

PRESS RELEASE: GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN CONTINUES TO BOMB ITS OWN CITIZENS, CREATING HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE

15 JANUARY 2015 [LONDON] – new film footage, photographs and interviews provide a rare insight into life in Sudan’s war-torn Blue Nile State: a contemporary, condoned Genocide.



Left: Hadia, currently living in Doro Refugee camp, describes the situation she fled in Blue Nile State.

Right: A Sudanese refugee in Doro shows the wounds he has sustained during aerial bombardment.

The people of Blue Nile State are enduring systematic and ruthless assaults on their lives and communities by their own government. Since conflict broke out in 2011, the Government of Sudan (GoS) has regularly targeted civilians and civilian infrastructure with aerial bombardment by Antonov aircraft, ground assaults and missile attacks.

One man (pictured above) who was injured by shrapnel from a bomb while trying to flee to South Sudan with his family, said: *“The bombing continues and they are still shelling from Kirmuk. The Antonovs keep coming and when they find a place inhabited or when they see people or cattle moving, they throw bombs at them. If they see a thick bush where they think people may be hiding, they even bomb that bush. There is no place to hide.”*

Severe insecurity and a blockade on international humanitarian assistance make Blue Nile State particularly isolated, with foreign visitors extremely rare. The conflict is largely unreported, and local people feel that the world *“continues to turn a blind eye”* to their suffering.

A delegation from the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) has just returned from the region, after visiting a number of locations in Sudan and South Sudan, including Blue Nile State. Interviews and film footage capture the voices and testimonies of those living at the heart of this forgotten conflict.

“The effect of the bombardment is so far-reaching, because it touches every aspect of life in these areas,” said HART’s partner Benjamin Barnaba. *“The bombardment is so intense, it is everywhere, even in the bush where the cattle are kept. They are subsistence farmers and cattle keepers, but when they see the Antonov they go into hiding and don’t have time to till the land. They face starvation”.*

Meetings with victims, civil society representatives, community, religious and military leaders and health workers revealed the devastating effect on the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of the local population.

Those who fled to South Sudan as refugees now find themselves trapped between two conflicts. Some are returning to Blue Nile State. They are forced to choose between aerial bombardment, isolation and possible starvation in their own land, or hunger and civil war in South Sudan. In the words of one refugee: *“there is no safety anywhere”*.

“Antonovs come even at night while people are asleep” described one refugee in South Sudan, who had arrived the previous day from Blue Nile. *“The planes use searchlights to see where the people are so they can see where to bomb us. Now we have to be careful about using any light, even fires for cooking. The Antonov comes quickly and bombs the area and people hide under trees or in streams”.*

On a previous occasion, we visited the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan. Last Saturday, we met representatives from the region who described recent attacks. On Christmas Eve, two children were killed and four injured when a

school in Buram County, South Kordofan, was bombed. On Christmas Day, Buram town was bombed, killing five people and injuring 21. In Kadugli County, also on Christmas Day, three children were killed in an attack on a school.

There is an urgent need for an independent, United Nations or African Union mandated Commission of Inquiry into serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed by the GoS in both Blue Nile and South Kordofan States since conflict broke out in 2011. One dedicated colleague from the Nuba Mountains pleaded: *“I challenge anybody who is denying the reality of what is happening in South Kordofan and Blue Nile to come and verify it for themselves... we can show them the reports, the bombing sites, the number of people who have been killed, the photographs, we can lead them from house to house where people have been lost, and take them to meet those who have become disabled as a result of the bombing.”*

“We have seen the evidence of a neglected genocide and a humanitarian catastrophe which bring political and moral imperatives for action by the international community” says HART CEO Baroness Cox. *“There is an urgent need to break the culture of impunity which allows the Government of Sudan to continue its ruthless policy of the attempted elimination of the indigenous population of Blue Nile State”*.

END

Baroness Cox is available for interviews. Photographs and footage are available on request. A full report will be published shortly. For more information, or to arrange interviews, please contact caroline.cox@hart-uk.org and alice.robinson@hart-uk.org, or call +44 (0) 208 204 7336.

The Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) works to provide aid and advocacy for the victims of oppression and persecution. The founder and CEO, Baroness Cox, has been visiting and working in both Sudan and South Sudan for nearly thirty years.

