

Blue Nile Emerging: Horrors without end and a familiar international acquiescence

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By Eric Reeves

February 2, 2013 - Three recent assessments missions to Blue Nile have powerfully expanded our view of the vast crisis in this desperate region, as well as of the better reported humanitarian crisis engineered by Khartoum in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan. Reports from Human Rights Watch, Aegis Trust and Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)(UK), and the intrepid Tomo Kriznar all provide exceedingly grim accounts deriving from recent assessment missions on the ground. Information about and links to these critically important accounts appear below.

Previously, our view of Blue Nile, where conflict has raged since September 1, 2011, has been shaped largely by the ghastly reports of refugees who have poured into Upper Nile (South Sudan) from Blue Nile. An important exception from 2011 is the "Field Report on Blue Nile" from the Enough Project, November 29, 2011, which provided early insight into the character of the violence. These refugee accounts in themselves make for extremely grim reading, and reveal the clear determination of the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party regime to destroy African civilian life as part of its counter-insurgency strategy against the indigenous rebellion led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-N). The tools of this vicious campaign are village destruction, burning of foodstocks, brutal rapes and murders, and unrelenting aerial assault, making agricultural production among those who have been ethnically-targeted virtually impossible.

John Ging, head of humanitarian operations for the UN, declared last month about Blue Nile and South Kordofan, "nearly one million people are in dire need, but out of reach of aid workers, forcing some to rely on roots and leaves for food" (January 8, 2013). These people are "out of reach" because Khartoum has imposed a total humanitarian relief blockade on the two regions, and has adamantly refused to accept the access proposal made exactly one year ago by the UN, the African Union, and the Arab League (indeed, the Khartoum regime claims that, "Blue Nile is getting back to normal"). Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates are consistently reported above the "emergency threshold," sometimes well above that threshold. Significant rates of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM)—which can prove rapidly fatal in children under five—have been reported from the camps in South Sudan and spot assessments in the Nuba Mountains.

It is hardly surprising that the comparison to Darfur has been made often, here for Aegis and HART by Mukesh Kapila, former chief humanitarian coordinator for Sudan; Kapila was forced to resign from his post in 2004 because of blunt comments about the realities of genocidal destruction in Darfur (BBC, March 2004). He was just as blunt in speaking about the mission organized by Aegis Trust and HART:

"I witnessed the 21st century's first genocide in Darfur during my time as UN Chief in Sudan in 2003-2004. Returning to Sudan a decade later, I saw the same tactics of systematic ethnic cleansing in full play in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile," says Dr Kapila, whose visit to the two areas was organised by the Aegis Trust in conjunction with the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)."

- A selection of what we have heard previously about Blue Nile:

[i] "Fresh fighting in Sudan [Blue Nile/Southern Kordofan] after US famine warning," Agence France Presse, January 19, 2012

[ii] "Blue Nile terror as Sudan air strikes cause havoc," October 10, 2011

[iii] "Aid Agencies Fear for Survival of Sudan's Blue Nile Refugees," Voice of America, June 20, 2012

[iv] "Sudan: Blue Nile Civilians Describe Attacks, Abuses," Human Rights Watch, April 22, 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"], <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/04/23/sudan-blue-nile-civilians-describe-attac...>

[v] "Sudan refugees reduced to eating leaves, bark," Agence France-Presse, June 20, 2012

[vi] "Sudan forces accused of killings, rape [in Blue Nile]," Agence France-Presse, November 1, 2011

(vii) "As refugee numbers [from Blue Nile] swell, disease puts pressure on relief efforts," (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), September 21, 2012)

[viii] "900,000 needy blocked from aid in Sudan's [Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains]," Associated Press, January 8, 2013

LINKS TO THE MORE EXTENSIVE ACCOUNTS RECENTLY CONDUCTED IN BLUE NILE ITSELF BY:

- Aegis Trust/HART
- Human Rights Watch
- Tomo Kriznar:

[1] "Returning to Blue Nile and to the Nuba Mountains," Aegis Trust/HART, January 18, 2013, <http://www.aegistrust.org/index.php/Campaigns-Policy-and-Research/former-un-sudan-chief-visits-the-countrys-warzones-war ns-of-potential-for-another-darfur-scale-catastrophe.html>

[2] Human Rights Watch:

(a) "Sudan: Bombardment of Civilians in Blue Nile and South Kordofan," December 10, 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/features/sudan-bombardment-civilians-blue-nile-and-south...>

(b) "Under Siege: Indiscriminate Bombing and Abuses in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile State," December 12, 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/12/12/under-siege...>

[3] Tomo Kriznar has also released video reporting from the ground in Blue Nile at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjoPFXsH2Qs>. This powerful documentary gives voice to the people of Blue Nile, with extremely revealing and technically impressive video and audio recordings.

It is impossible to escape the conclusion reading these reports and others—and viewing the extensive videography and photography from the Nuba Mountains as well as this of Blue Nile—that Khartoum's counterinsurgency campaign is based on deliberate, widespread, ethnically-targeted human destruction and displacement. Thousands have already died from violence and its deadly aftermath, although we have no way of knowing how many; hundreds of thousands are at acute risk of disease and malnutrition—or have already fled to South Sudan. UNHCR has registered 207,000 refugees as of January 29, 2013; tens of thousands have fled to Ethiopia; the total number is certainly higher and growing by the day—thousands every week in Unity and Upper Nile States. Altogether, the UN estimates that almost 1 million people have been displaced or are in desperate need.

In what sense, then, is it inappropriate to invoke the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)?

"In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

[a] Killing members of the group;

[b] Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

[c] Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;

[d] Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

[e] Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

The question, in fact, is not which of these acts has been committed; as in Darfur, the question is which have not.

The larger question is why this has mattered so little to the international community.

*Eric Reeves' new book-length study of greater Sudan (Compromising With Evil: An archival history of greater Sudan, 2007 - 2012) is available in eBook format, at no cost: www.CompromisingWithEvil.org
Websites: www.sudanreeves.org, www.sudanbombing.org, www.CompromisingWithEvil.org*