



“There was nobody to help us”

Oppression by the Government of Sudan and Food Shortages
in Blue Nile, Sudan

HART visit to Blue Nile, January 2018



Humanitarian
Aid Relief Trust

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Abbreviations

GoS	Government of Sudan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
SRRA	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency
SPLA-N	Sudanese People’s Liberation Army – North (Opposition Army)
SPLM-N	Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement – North (Opposition Party)
The opposition army and party are closely linked therefore sometimes they join together:	
SPLA/M – N	Sudanese People’s Liberation Army/Movement – North

Overview

The Sudanese people have experienced near-constant conflict and instability over six decades of independence. In Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, the Government of Sudan (GoS) has targeted civilians with aerial bombardment, missile attacks and ground offensives.

These assaults are directed at schools, churches, mosques and marketplaces – targeting indigenous Africans, moderate Muslims, Christians and traditional believers. The attacks they suffer are largely unreported and aid organisations are restricted from working there leaving the people neglected and without aid or advocacy. A ceasefire was agreed last year. Despite general cessation of aerial bombardment, we heard of continuing overflying by GoS aircraft causing fear, panic, disruption of activities and displacement of civilians.

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) visited Blue Nile in January 2018 meeting community leaders, activists and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Acute shortages of food and no access to healthcare or education are resulting in overwhelming manmade need and suffering.

Two main issues emerged through our discussions:

1. The belief that the GoS will continue military offensives against the people of Blue Nile
2. Cross-border aid is essential to the long-term survival of people in Blue Nile

This short report is unable to reveal the full extent of their concerns. We hope, however, it will provide at least some opportunity for appropriate response.

Recommendations

The GoS should allow cross-border aid to reach Blue Nile to enable the survival of the civilians, who are not able to trust aid sent from Khartoum (due to their experience of the GoS sustained genocidal policies perpetrated against them for so many years). The Khartoum Government's refusal to allow this demonstrates failure to comply with the conditions required by the US for the lifting of sanctions.

The UK Government should cease to adopt policies, including the promotion of trade links with the GoS, which provide credibility and support for the regime until they allow cross-border aid to reach the vulnerable civilians in the Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains; and encourage other Governments, especially the US, to do the same.

The International Community should acknowledge the suffering of the people of Blue Nile and the unacceptability of the GoS position – and fulfil its obligations to 'provide and protect'. Urgent action is needed to provide the food and health care for these civilians which they desperately and urgently need.



Demonstration in Yabus

Political Situation

There are two issues of concern regarding the political situation in Blue Nile. First, the lifting of the US sanctions in October 2017: there are reports that the GoS have been using the associated increase in resources to increase their military capability, including a build-up of armed forces and missiles on the northern Blue Nile border. This is fuelling the suspicion that the ceasefire will not last and that the Khartoum regime will use this time for consolidation of its military position to continue to impose their Islamist agenda.

*“Al-Bashir is using the ceasefire to equip himself with more weapons. There is a mutual relationship between GoS and foreign governments, including the United States, who lifted sanctions to allow further military supplies. **What conditions have been met? Why does the international community always believe GoS and not us? They want a ceasefire to buy more weapons.**” [Bold type inserted by HART].*

Deputy Commissioner, Yabus

Secondly, SPLM-N divided into two factions last July when Chairman Malik Agar and Deputy Chairman Abdul-Aziz Al-Hilu disagreed over proposed policies regarding relationships with

GoS, particularly regarding self-determination or autonomy. Clashes occurred between the two factions, causing further displacement of civilians and increasing tensions among the local people. No dialogue has yet been arranged between Malik Agar and Abdul-Aziz Al-Hilu to try to settle the disagreement.

“Although they have stopped fighting both continue with their own agendas. A dialogue is required at grass roots and leadership levels. A mediator is required such as church leaders who have a reconciliatory reputation.”

Military Offensives

Although levels of violence have decreased since the 2016 ceasefire, we heard several reports of a build-up of GoS armed forces and heavy weaponry including the purchasing of two fighter jets. The likelihood of a renewed offensive in Blue Nile has increased fears among the local people, resulting in more internal displacement and outflow of refugees.

“Although they have stopped fighting, GoS continue with their agenda. There is a build-up of troops on the border. They are building supplies of Iranian missiles in Kurmuk, Damazin and Bau and have purchased fighter jets from Russia. It is possible that money is available to them because of the lifting of sanctions.”

