

HOPE IN SUFFERING

Visit report: South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains in Sudan



Children pump dirty water out of the borehole at Hai Masna displacement camp, which has been contaminated due to poor maintenance and dirty pipes

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART)

February 2019

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They cry in their sleep from what they have seen.
We are suffering and dying miserably.”*

Asunta Abuk Madut, Hai Masna camp, South Sudan

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They prefer to deny us our rights.
They want to impose only one culture and one religion.”*

Governor Anur Shallah, Nuba Mountains, Sudan

*“The Government is killing its own people. They are burning
churches. They do not want people to be Christians.”*

General Jagot Mukwar, Deputy Chair of SPLM-N, Sudan

*“Our people have suffered so long. Hunger, sickness, war.
The Government persecute us in so many ways.
They employ new tactics to inflict suffering.”*

Commissioner David Isiah, Nuba Mountains, Sudan

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Our cattle slaughtered. Our homes destroyed.”*

Community leaders in Yida refugee camp, South Sudan

*“My baby is malnourished and has diarrhea but I cannot
access medicine or a ration card as we arrived too late.”*

Awok Mamour, Hai Masna camp, South Sudan

Overview

Sudan

The Government of Sudan's genocidal policies, already well documented, reflect President al-Bashir's avowed commitment to turn Sudan into an "Arabic, Islamic nation". Conflict, repression and severe human rights violations continue across the country.

In Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states (the Two Areas), military assaults are directed at indigenous Africans, moderate Muslims, Christians and traditional believers. As one opposition Governor told us: "The regime want to impose only one culture and only one religion."

We visited the Nuba Mountains in Southern Kordofan to obtain first-hand evidence of the suffering of the people, as well as current information about the Government's ongoing military offensives. We also met opposition leaders and visited Yida Refugee Camp, south of the border, currently home to 48,000 Nuba refugees.

South Sudan

South Sudan's civil war began in December 2013. It was triggered by a political dispute between President Salva Kiir's Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the opposition force led by former Vice President Riek Machar. Tensions increased as rebel groups proliferated along ethnic and tribal lines in localised militia.

In August 2018 a power-sharing agreement was signed between the warring parties, though it is not yet clear whether this will result in meaningful and sustainable actions.

Although significant challenges remain, we were encouraged by the resilience of those whom we met in Juba, Akon and Wau and their initiatives to meet as many of their people's needs as possible.

Summary

HART exists to support those suffering conflict and persecution in places with no international media attention who are generally not served by major aid organisations. We believe that, in order to meet their needs, the management of humanitarian assistance must primarily involve local people. The concerns outlined below therefore seek to reflect the priorities of our partners in Sudan and South Sudan.

Sudan

- The Government of Sudan should allow cross-border aid to reach the Two Areas to enable the survival of civilians, who are not able to trust aid sent from Khartoum due to their experience of sustained genocidal policies perpetrated against them for so many years.
- The UK Government acknowledge there has been no improvement in human rights in Sudan in recent years. Yet it continues to promote trade links with Sudan, which provides credibility and support for the regime. We heard time and again from community leaders within the Two Areas that the UK's 'strategic dialogue' policies will not work.

South Sudan

- We share the widely-publicised concern over the many problems in South Sudan, caused by aspects of the political leadership, economic crises and inter-communal conflicts. However, we were encouraged by the resilience and resourcefulness of local people, especially at the Mary Help College of Nursing and Midwifery and St. John's College in Wau.
- Community leaders are inhibited from accessing funds by large-scale donors, most notably the UK's Department for International Development, because of disruptive bureaucratic requirements. We urge such donors to make funds available to those who undertake programmes that supply essential services, such as education, health care, agricultural development and small-scale entrepreneurship.

Main findings: Sudan

Genocidal policies of the Government of Sudan

It has been ten years since President al-Bashir was issued an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court on multiple counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Yet neighbouring Islamist regimes continue to support the President because of his commitment to transforming Sudan into a unified Arabic, Islamic nation. As Malik Agar, Chairman of SPLM-N for Blue Nile, told us:

“The Government are committed to turning all of Sudan into an Islamic nation. They are not isolated in their ambition. The Islamic movement is one of the largest in the world.”

