



August 30, 2011

Sudan: Southern Kordofan Civilians Tell of Air Strike Horror

UN Should Demand Humanitarian Access, End to Indiscriminate Bombing

The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) are indiscriminately bombing civilian areas in the Nuba Mountains region of Southern Kordofan and preventing aid from reaching desperate displaced people, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said today.

Researchers from both groups, during a week-long mission to the area in late-August, investigated 13 air strikes in Kauda, Delami and Kurchi areas. Those air strikes killed at least 26 civilians and injured more than 45 others since mid-June. The researchers also witnessed government planes circling over civilian areas and dropping bombs, forcing civilians to seek shelter in mountains and caves.

“The relentless bombing campaign is killing and maiming civilian men, women and children, displacing tens of thousands, putting them in desperate need of aid, and preventing entire communities from planting crops and feeding their children,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch.

“The Sudanese government is literally getting away with murder and trying to keep the outside world from finding out” said Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International’s Senior Crisis Response Advisor. “The international community, and particularly the UN Security Council, must stop looking the other way and act to address the situation”.

Civilians have no way to protect themselves from indiscriminate bombings. Relatives of victims told Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch about their ordeal: “I heard explosions, and then a neighbor brought the body of Maryam to the house,” said the mother of two girls killed in one air strike. “She was hit on the head and part of her head was gone. He told me to go to the graveyard because they had taken Iqbal there. I went but her injuries were so terrible, I could not even look.”

According to aid groups on the ground, the bombing, attacks, and fighting have displaced more than 150,000 people in areas under control of opposition forces, where government restrictions have prevented aid groups from delivering food and other assistance. About 5,000 people have crossed the border with South Sudan to reach a refugee settlement in Unity state.

The bombs have had a devastating impact on the civilian population. Displaced communities forced out of their homes by the repeated bombing live in harsh conditions in caves, on mountaintops, under trees, and in the bush far from towns. They lack sufficient food, medicine, sanitation, and shelter from heavy rains. Many displaced families told researchers they were eating berries and leaves and that their children were suffering from diarrhea and malaria.

On August 23, President Omar al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for serious crimes against civilians in the western region of Darfur, announced a two-week unilateral ceasefire in Southern Kordofan, where Sudanese forces have fought armed opposition forces since early June. However, local organizations on the ground said that despite the ceasefire, the government continued to bomb civilian areas. Al-Bashir also said that neither the UN nor international aid agencies will be allowed to assist the displaced.

While researchers were on the ground, Antonov aircrafts dropped bombs over farmlands and villages almost daily. For example, on August 14, a plane dropped bombs near the village of Kurchi, 70 kilometers east of Kadugli, destroying the home and possessions of Wazir al-Kharaba. The researchers also photographed three bombs falling from an Antonov aircraft near Kurchi at 5:15 pm on August 19. On August 22, another air strike seriously injured a man in the leg and an elderly woman in the jaw and damaged a school.

“Indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas and restrictions on humanitarian aid could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity,” said Donatella Rovera, “Such attacks must cease and independent humanitarian needs assessment and relief delivery must be allowed immediately”

No evident military targets were visible near any of the air strike locations the researchers visited. Witnesses said Antonov planes or fighter jets flying at high altitudes dropped the bombs in civilian areas where, they said, there were no military targets nearby.

Weapons experts told the organizations that the munitions used are unguided and are often rolled out manually from Antonov cargo planes or launched from other aircrafts in a manner that does not allow for accurate delivery. “Use of weapons in a civilian area that cannot accurately be directed at a military objective makes such strikes inherently indiscriminate, in violation of international humanitarian law”, said Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

In government-held areas, UN agencies and other aid groups say they have been prevented from reaching many affected people because of the security situation and severe government restrictions. The Sudanese authorities have prevented the same agencies from accessing and delivering relief to civilians in opposition-held areas by refusing to authorize relief flights and by launching air strikes on airstrips used for aid delivery. On June 14, 19 and 24 government aircraft, including fighter jets, bombed near and on the Kauda airstrip.

