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Aid as a Weapon of War in Sudan

One More Reason to Adopt a Comprehensive Approach

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Since Sudan's government denies humanitarian aid organizations permission to operate freely in much of the country, access to those in need remains circumscribed and constantly in jeopardy.¹ Slow progress on negotiated access has allowed the Sudanese government to wield aid as a weapon of war against its own people.² The central government only allows food distributions in areas it controls, refusing permission for assistance to be delivered to civilians in rebel-held areas. Life-saving humanitarian activity has been held hostage to politics. A comprehensive approach, which looks beyond just negotiated access and pursues solutions that address the issues lying at the roots of violence in Sudan, can help end that dynamic.

The Sudanese government's punishing campaign of starvation warfare³ and aerial bombardment⁴ in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, or the "Two Areas," is well into its third year.⁵ These attacks are particularly costly to civilians since the long-marginalized Two Areas earlier bore the brunt of some of the fiercest fighting during Sudan's two-decade-long civil war between the central government and southern rebels.⁶ To the north and west, Darfur's civilians have suffered similar conditions for more than a decade.⁷ Hunger is rampant, water is scarce, and access to adequate medical care and schools is almost nonexistent.⁸ Just this year, at least 75,000 people have sought refuge in neighboring South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Chad.⁹ An additional half a million Sudanese were displaced from their homes by violence in the first nine months of 2013 but still remain within the country.¹⁰ In Darfur, at least 3.2 million people depended on some form of humanitarian assistance.¹¹ Recent record-breaking floods across the rest of Sudan have intensified the need for unfettered humanitarian aid.¹²

Despite the dire conditions, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, reports that humanitarian access to large swathes of the country remains restricted or altogether impossible.¹³ Although the World Food Programme was allowed into some government-controlled parts of Blue Nile state in April 2013¹⁴ and has been distributing food in government-controlled parts of South Kordofan,¹⁵ the 800,000 people still living in areas under the control of the rebels in those states have been effectively denied international humanitarian assistance for more than two years.¹⁶

The Sudanese government refuses humanitarian access to Jebel Marra in Darfur, making it impossible for the estimated 100,000 people in the area who are either displaced or severely affected by conflict to get the services they need.¹⁷ Due to Sudanese government restrictions and growing insecurity, aid workers have been unable to deliver promised assistance to communities in the northern part of the Abyei region. In South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, despite the rebels' announcement of a unilateral one-month humanitarian ceasefire¹⁸ and their acceptance of a polio vaccination campaign,¹⁹ aid has yet to reach populations in need.

The U.S. government's Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, has found that parts of Darfur have reached crisis levels, and food insecurity in rebel-controlled areas of South Kordofan could reach Phase 4 "emergency" conditions for the remainder of the lean season, when there is limited access to food until the harvest in October.²⁰ A recent study conducted by a humanitarian group with access to rebel-held parts of South Kordofan found that households are cultivating 73 percent less land than before the conflict erupted.²¹ The study also found that 62 percent of adults are limiting their own food consumption in order to allow small children to eat.²² Displaced adults are already only getting an average of 1.5 meals per day, and even those who have not suffered displacement eat an average of only a little more—1.7 meals per day.²³ Now, 83 percent are reducing the number of meals they eat and 80 percent are limiting portion size on 3.5 days per week.²⁴ Aid workers warn that coping mechanisms like these must be temporary. Life cannot be sustained for long on one-and-a-half meals a day.

The international community has repeatedly urged the Government of Sudan to negotiate with the rebels and guarantee humanitarian aid delivery to all parts of the country. In May 2012, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution that urges the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, or SPLM-N, rebels to adopt the August 2012 African Union/League of Arab States/United Nations "Tripartite Proposal" for humanitarian access.²⁵ Although the resolution also mandates negotiations, talks stalled. The proposal was never implemented and access remains restricted. Although the Government of Sudan eventually held talks with the SPLM-N in April 2013, the meetings were fruitless.²⁶

Now that Sudan's rebels have joined an umbrella opposition coalition called the Sudan Revolutionary Front, pursuing isolated negotiations is less productive than a comprehensive nationwide approach. Negotiations focused on guaranteeing unimpeded humanitarian access could build confidence for more comprehensive talks, as they did for the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Sudan's north-south civil war. Still, these conversations cannot and should not be the sole focus of international interventions and must be tied to more long-term solutions so the cycle is not repeated.

