizing communities, killing and maiming on a daily basis. The conflict is a scar on Africa, made worse by the fact that it bears many of the hallmarks of the state-sponsored violence inflicted on the Nuba people in the 1990s. It is a cycle of violence that only our African leaders can, and must, now break.

Credible reports from the Two Areas confirm what we have been hearing from our brothers and sisters on the ground: the humanitarian situation is verging on catastrophic. It is no exaggeration when the experts warn that a man-made famine looms.

An estimated 700,000 people in the SPLM-N-controlled areas, mainly women, children and the elderly, have little or no access to food, water, sanitation or healthcare. More than 18 months of bombing, shelling and ground attacks have meant that few have been able to grow and harvest staple crops. To make matters worse, aid agencies are barred from these areas, forcing many to seek sustenance from wild fruits and leaves, or to eat a meal only once every five days. The serious health and developmental implications for the many children subjected to this level of deprivation and violence are deeply disturbing.

Unless African leaders seize the opportunity to take decisive and firm action to demand an end to the violence, a whole generation of children may be lost to war.

As a coalition of over 350 civil society organisations from Sudan, South Sudan and across Africa, we appreciate attempts over the last year by the AU to encourage the warring parties to resolve their differences and allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need. But, despite these efforts and those by leaders such as former President Thabo Mbeki, no relief has been delivered and no guns laid down.

More must be done to ensure there is a cessation of hostilities, unhindered humanitarian assistance for all civilians in need, and direct talks between the two parties to peacefully resolve their long-standing grievances.

We urge Thabo Mbeki, as the Chair of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (HIP), to ensure that his forthcoming report to the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) includes firm and decisive recommendations on Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. At a minimum, both parties must be required to meet time-bound milestones and be held accountable for non-compliance. This has been stipulated in relation to other outstanding issues concerning the border region, notably Abyei and border demarcation. Given the lives that are at stake, the AU PSC must ensure that Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile are accorded a similarly determined response that provides no leeway for further delays, prevarication or inaction.

The situation is now too critical to allow civilians to be held hostage to further political intransigence.

Only unified, sustained, high-level political pressure will break the deadlock in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Failure of our African leaders to rise to this challenge will jeopardise our shared dream of Sudan and South Sudan living as two viable states side by side in peace. Now is the moment for the AU to demonstrate its leadership and ability to produce African solutions for African problems.

### **Signatories:**

Action Support Centre (Regional hub of over 100 African NGOs), Africa Democracy Forum, Africa Peace Forum, African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, African Research and Resource Forum, Agency for Independence Media (AIM - South Sudan), Al Khatim Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (KACE - Sudan), Arab Coalition for Darfur (ACD - Coalition of over 120 Arab civil society organisations), Blue Nile Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organization (BNRRDO), Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Community Empowerment Progress Organisation (CEPO - South Sudan), Darfur Bar Association, Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), Bishop of the Diocese of Kadugli Andudu Adam Elnail (Episcopal Church of the Sudan), Funj Youth Development Association (Blue Nile, Sudan), Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA), International Center for Policy and Conflict (ICPC), Kamma Organisation for Development Initiatives (KODI - Southern Kordofan, Sudan), Lawyers for Human Rights (South Africa), Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (NRRDO - Southern Kordofan, Sudan), Qura Elnfeer Organisation for Development, Hawa Salih (Human Rights Activist - Darfur, Sudan), South Africa Forum for International Solidarity (SAFIS - Consortium of over 100 South African organisations), South Sudan Human Rights Defenders Network (SSHRDN), Strategic Center for Social & Cultural Studies (Blue Nile, Sudan), Sudan Center for Conflict Resolution and Development (SCCRD), Sudan Consortium, Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG), Sudan Sensitisation Project, The Sudanese Association for the Defence of Freedom of Opinion and Conscience (SADFOC)