Benjamin Kuku, HART Partner

“2 months ago, planes were hovering overhead even during the ceasefire and causing fear amongst us.”

Abdulatif Nazer, IDP from Magouf

Genocidal Policies

Local leaders in Blue Nile are deeply angered by Khartoum’s policy of ethnic cleansing of indigenous African peoples and religious cleansing of moderate Muslims (who do not support the Islamist ideology promoted by the GoS), Christians and traditional believers. They believe the current assault is part of a longer-term strategy to conquer Blue Nile, before moving on to the Nuba Mountains.

“The war in Sudan is intended to marginalise the African peoples. Fundamentalist agencies want us to become an Arabic country and have sought to impose the Arab language on all citizens – agencies such as the Islamic Centre for Islamisation are working systematically to destroy churches in Sudan and across Africa. Our message to the faithful (fellow Muslims) in the UK and other countries is ‘Do not side with Khartoum and assist them in killing innocent people.’”

Idris Abdullah Aljak, Deputy Chair of the National Liberation Council

“GoS have been killing our people for a long time because we won’t accept their Islamism and because we are black. GoS has been fighting black peoples for decades and trying to turn black Sudanese people into Arabs and Wahabis fundamental Islamism, even using force and declaring holy war for example against the Nuba people in 1991. They want Sudan to be Arab and Islamist. El Bashir said this in Gagarif in 2011, publicly. He doesn’t want diversity.

We argue aid should have no borders. We’re confused because the international community doesn’t understand the situation. How can those in GoS who are killing us

send help while killing their own people? They destroy our mosques, churches, schools. Why is GoS killing us? Because we're black or different Muslims or we have our own culture? We don't understand. In Blue Nile, there are so many Muslims who are being killed.

The international community believes the GoS and tells their story. Civilians in need should have unconditional help”.

Sodi I. Shamila, Director of Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (SRRA)



Humanitarian Situation

Over 300,000 people have fled to neighbouring Ethiopia and South Sudan to seek refuge, leaving only 90,000 remaining in SPLA-N controlled Blue Nile state. Hundreds of thousands remain in Government controlled areas. There are reports that much of their land (especially in the Ingessena region) has been taken over by the GoS and given to its supporters - large plantations given to Arab leaders from neighbouring countries; smaller land plots given to supporters such as mercenaries.

The indigenous civilians are unable to cultivate in large areas and many have fled as IDPs to a camp in the Doro area; large numbers are held reportedly, not allowed to leave, for forced labour on the land that was once their own.



Items scavenged by IDPs in Wadaka to assuage the pangs of hunger

Severe Food Insecurity

There are multiple reasons for food scarcity in Blue Nile. Constant movement by civilians avoiding bombs and attacks from the GoS has prevented them from cultivating many crops and maintaining any resilience to natural disasters, including the floods in October 2017 which ruined majority of the crops they had been able to grow and which were to be used for food until the next harvest.

"The unsettlement causes many problems for looking after our children. We can't cultivate and this causes hunger for our children."

Raouda Yipa, IDP in Yabus

"There was a natural disaster last year which destroyed everything in 2017. We can only eat fruit and roots."

Maki Ibrahim Abas, IDP in Yabus Bala.

In Wadaka, the situation is extremely dire, with 9,000 IDPs who had recently fled from their homes in Danfona in the middle of the night. They left carrying nothing with them and no help has reached them from any NGO. They said that HART was the first NGO to reach them. They are trying to survive, scavenging for food, eating leaves and roots with no nutritional value, to ease hunger pains. They have no other supplies such as clean water or blankets.

"In Danfona, our home area, we had everything including stored food, but it was all burnt. We lost everything. On the journey, some people were injured. Many children were lost in the bush as everybody woke up in disarray and ran. Until now many children are still missing and their families fear them dead as there is no news. They

took all our cattle. We fled without anything. When we came here, there was nobody to help us, no NGOs. You are the first people to visit us.”

Sumaya Baria Nur, IDP in Wadaka

“I urge the humanitarian actors and agencies to find a way to help the people here in Wadaka because their needs are urgent and they’re living in a very difficult situation. If no aid comes there will be more casualties. If this situation continues until next March there will be no people here.”

