

20 July 2015

Dear Special Envoy Ambassador Booth,

In the run up to your visit to Sudan at the end of July, we, the undersigned Sudanese, African and international non-governmental organisations, are writing to brief you on some of our key concerns in regards to the human rights and humanitarian situation in Sudan. While we welcome your visit as an opportunity to engage with the Government of Sudan, we urge you to make it clear that there can be no normalisation of relations with the United States as long as the government continues to callously target its own citizens and disrespect its international and regional human rights obligations.

Our organisations have documented grave and widespread human rights violations in conflict and non-conflict settings, accompanied by a climate of impunity for perpetrators. In the conflict zones of Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, deliberate attacks on civilian populations continue to take place and cause mass forced displacement. Across the country, opposition party members, independent civil society, and human rights defenders continue to be subject to harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and in some cases, criminal charges. The Government of Sudan has failed to engage seriously in its own national dialogue process, raising serious concerns over the inclusivity and transparency of the process and future modalities of governance in the country.

There are currently an estimated 2.5 million internally displaced persons in Darfur and 1.7 million in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. A report released by the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan in January 2015 expressed concern about an apparent government policy of "collective punishment" to counter the insurgency in Darfur. This policy has seen the targeting of villages and communities, often on the grounds of presumed support to armed opposition groups. Since 2014, at least 500,000 people have been displaced in Darfur by violent attacks on civilians, indiscriminate bombing, and widespread abuses by Sudanese government forces and allied paramilitary groups such as the Rapid Support Forces. Abuses have also included destruction and burning of villages, rampant sexual violence against women and girls, and forced displacement. Human Rights Watch documented the mass rape of up to 221 women and girls in late October and early November in Tabit, North Darfur. Following the reported attack, the UN African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur, UNAMID, was not allowed access to Tabit by Sudanese authorities for over a week.

In recent months, our organisations have documented serious violations of international humanitarian law in Blue Nile, including a similar trend of targeting members of the Ingessana ethnic group on their presumed support to the rebel Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N). From April – May 2015, the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies documented three villages burnt to the ground by the Sudanese Armed Forces, displacing approximately 10,000 civilians. On 13 May, the Sudanese Armed Forces ordered the residents of four villages in Blue Nile to relocate, threatening that anyone who remained behind would be presumed to be an SPLM – N member. The Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG) also documented the burning of Maganza and Bagis villages on 11 and 12 May. SDFG reported that the displaced were without shelter for three days before security officials operating trucks transferred the group to Rosairis locality. On 3 July, the National Intelligence and Security Services and Sudanese Armed Forces forced the residents of Banat village in Bau locality to relocate to Abu Rahmad. Banat village is primarily occupied by members of the Ingessana ethnic group.

Displacement figures are difficult to access due to government obstruction of access; the Government of Sudan has heavily restricted humanitarian access to these areas, only allowing the Sudanese Red Crescent to provide assistance. IDPs displaced to the surrounding areas of El Damazein remain in extremely critical conditions, having lost food stocks and assets, and also having lost the ability to plant in the rainy season. International humanitarian organisations have been prohibited access to the rebel-held areas. We urge you to take advantage of your engagement with the government of Sudan to push for an urgent humanitarian assessment to assess the needs of the displaced.

In the SPLM-N controlled areas of South Kordofan, there has been a significant increase in violence in the run up to the rainy season. According to the South Kordofan and Blue Nile Coordination Unit, approximately 30,000 civilians were displaced in South Kordofan in May 2015 alone. In the first five months of 2015, the Sudan Consortium has verified 200 attacks (primarily aerial bombardment) on civilian targets, killing 39 civilians and injuring 148 persons. There were 65 attacks in May 2015, a 14% increase over the previous month.

The use of aerial bombardment and overflights over civilian villages and communities has been a consistent strategy of the Sudanese Armed Forces since the beginning of conflict in 2011. Aerial bombardment in May and June has disrupted cultivation activities before the rainy season, as well as having had a profound

psychological impact over the course of the conflict.

The Sudan Consortium has also documented the use of cluster bombs. On 27 May 2015, four cluster bombs fell on Kauda, the administrative headquarters of the SPLM-N controlled area, killing a two year old child. The UN Secretary General's latest report on UNAMID on 26 May noted that UNAMID had collected evidence of two cluster bombs near Kirigiyati in North Darfur. There is growing international consensus that the use of cluster munitions is unacceptable, as evidenced by the adoption in 2008 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Sudan is not a party.