Although the government announced on August 20 that it had never restricted access to the Nuba Mountains, President al-Bashir said three days later that no international groups would be allowed into the state and that only the Sudanese Red Crescent would be allowed to deliver assistance.

As parties to the conflict, the Sudanese government and the opposition forces should immediately agree to allow humanitarian aid by air and road to reach all affected populations, regardless of where they are living, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said. All humanitarian aid agencies should be given unrestricted access to help civilians now in urgent need of food, shelter and other aid.

The conflict began on June 5 between the Sudanese government and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in Kadugli and Um Durein, and quickly spread to other towns and villages where both government and SPLA forces were present.

Fighting erupted in the context of growing tensions between the northern Sudan ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) -- the political party that now rules independent South Sudan -- over security arrangements in the state and the disputed state elections in which the incumbent candidate for governor Ahmed Haroun, a former minister for humanitarian affairs who is also wanted by the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, narrowly won the governorship.

Southern Kordofan is home to large populations of ethnic Nuba groups with longstanding ties to the former southern rebel movement, which fought the Sudanese government forces in the Nuba Mountains during Sudan's 22-year civil war, which ended in 2005. When South Sudan became an independent state on July 9 this year, the SPLM operating in Sudan became known as SPLM-North, and the armed opposition group in Southern Kordofan became known as SPLA-North.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch researchers could not reach the front lines or enter the places controlled by the Sudan Armed Forces where the violence first erupted. But the researchers interviewed scores of displaced people who escaped fighting in Kadugli and other areas.

Witnesses said soldiers and militia shot people in the streets and carried out both house-to-house searches and stops at checkpoints using lists of names of known SPLM supporters. The witnesses also described destruction, looting and burning of churches and homes, including the bulldozing of homes of known SPLM members.

The accounts are consistent with many of the findings in the report the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released on August 15. That report was based on research carried out by United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) human rights monitors before the mission's mandate ended in early July, ahead of South Sudan's independence. The report documents patterns of unlawful killings and widespread attacks on civilian properties that could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said.

The Sudanese government has dismissed the UN report's findings, and asked the UN Security Council to delay discussion of Southern Kordofan until the government completed its own human rights investigation.

"Sudan appears to be trying to whitewash serious human rights abuses while it continues to bomb civilians and prevent humanitarian assistance," said Donatella Rovera of Amnesty International. "The Security Council has remained silent far too long. It should not sit silent as bombs fall on civilians."

The Security Council met on August 19, but failed to agree on a statement condemning human rights violations in Southern Kordofan or to take any concrete action, in large part because of objections by South Africa, Russia and China.

"South Africa's position is especially disappointing," said Daniel Bekele of Human Rights Watch. "As a leading African state, it should be doing everything to protect innocent civilians in Southern Kordofan from experiencing a repeat the horrific civil war in which so many perished."

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch urged the Security Council to firmly condemn and demand an end to Sudan's indiscriminate bombings in civilian populated areas and other violations, call for unfettered access for humanitarian agencies to all affected areas, and take concrete action to ensure an independent human rights monitoring presence across Southern Kordofan.

The organizations also urged the Council to implement the recommendations of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to mandate an independent inquiry into the alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that occurred during the hostilities in Southern Kordofan, and hold perpetrators to account.

Government Air Strikes on Southern Kordofan Civilians

Indiscriminate Bombing

Since early June, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) have repeatedly carried out indiscriminate airstrikes on civilian areas, killing scores of civilians and wounding many more, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said.

The researchers from both organizations investigated 13 of these air strikes in which dozens of civilians, many of them children, were killed and wounded and their properties destroyed. Some were hit in or around their homes, others while cultivating their fields or fetching water, or in village markets.

According to all victims and witnesses interviewed at the air strike locations, there were no fighters of the armed opposition group, SPLA-North, in the areas at the time or before the strikes.. None of the investigated incidents took place near front-line positions or areas of active armed confrontations.

The testimony was consistent with bomb fragments, unexploded ordnance, craters, damaged properties and other physical evidence found on the ground at the bombing sites. It also matched other available evidence, including photographs and video recordings taken by community members immediately after the attacks, as well as medical records and the pattern of injuries described by medical personnel who treated the victims.

