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Feature Article

Ten Years On, Darfur Continues to Deteriorate

Ten years since the outbreak of the Darfur conflict in 2003, the conflict continues unabated. An estimated 2.3 million people remain displaced by Darfur’s decade-long conflict.¹ The nature of the conflict in the region continues to oscillate and grow more complex, with civilians presently facing attacks by government forces and pro-government militias, as well as armed opposition groups.² During a visit to Darfur in May 2013, the UN Under Secretary General for

Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos reported that 300,000 had been displaced from January – May 2013 alone. This figure is higher than the combined number of displaced during the past three years.³

Violence in Darfur from 2009 – 2012 was characterised by widespread banditry and looting⁴ punctuated by short outbreaks of direct confrontation between the Government of Sudan’s (GoS) Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its affiliated paramilitaries, and Darfur’s rebel groups.

Direct conflict continues to occur between the SAF and rebel groups such as the Sudan Liberation Army Abdul Wahid faction (SLA/AW), the Sudan Liberation Army/ Mini Minawi faction (SLA/MM), and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). In April, the SLA/MM briefly controlled Labado and Muhajerja localities, both bordering Nyala town, South Darfur,

¹ IRIN News, “Renewed fighting worsens Darfur crisis”, 19 April 2013.

² Amnesty International, “10 Years on: Violations Remain Widespread in Darfur”, 28 March 2013.

³ Reuters, “Fighting in Sudan’s Darfur region displaces 300,000 – U.N. aid chief”, 22 May 2013.

⁴ Small Arms Survey, “Forgotten Darfur: Old Tactics and New Players”, Claudio Gramizzi and Jérôme Tubiana, July 2012.

before withdrawing days later. The SLA/AW defeated joint GoS forces near Kilik and Shatai localities, also bordering Nyala, shortly after. On 17 April pro-government forces entered Labado and Muhajeria localities, displacing several members of the Zaghawa ethnic group. Many were subsequently targeted when they fled to Kabsora and Netiga in Netiga locality of South Darfur. A peacekeeper from the joint United Nations African Union peacekeeping mission (UNAMID) was also reported killed on 19 April by unknown attackers in Muhajeria.⁵

A new dimension to the conflict in Darfur has been the increased use of aerial bombardment by the SAF, as well as massive displacement sparked by inter-ethnic fighting, often supported by Sudanese paramilitary forces. In recent months ACJPS and other human rights organisations have documented the increased use of aerial bombardment by the SAF. In one attack in February 2013, ACJPS documented the bombardment of Derib al Reih village in South Darfur, in which four civilians were killed and thirty seven injured. Two of the civilians killed were children. Reliable sources informed ACJPS that there is no rebel presence in Derib al Reih or military installations in the village and surrounding area.⁶ In February 2013, there were media reports of aerial bombardment in Central Darfur and South Jebel Marra, as well as in Blue Nile's IDP camps. In response, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2091 on 14 February calling for a cessation of military action in the region, including aerial bombardment.⁷

The beginning of 2013 also saw the outbreak of inter-ethnic conflict in both North Darfur and Central Darfur. While the GoS has stated that it does not have the capacity to quell inter-ethnic fighting, there have been reports of involvement by SAF members and other paramilitary forces.⁸ Forces such as the Border Guards and Central Reserve Forces (CRF) reportedly have joined in localised inter-ethnic conflict using government issued arms and vehicles, killing hundreds and prompting the forced displacement of thousands.⁹ In some cases, such as Um Dukhun in central Darfur, government forces have taken no measures to protect civilians, and impeded the access of UNAMID to conduct verification missions.¹⁰

The massive displacement figures in 2013 were primarily caused by inter-ethnic fighting in North Darfur in Jebel Amer and in Central Darfur in Um Dukhun. In Jebel Amer in North Darfur, conflict broke out between two Arab tribes, the Beni Hussein and Reizegat, in late December 2012. The conflict was precipitated when a leader of the Reizegat and member of the Border Guards, a militia affiliated with the SAF that the GoS has largely lost control of, claimed a piece of gold-rich land also claimed by the neighbouring Beni Hussein.¹¹ Members of the Beni

⁵ Reliefweb, "UNAMID peacekeeper killed in attack on Muhajeria Team Site, East Darfur", 19 April 2013.

⁶ African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, "Aerial bombardment in South Darfur kills four civilians; Government of Sudan declares it accidental", 22 February 2013.

⁷ UN Security Council, "Resolution 2091 (2013)", Adopted by the UN Security Council at its 6920th meeting on 14 February 2013.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: ICC Suspect at Scene of Fresh Crimes", 3 June 2013.

⁹ Sudan Democracy First Group, "Monthly Newsletter Issue (1) May 2013", 18 May 2013.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: ICC Suspect at Scene of Fresh Crimes", 3 June 2013.

¹¹ Amnesty International, "10 Years on: Violations Remain Widespread in Darfur", 28 March 2013.

