



## A View from Blue Nile

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**Blue Nile, Sudan** - Enough has recently documented that Sudanese military forces in Blue Nile state have engaged in the killing and raping of civilians, resulting in tens of thousands of refugees and displaced persons fleeing for safety in neighboring Ethiopia and South Sudan, and within Blue Nile. The civilian toll from an indiscriminate aerial bombardment campaign is rising. In addition to these devastating effects on civilians, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, in September, used the violence in Blue Nile as a pretext to declare a state of emergency in the state and remove its democratically elected governor, Malik Agar, forcing him into hiding. On a trip to a location near Kurmuk in Blue Nile close to the Ethiopian border, Enough Project staff spoke to Agar about the current situation and his aspirations for Sudan's future.

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On the evening of September 1, 2011, the Sudan Armed Forces, or SAF, attacked Damazin, the capital of Blue Nile state. One of the first targets of this operation was the residence of Malik Agar, the elected governor of the state and the chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, or SPLM-N. As a result, Agar was ousted from his governorship and the Sudan government appointed a military administration in his place. He fled Damazin with forces of the SPLM-N's military wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North, or SPLA-N, to an area close to the town of Kurmuk, near the Ethiopian border.

The fighting in Blue Nile has, from the start, followed the pattern of previous clashes in South Kordofan, using frequent aerial bombardments that have repeatedly fallen on the civilian population. In addition, the government of Sudan has imposed an aid blockade, and continues to use the worsening humanitarian crisis as a weapon of war. Agar told the Enough Project that the bombing is being employed to "kill the willing of the SPLA-N soldiers"<sup>i</sup> by separating them from families.

### The Fall of Kurmuk

On November 3, the SAF dislodged SPLA-N forces from Kurmuk and took the town. Following the fall of Kurmuk, the SAF issued a statement in which the operation was described as "a step toward elimination of SPLA remnants in the North".

In his first public statement after the fall of Kurmuk, Malik Agar told the Enough Project:

"Politically, the problem of Blue Nile is [an] integral part of the Sudanese holistic problem of mismanagement of the diversity and governance, no meaningful share of wealth and

powers. All these problems determine the future of Blue Nile, [and] by nature are central and can be only solve[d] holistically, the particulars could be detailed out after the constitutional guarantees which shall be based on clear distinction of the issues. Blue Nile does not stand by itself in isolation from the whole. In light of this Kurmuk is a battle that could have as well taken place elsewhere, in Medani or Sinnar for example, The fight happened to be there because of circumstances, and losing battles is quite natural in wars, however the war is not yet lost, though politically [Sudanese President] Bashir is making lot of noise about. Bashir pronounced SPLM[-N] dead but I can tell you, this is not the end of the movement, and SPLM[-N] is still very much alive and remarkably noisy. The town of Kurmuk has been captured by SAF two times during the previous war and SPLA[-N] recaptured it three times. SPLA[-N] is 20 kilometers from Damazin on the western front of Blue Nile and Bashir does not talk about it.”

### **The Sudan Revolutionary Front**

On November 11, the SPLM-N and the Darfur-based Justice and Equality Movement, or JEM, as well as two factions of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army, or SLM/A, signed the Kauda declaration establishing the Sudan Revolutionary Front, or SRF. A communiqué published in the local media following the signing of the declaration affirms the SRF’s resolve “to overthrow the National Congress Party (NCP) regime [in Khartoum] using all available means, above all, the convergence of civil political action and armed struggle”<sup>ii</sup>.

Agar told the Enough Project that the overthrow of the government has never been excluded as one of the options for resolving “a political crisis in Sudan.”

The Enough Project has published a number of reports<sup>iii</sup> that urge that a nation-wide approach to conflict resolution be undertaken in Sudan. Right now, the country is engulfed in four conflicts – in Abyei, Blue Nile, Darfur, and South Kordofan – that require a comprehensive peace deal for long-term stability.

### **A ‘New Sudan’ Vision Revisited**

The independence of South Sudan has inadvertently enabled the regime of Omar al-Bashir in Khartoum to enforce its will on territories that remained part of Sudan, including by imposing sharia law and extending what many in the three states now at war perceive as Arab domination. President al-Bashir has confirmed his intention to govern the country based on sharia law in a number of public remarks<sup>iv</sup>. In contrast to President al-Bashir’s desire to create an Islamic state, Agar told the Enough Project that his vision is of a “secular Sudan” where people would be treated equally, regardless of their differences in ethnic, religious and social background. In his hideout near Kurmuk, he said “I was born African, God created me that way. I am Muslim but I will never be an Arab”.

Agar asserts that Sudan will eventually be united by the very same diversity that now divides it. He espoused a vision of a country united in ethnic and religious diversity and with equal rights for its entire population. In the spirit of the late John Garang’s unionist vision, Yasir Arman, SPLM-N Secretary-General, told the Enough Project that once reformed, Sudan will seek to have a special

relationship with South Sudan in a form of a “Sudanese Union” modelled after the European Union with “freedom of labour, trade and movement of people” as the core values.

## Conclusion

In the long run, only a comprehensive peace process, fully inclusive of all parties can divert Sudan from the dangerous path on which it has embarked. In the near term, the international community must use all mechanisms available to pressure Khartoum for an immediate cessation of hostilities and to initiate negotiations under international mediation. International actors with leverage over the government of Sudan must understand that only a fully internationally backed peace agreement will bring expected results. To that end, the international community should:

- **Ensure the protection of civilians in Sudan.** The Sudan government must be pressured to lift the humanitarian blockade and allow international relief agencies access to the conflict areas. If the Khartoum regime persists in using the worsening humanitarian crisis as a weapon of war, international donors must consider a cross-border relief operation as a matter of urgency.
- **Use diplomatic and economic leverage to initiate a peace conference** with international mediation, where all parties would engage in peace talks aimed at a comprehensive peace deal that would provide for cessation of hostilities, free and fair elections and constitutional review.
- **Support transformation towards democratic change.** The international community should support the development of Sudanese civil society.

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<sup>i</sup> Author of this report met with Malik Agar in October, 2011

<sup>ii</sup> “Implausible Denials,” Africa Confidential Volume 52, No. 13. November 18, 2011. Accessed at: <http://www.africa-confidential.com/index.aspx?pageid=7&articleid=4240>

<sup>iii</sup> For example, John Prendergast, A New U.S Policy For Two Sudans, Enough Project, August 2011, available at [http://www.enoughproject.org/files/new\\_policy\\_two\\_sudans](http://www.enoughproject.org/files/new_policy_two_sudans).

<sup>iv</sup> “Sharia Law to be tightened if Sudan Splits- President.” BBC, December 19, 2010. Accessed at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12033185>