The type of munitions used and the manner in which they were delivered -- unguided munitions dropped from high altitude -- are further evidence that the bombings were indiscriminate, and as such unlawful under applicable rules of international humanitarian law.

Deaths of Women and Children

Angelo al-Sir, a farmer in his early 40s, told researchers that his pregnant wife, a mother of 10 children, and two of his children, his nephew and another relative, a total of five people, were killed in an air strike on June 19 in Um Sirdeeba, a village east of Kadugli:

“My wife, Mahasin, was planting crops in the field next to our home when we heard a plane, an Antonov, circle above. She shouted to the children: ‘Lie on the ground as the bombs are coming now.’”

The bomb landed and exploded near the family’s home, with devastating consequences.

Mahasin, 35, was killed instantly, decapitated by bomb fragments in the field outside her home. Her 9-year-old son, Yasser, was in the kitchen helping his older sister Amal cook when bomb fragments flying through the wall hit him in the skull. The fragments also hit his 1-year-old sister, Amani, sitting outside, in the chest, and instantly killed their 4-year-old cousin, Musa’ab al-Fakih, who was sitting next to her. Fearing more air strikes, al-Sir and his neighbor carried the wounded children, Yasser and Amani, to the nearby mountain but both children died within minutes.

A relative in his late 20s, Alsafi al-Hassan, who was teaching in a school in the nearby mosque and was staying with the al-Fakih family, was also killed by flying bomb fragments as he sat under a tree in the courtyard.

Several other children from Al-Sir and Al-Fakih families were injured in the strike. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch visited five of them at the hospital where they were still receiving medical treatment two months after the incident. Two of them, 3-year-old Ruba al-Sir and 2-year-old Abbas al-Fakih sustained particularly serious injuries to the chest and back and in both cases fragments penetrated their lungs. Three-year-old Mawadda al-Fakih suffered lacerations to her lower left leg, and 5-year-old Saida al-Sir and her 11-year-old sister, Husna, had similar injuries to their limbs.

Relatives and neighbors told Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that there were further bombings in the area, including one a week later that killed a little girl nearby.

On June 22, another air strike at Kauda, 120 kilometers east of Kadugli, killed 24-year old Fawziya Ibrahim Kulul, who was eight-months pregnant and the mother of a 3-year-old boy, while she was grazing her goats in a field near her home. Her relatives and neighbors said that at least five bombs fell in a line that afternoon. The first killed Kulul and the last exploded very near a local nongovernmental organization’s compound and damaged a nearby home.

On June 26, a plane dropped bombs again on Um Sirdeeba, about 200 meters away from the June 19 strike, killing 8-year-old Zarqa al-Saja as she sought shelter under a tree. Her mother, Mariam Zanga, said that she and her husband had gone to farm their land while the children stayed at home:

“I went to the farm and when I came home she was already dead; I could not do anything to help her. She had a very large abdomen injury, her intestines were out.”

Bomb fragments also injured Najwa Daud, a 3-year-old neighbor, and a subsequent strike in early August injured three other neighbors.

Another air strike on June 26, on the Kurchi market, killed 13 civilians, including five children and three women, and injured more than 20 other people.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch visited the bomb site in Kurchi and interviewed 25 victims, relatives of victims, and other witnesses. Their detailed testimony, together with other evidence, provide a consistent picture of what appears to have been an indiscriminate attack on civilians.

Three of the bombs exploded within an area of about 150 meters by 100 meters around the village water pump and market area, where residents -- especially women and children -- usually gather. Prior to the attack, the now-deserted daily market was busy every day.

Most of the victims were women and children who were fetching water, others were shoppers or passers-by. Among those killed were 4-year-old Makalina Teimas Suleiman and her 3-year-old sister, Breskela. Their 8-year-old sister, Marcela, lost most of her right foot and part of her left foot. She told the researchers from her hospital bed:

“We were near the well and the plane came and everybody ran. Then I had a lot of pain in my legs. Now I have to learn to walk with these sticks (crutches); it’s very difficult.”