To help alleviate the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Sudanese civilians in war-affected areas, we recommend the following steps:

- All sides should shift support away from isolated negotiations about each of Sudan's conflicts. Instead, stakeholders should encourage the parties to begin negotiations that bring conversations about ending the wars in South Kordofan, Darfur, and Blue Nile under one umbrella.
- Donors should foster the development of an independent humanitarian wing of the Sudan Revolutionary Front to increase aid-delivery capacity in war-affected regions being held by the rebels in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Darfur.
- Research and media coverage on the humanitarian situation in the Two Areas should not neglect the ongoing challenges facing Darfur and Abyei. Similarly, analysis of Darfur or Abyei should include reference to the ongoing situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. It is important that Sudan's regional wars be seen as a nationwide problem of failed governance, systematic state-sponsored violence, and marginalization, for which a nationwide solution is necessary.
- In light of the Government of Sudan's failure to comply with the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2046, and in accordance with the international community's responsibility to protect, the U.N. Security Council should consider taking Chapter VII action to require that the Government of Sudan allow unfettered access for humanitarian aid workers to all parts of the country.

Endnotes

- 1 Some examples of aid restrictions include visa delays, limited access for U.N. peacekeepers, and restrictions on the travel of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan. See United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, "UNHCR appeals to Sudan government to renew work permits for its international staff in Darfur," August 6, 2013, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/5200d2199.html>; Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: Renewal, Strengthening of the Independent Expert Mandate," September 9, 2013, available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/09/sudan-renewal-strengthening-independent-expert-mandate>.
- 2 For a complete presentation of this argument, see John Prendergast, *Crisis Response: Humanitarian Band-Aids in Sudan and Somalia* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).
- 3 Tracy Fehr, "New Report: Starvation Warfare in South Kordofan's Nuba Mountains," Enough Said, October 18, 2012, available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/blogs/new-report-starvation-warfare-south-kordofan-nuba-mountains>.
- 4 The Enough Project and the Satellite Sentinel Project Teams, "Architects of Atrocity: The Sudanese Government's War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Torture in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States" (2013), available at http://www.enoughproject.org/files/Architects_of_Atrocity.pdf.
- 5 Rebels in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile fought the Sudanese government forces alongside the SPLA during the country's Second Civil War, from 1985 to 2005. After a brief respite from 2005 to 2011, clashes erupted again in September 2011. The protracted conflict stems from disagreements over resources and political power sharing that remained unresolved in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Fighting has pitted the forces of Sudan's National Congress Party, or NCP, against those of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. For more detailed accounts and historical context, see Matthew LeRiche, "Sudan's Bloody Periphery: The Toll on Civilians from the War in Blue Nile State" (Washington: Enough Project, 2013), available at http://www.enoughproject.org/files/SudansBloodyPeriphery_Field-Dispatch.pdf, pp. 1–2; International Crisis Group, "Sudan's Spreading Conflict (I): War in South Kordofan" (2013), available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/sudan/198-sudans-spreading-conflict-i-war-in-south-kordofan.pdf>; International Crisis Group, "Sudan's Spreading Conflict (II): War in Blue Nile" (2013), available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/horn-of-africa/sudan/204-sudans-spreading-conflict-ii-war-in-blue-nile.pdf>.
- 6 Eric Reeves, "They Bombed Everything That Moved: Aerial Military Attacks on Civilians and Humanitarians in Sudan, 1999 – 2013," Enough Said, September 23, 2013, available at <http://enoughproject.org/blogs/they-bombed-everything-moved-aerial-military-attacks-civilians-and-humanitarians-sudan-1999>.
- 7 Omer Ismail and Annette LaRocco, "Failing Darfur" (Washington: Enough Project, 2012), available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/files/DDPImplementation.pdf>. For a recent synopsis of the humanitarian situation in Darfur, see also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Briefing: The humanitarian situation in Darfur," August 15, 2013, available at <http://www.irinnews.org/report/98580/briefing-the-humanitarian-situation-in-darfur>.