Executive Summary

Sudan: SPLM-N (rebel) controlled areas

- Systematic, targeted attacks against civilians in Blue Nile State by the Government of Sudan continue with devastating effect. Aerial bombardment, missile attacks and ground offensives targeting villages, people trying to tend their crops and livestock, schools and clinics, represent serious violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity.
- We witnessed the wounds sustained by civilians, civilian infrastructure damaged by bombardment, including markets, schools and clinics, and the psychological trauma of survivors.
- Such sustained assaults on civilians, leading to widespread casualties and displacement, represent the GoS’ policy of ethnic cleansing of the traditional and diverse African population of Blue Nile State.
- Local leaders state that the international community is *“turning a blind eye”* to their suffering, or that it is *“not willing to pay the price of intervention”*.
- However, the people of Blue Nile demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination to remain and to continue cultivating their land; to keep their culture alive; to provide education for the younger generation; and to maintain health facilities – all virtually unaided by the outside world.
- For three years, HART has been working with local partners who deliver food and medicine to isolated communities within Blue Nile state.
- We receive detailed reports, and on this occasion, visited clinics supported by HART. We met health workers and saw the quality and range of the medicines provided by HART. Local communities emphasised how much they need and appreciate this assistance.
- On a previous visit, we visited another remote location in Blue Nile State where the local population had received food aid with funds provided by HART.

Sudan: Government of Sudan controlled areas

- In government-controlled areas of Blue Nile State, civilians have been driven from their land by military offensives and human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial killings.
- Land and homes belonging to the displaced population are being given as a reward by GoS to those who have fought alongside them against the SPLA-N, including mercenaries from Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Mali and

Sudan. Many have moved in to these properties, bringing their families and livestock with the intention of permanent settlement.

- Large, fertile tracts of land are being given by GoS to other countries, particularly Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Iran for agricultural projects and other investments.
- This policy of resettlement indicates that GoS does not intend to allow displaced people to return, highlighting their efforts to create demographic change in Blue Nile which may amount to ethnic cleansing.

South Sudan

- Fighting between the Government of South Sudan and opposition forces aligned with Riek Machar continues in 3 States, perpetuating the displacement of nearly 2 million civilians, including 1.5 million who are internally displaced and nearly half a million who have sought refuge in other countries. .
- There are reports that Riek Machar is mobilising and equipping additional militias to fight against Government forces in other areas, including forces under the command of General Daaw in northern Bahr-El-Ghazal.
- The international community's efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance in 2014 averted a looming famine.
- However, many people have not yet been reached, or have received insufficient assistance. There is an urgent need to scale up the humanitarian response to alleviate present suffering and to avert possible famine in 2015.
- We visited Agany in Turolei, Twic County, Warrap State, where IDPs from Malakal and Bentiu face many problems. Apparent gaps in the registration process have left many without registration cards. They are therefore unable to receive assistance including food, shelter and blankets.
- Food shortages result in severe suffering, particularly for children and the elderly. While there are some schools, some children are unable to attend because of hunger and/ or inability to pay the fees.
- Health care is severely overstretched and difficult to access, as facilities originally intended for the host community are now supporting a large influx of IDPs. Many IDPs are located far from health facilities.
- Other serious shortages include clothing; many described how, when they had to flee for their lives, they could carry nothing with them. Consequently they only have one item of clothing which has had to last for a year, many of which are now torn and dirty, causing health hazards.
- Many parts of South Sudan are facing a particularly cold dry season, with temperatures plummeting during the night, causing severe problems, especially for young children and the elderly.
- Refugees from Blue Nile state in Doro refugee camp remain extremely vulnerable as a result of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, and continue to suffer from insufficient humanitarian assistance.
- While we were in Doro refugee camp, Riek Machar's opposition forces captured Jamam, around 70km away. Government forces regained control, dispersing the rebel forces across the area, which created fear amongst the local population of attacks by well-armed rebel militias.

Recommendations

Sudan

- There is an urgent need for an independent, UN or AU mandated Commission of Inquiry into serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States since conflict broke out in 2011.
- Urgent measures must be taken to tackle the culture of impunity which enables GoS to continue its ruthless attacks on civilians, such as targeted sanctions on those responsible for crimes against humanity.
- Given that the GoS will not allow access by international aid organisations, cross-border aid is a humanitarian imperative.
- The failure to provide healthcare is allowing the escalation of infectious diseases such as polio and TB, which can spread across borders and pose a threat to the region.
- HART's experience demonstrates that provision of cross-border aid is feasible, with effective accountability for funds provided.
- The commitment of local communities to provide education by establishing primary schools despite the challenges of aerial bombardment needs international support in the provision of essential supplies and funding for teachers.

South Sudan

- There is a clear need to apply pressure, including further sanctions, on individuals fuelling and directing the violence.
- There is an urgent need to ensure comprehensive provision of humanitarian aid to ensure that all affected regions, and individuals, receive essential life-sustaining supplies.