Photographs taken immediately after the attack show the bodies of her two sisters torn apart by the bomb fragments in a field near the well. Awatef Kober, the mother of Iqbaal and Maryam Musa al-Rahima, told the researchers that her daughters had gone to the borehole to fetch water when the bombs exploded:

“I heard explosions, and then a neighbor brought the body of Maryam to the house. She was hit on the head and part of her head was gone. He told me to go to the graveyard because they had taken Iqbal there. I went but her injuries were so terrible, I could not even look.”

A third sister, Kechi, 8, was injured in the attack but survived. The family had just returned home before the attack from their hideout in the caves in the nearby mountains, where they spend most days to protect themselves from the bombings. Ikhlas Hassan Jaden, 13, was bringing lunch to her brother in a market shop. Her mother, Leila Ahmad, told the researchers:

“I heard three explosions. I ran to the market because my children were there. As I ran there I saw people running toward me carrying my daughter. Her legs were broken and lacerated. We took her to the clinic here in Kurchi but they said she was too seriously injured and needed to go to the hospital in Kauda. She died before we could reach the hospital.”

Walid Osman Ali, a 32 year-old butcher and father of two young children was killed as he tried to take shelter behind one of the shops. The shop owner, Nabil al-Amin Kua, described how he was killed:

“While he was charging his phone we heard a plane above. I threw myself to the ground behind the shop and Walid remained standing near the wall. Big fragments flew against the wall. He was hit all over, especially around his waist. He was virtually cut in half.”

In addition to the 13 people killed in the Kurchi market bombing, more than 20 were injured. Among them was 8-year-old Bibiana Isaac, who was fetching water at the well. The doctor who treated her told the researchers that bomb fragments cut through one of her cervical vertebrae, and she is now paralyzed from the waist down.

In a later air strike, on July 2 around mid-day, two women, Nunu Angelu Karki, a 24-year-old mother of a 4-month-old baby, and Nidal Hashim Wagana, 23, were killed by bomb explosions at Saraf Jamus, a village near Kurchi.

Karki's father said that when the plane flew overhead, she ran from the fields toward a foxhole the family used as a bomb shelter, but was killed before she could reach the hole. Nairobi Luka, 12 was with her but escaped with minor injuries. An 8-year-old neighbor, Shallu Bolis Abali, was also slightly injured.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also investigated bombing incidents that occurred in August. On August 14, a plane dropped bombs near the village of Kurchi, destroying the home and possessions of Wazir al-Kharaba, his two wives and 11 children. The researchers also witnessed bombs falling from an Antonov aircraft in an area south of the village of Kurchi on August 19 at 4:30 p.m. On August 22, the day after the researchers left the area, bombs fell on Kauda, wounding a man and an elderly woman and damaging a school.

Violations of International Humanitarian Law

Indiscriminate bombing violates international humanitarian law. Sudanese military and the SPLA-North fighters, as parties to an internal armed conflict, are bound by international humanitarian law, which prohibits attacks that do not discriminate between civilians and military objects. Attacks that cause civilian harm disproportionate to the direct expected military gain are also prohibited.

Attacks are indiscriminate when they are not directed at a specific military objective, or employ a method or means of warfare that cannot be directed at a specific military objective or whose effects cannot be limited in their impact and that therefore does not distinguish between civilian and military. Both sides must take all possible precautions to minimize harm to civilians and their property including, when circumstances permit, by giving effective advance warning of attacks that may potentially affect the civilian population.

Antonov planes are unable to direct guided bombs to specific military targets. Instead, the bombs are rolled out of the back of the aircraft, and pilots time their release based on a number of variables, including aircraft speed and height. Once a bomb is released, its trajectory cannot be changed. Fighter jets dropping or firing such unguided munitions in civilian areas would raise serious concerns of indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

Hundreds of Thousands Flee Bombs

At least 150,000 people have fled their homes since the start of the conflict in early June, according to organizations on the ground working in five SPLM-North-held localities. The number may be significantly higher, as heavy rains and lack of fuel for vehicles and security concerns have restricted access to many SPLM-North-controlled areas, where tens of thousands of displaced people have gathered. This number may increase in the coming months, as fighting in several areas is resulting in further displacement.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch spoke with about 150 displaced people. They were living in makeshift shelters near huge boulders at the bottom or on the top of mountains where they could run for cover in case of aerial bombardment, under trees far from the main roads and towns that are most likely to be bombed, or in schools closed for the summer break.

