



House of Lords

Tuesday 9th December 2014

2.52 pm

Asked by Baroness Cox

To ask Her Majesty's Government what is their assessment of recent developments in the Republic of Sudan.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Anelay of St Johns) (Con): My Lords, we are deeply concerned about the ongoing conflicts in Sudan. Reports of aerial bombardments in South Kordofan and in Blue Nile, and the lack of access for the United Nations to investigate allegations of mass rape in Darfur, are especially worrying. We welcome efforts to secure ceasefires and moves towards a political solution, including the peace talks mediated by President Mbeki, and support a comprehensive, inclusive and transparent national dialogue.

Baroness Cox (CB): My Lords, I thank the Minister for her sympathetic reply. Is she aware that I have actually seen Government of Sudan Antonov bombers deliberately targeting hospitals, schools, markets and civilians trying to harvest their crops, forcing hundreds of thousands to hide in snake-infested caves, river beds and woods or to flee into exile in South Sudan and Ethiopia? According to the well-respected Enough Project, such systematic attacks on civilians and the Sudanese Government's aid blockade lay the foundation for a case of crimes against humanity by extermination. All this is happening with impunity. What actions are Her Majesty's Government taking to challenge this impunity?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, the noble Baroness paints an accurate picture from first-hand experience. I respect that courageous experience. She asked about impunity. We press the Government of Sudan to hold all perpetrators of human rights violations fully to account for their actions. Impunity must not be accepted. In the United Nations Human Rights Council, we support the work of the independent expert on the human rights situation in Sudan. The UK is also a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court. We continue to call on the Government of Sudan to comply with the arrest warrants for the ICC indictees. I will be representing the UK at the next meeting of the ICC in New York later this week.

Lord Steel of Aikwood (LD): My Lords, as the Minister knows, something like 100,000 people have fled both parts of Sudan over the border into Ethiopia during the past year. What extra help are the Government giving to that Government to try to cope with the influx?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, we are certainly aware of the extra aid that needs to be granted to these areas. We have been aware that more than 430,000 people have been displaced. DfID estimates that it will spend a minimum of £27 million on projects in Darfur alone. That includes funding to the World Food Programme and the Common Humanitarian Fund in Darfur. We are urging the Government of Sudan and the Darfur rebel movements to engage fully in peace talks. We are also engaging with the difficulty of access to the two areas of Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where access for humanitarian aid is, to say the least, perilous.

Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead (Lab): My Lords, as Sudanese opposition groups are now increasingly speaking to each other and taking unified positions and many people are saying that they are now likely to welcome support and advice from the United Kingdom, and in view of the need to tackle the terrible insecurity in the region, is it not short-sighted, badly timed and very unhelpful that there have been cuts in the Sudan units in the FCO?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, I was able yesterday during the Question for Short Debate from the noble Earl, Lord Sandwich, in the Moses Room to put on record the fact that the Sudan unit has its resources carefully

monitored. Whenever they need to be increased, they are. I gave a commitment that that careful monitoring and increase where necessary will be continued.

Lord Jay of Ewelme (CB): My Lords, what efforts are we making to work with the Government of the Republic of China, who have a huge influence on both Khartoum and Juba, to bring pressure to bear on both Governments of Sudan in order to pave the way towards a degree of stability and economic development?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Jay, raises an important point. Because of our cultural and historic ties with the area we have been involved in negotiations through the troika, with the United States and Norway, and had leverage through the EU. I can assure the noble Lord that we have also made representations with the Republic of China and diplomatic relationships are under way with regard to how we might all work towards peace in Sudan.

Lord Bach (Lab): My Lords, we all wish the Minister good fortune in her important task later this week in New York. An agreement was signed in Addis Ababa last week by those aiming at unifying opposition to President Bashir. It is reported that a number of those signatories were summarily arrested on their return to Sudan. What representations have Her Majesty's Government made about this latest example of unacceptable authoritarian conduct?

Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Bach, rightly refers to the detention of opposition leaders and civil society figures who signed what is known as the "Sudan call"—the opposition trying to solidify. I assure him that we have voiced our concerns about the detention of the opposition and civil society figures and we have consistently asked for the release of political prisoners in Sudan. More than that, it is important that when people are held in the Sudan they are not maltreated.