Abdelaziz Adam al-Hilu, Chairman of SPLM-N, shared similar concerns:

“The civil war will continue as long as Bashir continues to impose an Arab identity on the citizens of Sudan. We will never have peace until the Government abandons Sharia laws. We will never have peace until the Government accommodates diversity and supports our array of cultural identities across Sudan.”

The same point was made by opposition Governor Anur Shallah, who is responsible for a number of counties in the Nuba Mountains:

“The regime does not want to finalise peace. They prefer to deny us our rights. They want to impose only one culture and one religion.”

Ongoing military operations

In a previous visit report (January 2017) we cited evidence of aerial bombardment by Antonov aircraft in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. The attacks were directed at schools, churches, mosques, villages, marketplaces and other infrastructure central to the wellbeing of the community, causing civilian deaths and forcing families to flee to locations with life-threatening conditions.

We were relieved to hear, upon our most recent visit, that aerial attacks have not occurred since the beginning of 2017. However, the Government continue to fly Antonov aircraft over the Two Areas, to cause fear and dissuade refugees from returning home.

Community leaders within Yida Refugee Camp, who represent thousands of displaced persons from the Nuba Mountains, explained why the presence of Antonovs cause so much fear among the local population:

“We have come to Yida because it is not safe in the Nuba Mountains. The Antonovs killed our children. Even though the planes do not drop bombs today, they often circle the skies. It is psychological warfare. The planes bring back awful memories. People are traumatised by war. Our families were killed, our cattle slaughtered, and homes destroyed. That is why so many stay in Yida.”

There are also reports that, although levels of violence have decreased, the Government remain committed to strengthening their military capability. We heard several reports of a build-up of armed forces close to the Two Areas. This is fueling suspicion of a renewed Government offensive and has increased fears among the local people, resulting in further internal displacement and outflow of refugees. Yida community leaders said:

“People want to return to the Nuba Mountains but there are rumours of a build-up of Government troops. Many are scared that, if we return, we will be killed.”

Similar concerns were expressed by the Deputy Chair of SPLM-N, General Jagot Mukwar:

“Antonovs have not dropped bombs for two years. But we hear that Government troops could be moving closer. SAF [Sudanese Armed Forces] surround the Two Areas. In November and December, civilians were ambushed on the main road in Habila. It happened three times in two months. Two weeks ago, a farm was burnt, also in Habila. The Government is killing its own people. They are burning churches. They do not want people to be Christians. They want us to speak in Arabic. They want us to have Arabic names.”

Senior members of the SPLM-N for the Nuba Mountains informed us of the names of 32 churches that have been burnt down in Sudan over the last year. We were also told of a further 40 that have been destroyed. We await confirmation on this claim.

Division within SPLM-N

SPLM-N divided into two factions in July 2017, when Chairman Malik Agar and Deputy Chairman Abdelaziz Adam al-Hilu disagreed over proposed policies with the Government of Sudan, particularly regarding self-determination or autonomy. Clashes occurred between the two factions, causing further displacement of civilians and increasing tensions among the local people. No dialogue has yet been arranged between Malik Agar and Abdelaziz Adam al-Hilu to try to settle the disagreement.

We urge SPLM faction leaders to try to resolve their differences and provide a strong, stable and united opposition for the good of the people.

Severe Food Insecurity

Food prices in the markets are rising above average and food access among poor households is expected to be much lower than normal in 2019. Widespread livestock diseases and cattle raids not only threaten livelihoods, but also increase fear. Constant displacement amongst civilians prevents them from cultivating crops and maintaining any resilience to natural disasters, such as floods.

Regional Commissioner David Isiah explained how Government policies restrict access to food:

“Our people have suffered so long. Hunger, sickness, war. The Government persecute us in so many ways. They employ new tactics to inflict suffering – criminal networks operate underground to attack villages. They steal our livestock and destroy our property. Bandits kill people in the field.”