Throughout the country, there is little room for discordant views to the ruling National Congress Party. The re-election of President Omar al Bashir in April 2015 in elections that were boycotted by the mainstream opposition, the hibernation of the Darfur case by the International Criminal Court, and Bashir's escape from South Africa have emboldened the Government. Political space for the exercise of civil and political rights is severely circumscribed. Periods of intense political negotiations in the country have been punctuated by increasing crackdowns on independent civil society and mainstream political opposition figures. Sudan's National Assembly passed a number of controversial amendments in early 2015 without public consultation, subverting the previously announced "national dialogue" process aimed at the creation of a platform between the Government and opposition. The government of Sudan seems poised to re-launch the national dialogue process on its own terms, excluding not only the allied opposition groups that have come together under the Sudan Call platform, but also dissident Islamist groups such as the Reform Now party. Sudanese civil society and activists have been clear: we welcome a national dialogue process, but only if it is inclusive, transparent and allows for international engagement.

Relations between the United States and Sudan also cannot be normalised on the basis of regional security and counter-terrorism measures. Regionally, Sudan has contributed to destabilising conflicts in South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Libya. Sudan is also now the third largest arms producer in Africa. According to Conflict Armament Research, Sudanese manufactured ammunition has been recovered from ISIS forces in Syria and Iraq, as well as from the rebel Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army – in Opposition in South Sudan.

Building on the platform for engagement of your visit, we urge you to:

- Make clear to the government of Sudan that no normalisation of relations with the United States can occur while the blatant targeting of civilians continues in conflict areas. We call on you to urge the Government of Sudan to facilitate your visit to the conflict zones of Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile.
- Call for immediate and unrestricted humanitarian access to all conflict affected areas of Sudan, including Abyei and eastern Sudan. In particular, you should urge that the government of Sudan allow an independent assessment of the humanitarian needs of those recently forcibly displaced from Blue Nile.
- Call for the government of Sudan to re-engage robustly with international efforts to mediate Sudan's conflicts based on a synchronised approach. A compartmentalised and regional approach to peace-making cannot yield a solution to grievances that are national in character.
- Urge the government of Sudan to urgently implement reforms of its justice system as recommended by the AU High Level Panel on Darfur with a view to transforming the culture of impunity in Sudan.
- Make clear to the Government of Sudan that the United States wants to see respect for basic freedoms and the creation of a conducive environment for a genuine, comprehensive, and inclusive national dialogue; and that the United States supports efforts by Sudanese who wish to advance such a process with a view to ending conflict and achieving meaningful governance reform and inclusive participatory politics.
- Call on the Government of Sudan to immediately halt all forms of harassment of opposition leaders, independent activists, and civil society groups, especially through judicial harassment and the closure of organisations. We also encourage you to meet with independent members of Sudanese civil society.

Thank you for your continued engagement with the Government of Sudan as US Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or if we can provide you with any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,

Act for Sudan  
African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies  
African Freedom Coalition

African Soul, American Heart  
Ahmed H. Adam, Visiting Fellow, Institute for African Development, Cornell University  
Al Khatim Al Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (KACE)  
American Friends of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan and Sudan  
Carl Wilkens Fellowship  
Coalition of Advocates for South Sudan  
Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations  
Congoese Genocide Awareness  
Damanga Coalition for Freedom and Democracy  
Darfur Action Group of South Carolina  
Darfur and Beyond  
Darfur Bar Association  
Darfur Interfaith Network  
Dear Sudan, Love Marin  
Dr. Ahmed Saeed  
Enough Project  
Funj Youth Development Association  
Freedom House  
Genocide No More – Save Darfur  
Georgia Coalition to Prevent Genocide  
Humanity is Us  
Jews against Genocide  
Joining our Voices  
Kamma Organisation for Development Initiatives  
Living Ubuntu  
Massachusetts Coalition to Save Darfur  
Never Again Coalition  
Nuba Mountains Advocacy Group  
Nuba Mountains International Association  
Nubia Project  
NY Coalition for Sudan  
International Justice Project  
International Refugee Rights Initiative  
Investors against Genocide  
People4Sudan  
Stop Genocide  
Sudan Advocacy Action Forum  
Sudan Consortium  
Sudan Democracy First Group  
Sudan Human Rights Network  
Sudan Unlimited  
United for Peace  
United to End Genocide  
United Sudanese and South Sudanese Communities Association  
Voices for Sudan  
Waging Peace