Others sought shelter in towns and villages with strangers, who say they have no choice but to help people who would otherwise live under the open skies. In one case, the researchers visited an area where about 1,000 people had sought shelter in abandoned homes and caves on the top of a mountain, fleeing bombings in and near their village at the foot of a mountain. Another 1,500 people from far-flung villages also fleeing the bombing had joined them there.

Pressing Humanitarian Needs

More than two months after the Sudanese authorities began blocking all humanitarian assistance to SPLM-North-held areas and to most parts of government-held areas in the state of Southern Kordofan,

more than 150,000 displaced people fleeing aerial bombardments and other attacks urgently need food and other humanitarian assistance.

Scores of displaced people told Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that because they had received no or only limited humanitarian assistance they were forced to eat and feed their children wild berries and leaves. Communities throughout SPLA-North-held areas have been unable to cultivate their fields – or to plant even a fraction of their usual crops – due to widespread fears of attack or because their farmlands are in SAF-controlled areas and not accessible. Food shortages are likely to worsen.

On August 20, three UN agencies attempted to carry out an assessment mission to what the UN said would be “several locations” in Southern Kordofan, including SPLM-North-held areas. They were escorted by Sudanese government officials, including from Military Intelligence and were only able to visit Kadugli, a town under government control, where authorities refused them authorization to travel to other areas.

On August 23, President al-Bashir declared that no foreign agencies would be allowed into the state of Southern Kordofan. UN staff have since confirmed to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that the state authorities continued to deny them independent access to many parts of the state, including to all opposition-held areas.

Government Blocking Aid

Since the outbreak of fighting, the UN has been able to assist only some of the estimated tens of thousands of displaced people, mostly in or near Kadugli, with food and other basic assistance. The UN's access to areas outside Kadugli has been severely restricted. A small number of organizations with almost no aid supplies left – and with limited vehicles, spare parts and fuel – struggle to assist some of the 150,000 displaced in SPLM-North-held areas.

While many UN staff evacuated Kadugli and other locations in Southern Kordofan because of the outbreak of conflict in early June and severe restrictions on their ability to move outside Kadugli, others left with the expiration of the UN mission's mandate on July 9, the day South Sudan declared independence.

On June 9, the Sudanese authorities stopped authorizing flights from the capital, Khartoum, to Southern Kordofan. They allowed a number of UN flights between June 21 and 26 to SPLM-North-held towns, including Kauda, to evacuate all international -- and some national -- staff.

On June 20, the US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, told the Security Council that the Sudanese authorities “threatened to shoot down UNMIS air patrols, ... have taken control of the airport in Kadugli and [have] refused landing rights to UNMIS flights.” Colonel Khalid Al-Sawarmi, spokesman for the Sudan Armed Forces, denied her contention.

The government has nevertheless refused to allow flights to Southern Kordofan, except to evacuate staff and assets.

Dwindling Food Supplies, Impending Crisis

When fighting erupted, the World Food Program (WFP) storehouses in Kauda -- in SPLM-North hands since mid-June -- held 700 metric tons of food. After the WFP evacuated in June, organizations remaining in the area took over and in the next 60 days distributed a 10-day ration to 100,000 displaced people, according to local aid groups. The remaining food is enough to cover another 10-day ration for 23,000 people.

Dozens of displaced people in all locations the researchers visited said they had rationed the limited food aid and then survived for weeks on wild berries and leaves they used to make soup. Mothers said their children were suffering from diarrhea. The mothers said they had no idea how they would keep their family alive in the weeks to come. Those hosted by families said their hosts had very little or no

food to share. According to WFP, Southern Kordofan had poor harvests in 2009 and 2010, which means communities were struggling even before the conflict began.

Most people interviewed said that they had been unable to plant crops – or far less than usual -- because they were terrified by the intense aerial bombardment by the Sudanese air-force in June and July, the months when communities plant sorghum, the area's staple food.

Other displaced people far from their homes said they had planted nothing because they were no longer able to reach their fields.