Antar Juma, Paramount Chief of the Jumjum Tribe

Challenges for Education

There is little access to education for children in Blue Nile with only 32 primary schools. There are no paid teachers, no teacher training, no exercise books, pens, pencils, chalk boards, etc. Education is a priority as they want the younger generation to have good future – learning to read and write but also skills such as carpentry, mechanics and construction.

IDPs at Yabus expressed their concerns:

“The future for my children will be difficult without education. Children are meant to look after their parents when they are old but I will have to work.”

“I am angry and sad because our children do not have a school and they have no future.”

“What makes me fearful is no education for the children. I was a member of a committee to make children go to school and it is painful that they can’t go. I am not happy about this. An Antanov bomb once landed close to school and this causes fear.

The bombing hindered concentration and many students left to the refugee camps in Ethiopia and South Sudan to receive better schooling. There are only 40% of Girls in school who often drop out due to cultural traditions such as early marriage. Scholarships are needed for both boys and girls who would to go to secondary school or university as refugees it is very difficult to support themselves in other countries and pay for schooling.

“During the conflict we had to abandon the classrooms and work under the trees. Schools in Chali were totally destroyed”

Issa Khirased Mohamud, Education Secretariat

“Education is not compatible with Antanovs flying overhead. Please put pressure on the Government of Sudan to stop Antanovs. We need peace.”

Deputy Chairman of National Liberation Council

“We need money for people to complete secondary school and we need scholarships for students to go to Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Egypt and South Africa. We also need teachers from other countries to train our teachers.”

Abdul Hafiz, Teacher

Healthcare and Wellbeing

There are 28 health clinics in SPLA-N held-territory, covering a population of 90,000 people. These clinics provide universal health care and midwifery but are chronically short of trained manpower and medical supplies. The majority of care is provided by community health workers and traditional birth attendants.

There are no qualified midwives operating in the area and 12% of all births end in maternal death, one of the highest maternal mortality rates in world. 7% of maternal deaths are caused by sepsis due to suboptimal practice. Both the Medical Director and Secretary of Health stated that even one trained midwife would reduce this to zero overnight.

The only referral hospital available is Maban over the border in South Sudan as El Kurmuk to the north is inaccessible due to the continued violence. Complicated pregnancies and trauma have to be transported by any means available as there is no ambulance service.

There are high incidences of diarrhoeal diseases, tuberculosis, leprosy, skin diseases, sexually transmitted diseases and malnourishment but no medicines to treat them with. Childhood immunisation and public health vaccines are unavailable. Public health including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene is being managed by a team of Volunteer Health Trainers.

The Army clinicians stated that they have their own medical supply chain but it is still wanting for antibiotics and painkillers, tourniquets and dressings to manage combat wounds. Sick and injured troops are cared for in the civilian medical chain and are therefore dependent on Maban hospital.

The Need for Cross-Border Aid

The people in Blue Nile have deep distrust of the GoS and would prefer if aid came across the border rather from Khartoum. In particular, the people are worried that food aid will be tampered with and used to further the regime’s agenda. They are willing to accept non-food items which can’t be used to harm them such as education and medical supplies.

Their fear and distrust is not unfounded as there is history of the regime interfering with international aid operations in Darfur. Furthermore, twice agreements have been signed by

the GoS to allow humanitarian aid into Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile yet this is yet to happen.

"We don't expect the regime to give us healthy food. Their offers have deceived the world. Now people are hungry, tired, suffering and are really in need but it must come from sources we can trust."

"We argue aid should have no borders. Civilians in need should have unconditional help. But we are confused because the international community has completely misunderstood the situation. Why do you think our people flee abroad, and not to Khartoum? It is because they are killing their own people, mosques, churches, schools"

Sodi I. Shamila, Director of SRRA

"GoS is also denying the international community to send professionals to help us. Please ask organisations in the UK to come to help the people of South Kordofan and Blue Nile."

Deputy Commissioner





Acknowledgements

HART wishes to thank everyone who made us welcome and who provided the help we needed to accomplish our visit.

We also thank all who spoke to us, sharing information and concerns. We are particularly grateful for the grace and dignity with which we were received by people living in conditions of extreme deprivation and associated suffering. We will try to be a voice for them and to make known their needs - and the need for the international community to fulfil its obligations 'to provide and protect'.

HART is making it a priority to try to obtain money and arrange for food aid to be sent to the desperate IDPs in Wadaka as a matter of utmost urgency. To contribute, please go to <https://www.hart-uk.org/donate/appeal-9000-displaced-blue-nile>. Thank you.

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