But Abdelaziz Adam al-Hilu, Chairman of SPLM-N, pointed out:

“...we know that a successful humanitarian intervention cannot be achieved until a political solution is reached. Humanitarian issues are merely a symptom

of the political tension, as long as Bashir continues to use food and education as the most powerful weapons of war.”

Challenges for education

There are 240 primary schools and ten secondary schools in the Nuba Mountains. Local people show tremendous resourcefulness in organising these schools, especially as they receive no support from the Government of Sudan. Education is a priority as they want the younger generation to have a secure future – learning to read and write but also developing skills such as carpentry, mechanics and construction. However, pupils have no text books, and virtually no exercise books or pencils. Teachers are untrained and limited in number. They are being asked to work voluntarily, with little-to-no financial incentives.

Governor Anur Shallah said:

“Support for our schools comes from within the community. There is no help from the Khartoum. We have to support ourselves.”

Chairman Abdelaziz Adam al-Hilu added:

“The Government only provides children with education if they attend Islamic schools. Bashir wants to keep the war going so that he can continue to restrict education. For as long as the young generation are oppressed, they are unable to learn about their history and human rights.”

Healthcare and Wellbeing

We were told in 2018 there are 28 health clinics in SPLA-N held-territory, covering a population of 900,000 people. These clinics provide universal health care and midwifery but are chronically short of trained manpower and medical supplies. There are high incidences of diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis, leprosy, skin diseases, sexually transmitted diseases and malnourishment but no medicines to treat them with. Childhood immunisation and public health vaccines are unavailable.

Commissioner David Isiah from the Nuba Mountains said:

“Since 1994 there has been no vaccination for children.”

Refugees in Yida also face difficulties in accessing effective health care. Community leaders within the Camp told us:

“The population in Yida camp is too high. We only have one dispensary health clinic for the entire host community and refugee population. CARE international are running the clinic. The UN is not helping with education either. The teachers in the camp are volunteers so they have no financial incentives to stay. We try to raise funds through families but many children are orphans. They do not have parents who can help. Many of these orphans look for work to raise funds, which means they are not in school.”

Life is very difficult in Yida, especially as UNHCR is trying to pressurise refugees to move to alternative locations. Many do not want to leave, as they wish to stay as near as possible to their homeland, to return if and whenever possible.

Women and girls

Throughout the conflict, women and girls have suffered discrimination and violence. Those who are unaccompanied, pregnant, disabled, elderly or heads of households are most at risk.

Hawa Mondo, Protection Coordinator at the Nuba Relief and Rehabilitation Development Organisation (NRRDO), explained:

“Most men are soldiers so women are responsible for family and the provision of food. Most women have lost a husband or child. They are sad, always. They are traumatised. They need psychological support. Some of those who carry firewood are injured by landmines. We try but we do not have the chance to change anything.”

The need for cross-border aid

The people in Blue Nile have deep distrust of the Government of Sudan and are in desperate need of aid to come from across the border rather from Khartoum. In particular, the people are worried that food aid will be tampered with and used to

further the regime's agenda. They are willing to accept non-food items that cannot be used to harm them such as education and medical supplies.

Their fear and distrust is not unfounded as there is history of the regime interfering with international aid operations in Darfur. Commissioner David Isiah from the Nuba Mountains said:

“The Nuba people are in need of humanitarian assistance. But the Government is broking all efforts. There is mistrust. The Nuba people associate Antonov planes with guns and bombs. They do not understand that anything helpful might come from Khartoum. We would prefer aid from international charities, not the Government.”

Governor Anur Shallah, responsible for a number of counties in the Nuba Mountains controlled by SPLA-N, said:

“We need humanitarian assistance from neighbouring countries. Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan or Kenya. We need all kinds of relief from the international community. The people do not want aid from Khartoum.”

Main findings: South Sudan

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The civil war has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths and forced millions to flee their homes. According to the UN 1.76 million are internally displaced. Half the population is food insecure. Two thirds of the country requires humanitarian assistance.