Local community leaders said that the few people able to trade livestock or money for sorghum either could not find enough food in markets or could not afford the high prices. WFP reports that market supplies are dwindling because they are heavily dependent on trade with the north, which is now cut off from SPLM-North-held areas. Prices are rapidly increasing.

The UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has said it expects a big reduction in cultivated areas in Southern Khordofan. Local authority representatives say late rains will compound the problem, leading to an extremely poor harvest in most areas in October and November. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, rainfall estimates in the area are 50 percent less than the average. The Network says the food and livelihood situation for civilians affected by the conflict, including the displaced, has already reached "Crisis" level - one level below "Emergency."

Nutrition specialists analyzing the dynamics in Southern Kordofan fear the malnutrition rate will escalate due to the "cumulative effects of hunger, diarrhea, malaria and pneumonia."

Other Assistance Needed

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said the displaced also urgently need non-food item (NFI) assistance. Since early June, organizations have distributed only 1,500 NFI kits, which contain blankets, plastic sheeting, cooking utensils and mosquito nets. Aid groups say they have only a few hundred left. In one area, local authorities said that the main reason thousands of the displaced were living with host families struggling to accommodate them was that the displaced had no plastic sheeting to construct roofs for makeshift shelters.

The current humanitarian situation is reminiscent of the situation during the conflict in Southern Kordofan in the early 1990s, when the Sudanese military blocked all assistance to SPLA-held areas and forced thousands of civilians to live in government-controlled "peace camps" to receive aid. Famine raged, and tens of thousands of civilians died of malnutrition and disease.

Obligations to Allow Aid Access

The laws of war require all parties to the conflict, including the Sudanese authorities, to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of impartial humanitarian relief for civilians in need, conducted without any adverse distinction. Although the Sudanese authorities do have a right to control the delivery of aid, they cannot arbitrarily deny access to humanitarian organizations and must allow access to humanitarian organizations which provide relief on an impartial and non-discriminatory basis if the survival of the population is threatened.

Sudan would only be allowed to restrict aid agency movements to or within SPLA-N-held areas temporarily if the restrictions were required by a genuine and imperative military necessity – a fear that relief operations would interfere with military operations. The Sudanese government has not demonstrated such necessity.

Serious Human Rights Violations in Kadugli

The conflict in Southern Kordofan began on June 5, just weeks after the government's harsh military takeover of the adjacent disputed area of Abyei in May. Fighting between the Sudanese government

forces and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) erupted in Kadugli and Um Durein then quickly spread to other towns in Southern Kordofan where both government and SPLA forces were present.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch could not reach Kadugli and other SAF-held areas, but researchers interviewed scores of people who had fled Kadugli in the days following the outbreak of conflict and who had witnessed or been victims of human rights violations by Sudanese forces and allied militia. The overwhelmingly consistent accounts indicate that government forces working with armed militia forces committed serious human rights abuses in the area.

The witness accounts are consistent with many of the findings in the August 15 UN report, which documented numerous cases of extrajudicial killings and arbitrary arrests, including of UN staff members, through house-to-house searches and checkpoints, and other violations.

Dozens of people who witnessed the abuses said government forces, including the Sudan Armed Forces, Central Reserve Police (CRP), and the paramilitary Popular Defense Forces (PDF) -- and allied militias -- shelled and bombed residential neighborhoods, looted and burned down homes and churches, shot at civilians, and unlawfully arrested and killed those suspected of links to the SPLM.

Extrajudicial Killings

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch received numerous accounts of extra-judicial executions of people believed to be affiliated with the SPLM, both in Kadugli and other parts of Southern Kordofan.

Khaled Kuku Masubar, a 37-year-old employee of a development organization in Kadugli interviewed in Um Sirdeeba, said he saw a group of soldiers in a pick-up truck shoot Rizik Rizgullah Kacho, a civilian and known SPLM member, in front of the hospital. "I heard the commander say, 'Those are SPLM. Finish with them.'" Masubar also saw soldiers shoot dead another man outside a church, and saw many other bodies "in different places on the street and under a tree."