- 8 Enough Project, "Life in the Nuba Mountains: Humanitarian Needs Assessment in Sudan's South Kordofan State" (2013); Enough Project, "Rapid Food Security And Nutrition Assessment: South Kordofan" (2012), available at <http://www.enoughproject.org/files/SK%20Rapid%20Assessment%20Report.pdf>; Eric Reeves, "Humanitarian Conditions in Darfur: Relief Efforts Perilously Close to Collapse," August 15, 2013, available at http://www.sudanreeves.org/2013/08/15/humanitarian-conditions-in-darfur-relief-efforts-perilously-close-to-collapse-appendices-supplementary-documentation_.
- 9 United Nations, "Fresh tribal clashes in Darfur trigger largest influx of refugees into Chad in years, UN says," Press release, April 12, 2013, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44636>; "Sudanese refugees relocated to camp in Ethiopia," *Sudan Tribune*, May 21, 2013, available at <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article46638>; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Unity," Refugees in South Sudan Information Sharing Portal, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/region.php?id=26&country=251> (last accessed October 2013); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Upper Nile," Refugees in South Sudan Information Sharing Portal, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/SouthSudan/region.php?id=25&country=251> (last accessed October 2013).
- 10 John Prendergast and Omer Ismail, "Persona Non Grata," *Foreign Policy*, September 23, 2013, available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/09/23/persona_non_grata_sudan_omar_al_bashir_united_nations.
- 11 The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA, notes that this figure includes 1.2 million long-term IDPs in camps verified by World Food Programme (with biometrics) for food assistance; more than 240,000 registered new arrivals in camps in 2013; other IDPs (either in camps but unregistered or living outside camps); and other vulnerable people in Darfur. OCHA, "Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot," August 31, 2013, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Sudan_Snapshot_31_Aug_%202013_1.pdf.
- 12 OCHA finds that 500,000 people have been affected by flooding across the country. Humanitarian response is still ongoing. OCHA, "Sudan: [Non-Food Items / Emergency Shelter] Flood Response Map," September 3, 2013, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/NFI_ES_flood_response_03_Sep_2013.pdf. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, flash flooding and continued conflict in August could increase the number of food-insecure people in Sudan from 4 million to 4.3 million people during the peak lean season. FEWS NET, "Sudan Food Security Outlook Update," August 2013, available at http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Sudan_FSOU_2013_08_final.pdf.
- 13 OCHA, "Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot."
- 14 Ian Timberlake, "First UN food aid allowed into war-torn Sudan state," Agence France-Presse, April 4, 2013, available at <http://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/first-un-food-aid-allowed-war-torn-sudan-state>.
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- 16 OCHA cites Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, or SPLM-N, estimates that in non-government-controlled areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, there are 800,000 civilians that are either internally displaced or severely affected by conflict. See OCHA, "Sudan: Humanitarian Snapshot."
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- 21 Enough Project, "Life in the Nuba Mountains."
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 U.N. Security Council Resolution 2046, S/RES/2046, paras. 3–4, May 2, 2012, available at http://www.un.org/docs/sc/unsc_resolutions12.htm; "Framework Agreement between the Government of Sudan and Sudan People's Liberation Movement (North) on Political Partnership between NCP and SPLMN, and Political and Security Arrangements in Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States," June 28, 2011, available at http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/Two_Areas_Agreement.pdf; "Memorandum of Understanding between the Sudan People's liberation Movement/North and the African Union/League of Arab States/United Nations Tripartite on Humanitarian Assistance to war-affected civilians in Blue Nile and South Kordofan States," August 4, 2012, available at http://www.sudantribune.com/IMG/pdf/20120804_Tripartite_SPLM-N_Humanitarian_MoU.pdf.
- 26 Yasir Arman, "Sudan Government's Political Conditions in the Addis Ababa Peace Talks Block the Agreement on the Humanitarian Cessation of Hostilities for the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile," April 27, 2013, available at <http://splmnsudan.net/en/sudan-governments-political-conditions-in-the-addis-ababa-peace-talks-block-the-agreement-on-the-humanitarian-cessation-of-hostilities-for-the-nuba-mountains-and-blue-nile/>.