We visited Hai Masna displacement camp in Wau, which is currently home to 8,280 IDPs. The camp's manager, James Aguer Ken, identified six priorities:

- **Education:** *"There is a primary school here. There is no secondary school but children are able to go to a school outside the camp. This costs students money. So most do not go. They farm instead."*
- **Healthcare:** *"There is a clinic that operates during the day. The queue is very long. It is only open during the day. There is no light in the clinic. The problem is shortage of staff. We only have one nurse, one midwife, one pharmaceutical assistant, one clinical officer and one trained Traditional Birth Attendant – for the whole camp. Medicine is provided by the Red Cross. For serious illnesses, medicine costs a lot of money. Diarrhea and vomiting is a big problem for children. Latrines are not cleaned because cleaners are only provided with two bars of soap per month."*
- **Electricity:** *"The camp does not have sufficient electricity. There is nowhere to charge mobile phones so people here cannot communicate with their families outside the camp. There is no light in the clinic. We only have security spotlights. There are no other lights in the camp. We have been given torches previously but these are now broken. Children are bitten by scorpions at night."*
- **Accommodation:** *"The plastic sheets which cover our shelters tear easily in the heat. In the rainy season, people take shelter in the school, but this isn't big enough for 8000 people. There is nothing we can do to rebuild shelters."*
- **Food and nutrition:** *"Each person with a food token receives 10kg per month of sorghum and lentils from the World Food Programme. 412 households*

who arrived in June do not have food tokens. These households eat grass to survive, though a lot of grass has been burned, or they try to earn money for food by working in the market.”

- **Security:** “IDPs have been instructed to stay in the camp for their safety. They risk being attacked if they leave the camp. Government forces control the town and rebels control the bush. Returning IDPs who go to bush for fire wood risk being accused of colluding with rebels. They are mistrusted on all sides – caught in the middle. The fighting has reduced in Wau. But all over South Sudan, rebels are recruiting young people who are enticed by the prospect of military rank and financial incentives.”

We also sat with several women living in Hai Masna displacement camp. Each of the women expressed their priorities and concerns, namely: the overwhelming need for food and light. Extracts from three interviews are recorded below.



(Left) Asunta Abuk Madut is living in Hai Masna displacement camp. She has six children.

“Light is our biggest concern. We have no torch or light inside our tent to protect us from snakes.

“Last week my son was attacked during the night by a snake inside of our tent and we had to flee until morning, as we could not see anything.

“My children get night terrors because they are traumatised. They cry in their sleep from what they have seen.

“We are suffering and dying miserably. Everyone fears returning home because the rebels are hiding in the bush. We still have fear. We do not have the energy to rebuild our homes that were burnt down.”

(Right) Abang Mawut does not know her age. She has eight children and is pregnant with her ninth.

"I spend all day with my husband, selling firewood and using millet grain to make alcohol to sell.

"I can only afford to send four of my children to school. But when they go to school hungry, they miss classes during the day to find food.

"For me, it is not easy being pregnant in this camp as I have no bedding and get aches from lying on rocks on the ground."



(Left) Awok Mamour is 21 years-old. She is mother to a three year-old and a baby of six months.

"My baby is malnourished and has diarrhea but I cannot access medicine or a ration card as we arrived too late.

"I try to support my family by selling rolls of long grass for 200 SSP [less than \$1] but I am constantly dependent on food relief from CARD."

Power for The People

HART's partner organisation, Power for The People (PFP), is in its final planning stages with Archbishop Moses Deng and the Diocese of Wau to provide solar lighting to vulnerable households living within Hai Masna displacement camp.

Through purchasing more than 700 solar light packs, the Diocese will rent out 'dream boxes' to assist PFP in encouraging IDPs to implement entrepreneurial initiatives such as phone charging and the option to extend work hours after sunset. Additionally, the Diocese of Wau will loan out the solar light packs to St. John's College to enable students to study for their exams in the evenings.