Witnesses said that National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) agents, other security forces and allied militia had lists of suspected SPLM supporters, which they used to carry out arbitrary arrests in house-to-house searches, at checkpoints, and on the streets.

In some cases, local residents identified by witnesses as supporters of the National Congress Party, the political party ruling Sudan, guided the militias to known SPLM members. Government security forces also entered the "protective perimeter" next to the UN mission's compound in Kadugli and arrested people there, and on at least two occasions killed people near the compound.

"Someone told me the list had my name on it, so I decided to go to UNMIS," recalled LK, a 29-year-old woman and member of the SPLM. As she fled to the compound on June 11, she saw three dead bodies near the river. Near the compound, she saw security forces shoot two youths.

"The [central reserve police] shot and killed two boys, Khaled, 18 and Amr, 16," she said. "They are the sons of Saleh, a driver for [deputy governor and SPLM leader] Abdelaziz [al-Hillu]. They purposely killed those two boys, I saw someone point at them and I saw the bodies after they were shot. Their bodies were on the ground."

Another witness, FA, who was also a national staff member of the UN mission, said: "On June 7, SAF, Military Intelligence, and militia started arresting people inside the UNMIS compound." She recalled how on June 8 two vehicles from the Central Reserve Police stopped at the main gate of the mission and killed Nimiri Philip, a UN contractor:

"They took him from the main gate and tried to kill him in front of the gate. Many displaced women started crying, so they took him in a vehicle, killed him and threw his body out."

Looting and Destruction of Property, Including Churches

Dozens of witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported seeing homes and churches looted and destroyed. "They took the zinc roofs and burned the rest," said RHA, a 29-year-old woman from Hagar Al Nar who witnessed looting and burning of neighbors' homes from inside hers.

Members of the clergy reported that soldiers and militia looted property from four churches and the Sudan Council of Churches in Kadugli and destroyed a church in Um Durein. Martin Boulos, a church leader interviewed in Juba, said that while he was hiding in the Sudan Council of Churches compound, he could see militia and police shooting inside the guest house and looting the office.

"They broke all the windows and doors of the guest house, took what they wanted and burned the rest: another church leader said. "They moved to the office and cathedral and broke many things."

The deliberate destruction of religious monuments is a crime under international humanitarian law.

Sexual Violence

Several witnesses also reported rapes by government soldiers. RKA, a 24-year-old woman from a village northeast of Kadugli, said seven SAF soldiers raped her in the bushes near a checkpoint outside of Heiban, as she was making her way home after the conflict broke out in Kadugli.

"They took my camera and my bag with my passport and they took me in the bushes," she said. After the rape, she fled to Juba and has no news about her son and other family members who were separated from her at the time of attack and are living in an area controlled by the military.

MBA, a lawyer interviewed in Juba, said that his neighbor and her 16-year-old daughter sought his assistance after soldiers raped the daughter in Kadugli on the third day of fighting there. "The daughter had blood on her legs," he recalled. "I gave her antibiotic and cleaned her wound with rags and salt." MBA also said he received a telephone call from a 25-year-old female neighbor who had been raped by three militia men in her home. "She could not move, they had beaten her," he said.

Coerced Returns to Kadugli

Witnesses from Kadugli also said that government officials had attempted to coerce displaced people who had taken refuge with the UN mission to return to Kadugli in the weeks following the outbreak of conflict. On June 20, local authorities reportedly entered the "protective perimeter" adjacent to the camp, where approximately 10,000 displaced people had gathered, and ordered people to return to their homes in Kadugli or to congregate in schools and the Kadugli Stadium. On June 18, the Governor Haroun announced in local media that civil servants should return or else they would not receive their salaries.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement emphasize that displaced people have the right to seek safety in any part of the country and the right not to be resettled in any place where life, safety and liberty and/or health would be at risk.

Other Allegations

Witnesses including UN staff told the researchers of two mass graves in the Kadugli area -- in Tillo and by the valley in the village of Murta. However, the researchers could not confirm these allegations due to lack of access and limited accounts from witnesses. The researchers also received credible reports that anti-vehicle landmines were laid in and around Kadugli and other strategic locations, but could not confirm which forces were responsible.

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