Education

Children in South Sudan are less likely to receive education than any other child in the world. Capacity building efforts are frequently interrupted by conflict. There is a shortage of trained teachers and many potential students find it difficult to access or afford schools.

Victor Atem Atem is the Governor of Gogrial State. He told us that, in his state, *"access to education is still a problem. Some children have to travel 7km to get to their nearest school. Walking is especially difficult in the rainy season. Most classrooms are suitable for a maximum of 45-50 students but there are over 80 children in some classes."*

St. John's College in Wau is managed by Archbishop Moses Deng and the Episcopal Church of South Sudan. The college provides courses for 720 students in business administration, primary education and theology, offering an array of three-month courses and diplomas. St. John's College has a strong and ever-increasing gender ratio of 32 per cent female students.



Second-year primary education students at St. John's College

Provision of healthcare

Mary Help College of Nursing and Midwifery is based in Wau, in the same compound as Mary Help Hospital. It was established in 2006 to facilitate the growth of high-quality nursing in South Sudan. It provides courses in BSc Nursing, BSc Midwifery, Diploma Nursing and Diploma Midwifery.

We also visited St. Luke's Clinic in East Bank, Wau. Six rooms have been constructed to contain a pharmacy, observation room, consultation room, medicine storage room, an antenatal care room and an immunisation room. Until the rooms are furnished, the East Bank community relies on a handful of volunteer healthcare professionals. Approximately 250 patients visit a neighbouring private clinic every day, though it is some distance and patients are required to pay a fee.

The most common illnesses treated are malaria, typhoid, acute malnutrition, coughing and diarrhea. One in three patients attending the clinic each day suffer

from diarrhea. The clinic's Clinical Officer, Mario, also informed us of a recent outbreak of cholera nearby and of meningitis 50km away, which has so far killed two children.



The new health clinic constructed on the East Bank with funds secured by HART from the Guernsey Overseas Aid and Development Committee

Once St. Luke's Clinic has secured funding for medicine and staff salaries, community leaders expect it will receive more than 500 patients a day, approximately a third of which will be pregnant women.

The Paramount Chief of the East Bank area, Dhel Akol Ngor, expressed his gratitude for the clinic:

"On behalf of the Eastern Bank community, I would like to thank the Diocese of Wau for putting the renovation of the health facility as a first priority... the community is so excited to see the clinic renovated successfully. As a community we will no longer worry where to take patients for treatment as we used to do."



Sister Gracey gives a tour of the Nursing College to Archbishop Moses Deng , Baroness Cox and Revd David Thomas

Peace initiatives

We were encouraged to hear that, in Gogrial State, Governor Victor Atem Atem summoned 28 state community leaders to attend a one-week conference in April 2018. The leaders agreed upon and signed a set of 'peace-building resolutions'. Since the resolutions were passed, 90 per cent of civilian-owned guns have reportedly been handed in or collected.

Joseph Garang Willo, Deputy Mayor of Wau State, also shed light on the country's ambition to reach peace. Stressing his desire for the implementation of a lasting peace agreement, the Deputy Mayor declared that the country needs a lot of international support. His three main priorities required for achieving peace were: greater support for female capacity building; the provision of more schools; and an in-depth resolution to solving deep-rooted tribal difference.

Acknowledgements

At the core of HART's ethos is a commitment to working in partnership with local people. All of our projects are locally-led from vision through to implementation by partners who possess the requisite knowledge, skills and commitment to find and deliver appropriate solutions.

HART wishes to thank everyone who made us welcome and who provided the help we needed to accomplish our visit, including the Rt Rev Moses Deng Bol, Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Wau, and Benjamin Barnaba, Executive Director of the NGO New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC).

We also thank all who spoke to us, sharing information and concerns. We are particularly grateful for the grace and dignity with which we were received by people living in conditions of extreme deprivation and associated suffering. We will try to be a voice for them and to make known their needs – and the need for the international community to fulfil its obligations 'to provide and protect'.



Baroness Cox is welcomed by children with customary songs in Akon, Warab State