Hussein tribe have reportedly controlled the distribution of artisanal mining licenses in the area since the discovery of gold in the region in 2010, and have resisted government attempts to levy taxes on gold production.¹²

The conflict escalated, culminating in coordinated attacks from members of the Reizegat on Beni Hussein villages. It is estimated that 500 people were killed in the attacks, with the UN estimating at the end of January that in only a month approximately 100,000 people fled Beni Hussein territory.¹³ During the conflict, sexual violence was also reportedly prevalent. The conflict continued through early March, when a peace agreement between the Reizegat and Beni Hussein was signed.¹⁴

The violence reignited in late June after pro-government militias reportedly surrounded the IDP camps around Saraf Omra town. The catalyst to the renewal of conflict in the region was reportedly the suspension of petrol convoys between Saraf Omra and Al Sareif Beni Hussein.¹⁵

Since early April, heavily armed members of the Misseriya and Ta'isha ethnic groups have conducted attacks on Salamat communities in central Darfur.¹⁶ At least 50,000 civilians in central Darfur fled to neighbouring Chad,¹⁷ with over 30,000 of these refugees coming from Um Dukhun. Though the displaced from Um Dukhun are largely Salamat, members of non-Arab ethnic groups such as the Masalit, Fur, Dajo, Kajaksa, and Tama have also been displaced by the fighting.¹⁸

The Misseriya, Ta'isha, and Salamat ethnic groups are all Arab tribes, with the Salamat having strong linkages to Chad, which borders with Um Dukhun. Conflict was reportedly sparked when a member of the Misseriya allegedly attempted to commit an armed robbery against a member of the Salamat tribe.¹⁹ The root causes of the conflict likely go deeper, as there have been longstanding land disputes in the region. In recent years, the Salamat, who have lived under Ta'isha administration in South Darfur for several years, sought greater autonomy and were promised a native administration by the former governor of West Darfur in 2010. Tensions in the region increased when central Darfur state was created by Presidential decree in 2012, a move that appeared outwardly to consolidate Salamat power.²⁰

It is not entirely clear why the GoS has supported the attacks on the Salamat, though one possibility could be that the GoS is attempting to appease the Misseriya and Ta'isha for their past

¹² Sudan Tribune, "Sudan's border force linked to Darfur gold mine attacks: Amnesty", 30 January 2013.

¹³ Reuters, "Up to 100,000 people flee fighting in Darfur: U.N.", 31 January 2013.

¹⁴ Enough, "Darfur's Gold Rush: State-Sponsored Atrocities 10 Years After the Genocide", May 2013.

¹⁵ Radio Dabanga, "Renewed violence between Abbala and Beni Hussein in North Darfur", 26 June 2013.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: ICC Suspect at Scene of Fresh Crimes", 3 June 2013.

¹⁷ UN News Centre, "Fresh tribal clashes in Darfur trigger largest influx of refugees into Chad in years, UN says", 12 April 2013.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: ICC Suspect at Scene of Fresh Crimes", 3 June 2013.

¹⁹ Radio Dabanga, "Misseriya release Salamat deputy in Central Darfur", 30 April 2013.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: ICC Suspect at Scene of Fresh Crimes", 3 June 2013.

support to the *janjawiid* militias. International Criminal Court indictee Ali Kushayb, a former *janjawiid* leader and member of the paramilitary CRF, has reportedly been involved in leading attacks on Salamat villages. Witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that they observed Kushayb riding in a government vehicle during an attack on Abu Jeradil, near Um Dukhun, on 8 April.²¹

An agreement was signed by the leaders of the Salamat and Misseriya on 10 April.²² The agreement laid out the conditions for a ceasefire, as well as disarmament and demilitarisation of the area to encourage the return of the displaced.²³ The agreement quickly collapsed.

A ceasefire was not reached until 3 July in Zalingei, the capital of Central Darfur. The signing ceremony was attended by the Sudanese Second Vice President Dr. Haj Adam Youssef, the head of the Darfur Regional Authority, Dr Tijani al Sisse, and the Minister of Justice Dr. Mohamed Bushara Dosa. The agreement provides for the cessation of all hostilities and aggression between the tribes, and for the two parties to cooperate in reconstruction and development and encourage the return of displaced persons.²⁴

The massive displacement and casualty figures of the first months of 2013 are taking place in a context where little political progress has been made in efforts to resolve the Darfur conflict and funding streams to the region are being reoriented away from humanitarian and emergency relief and towards development aid.

On 7 – 8 April 2013, an International Donors Conference was held in Doha to discuss ways of reconstructing and developing Darfur. Proposed funding shifts programming in Darfur away from emergency and humanitarian aid to development aid,²⁵ which some believe is an attempt to attract more support – and signatories – to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD).²⁶

Though the DPDD has largely been supported by the international community, many Darfuris and Sudanese are suspicious of the process on the grounds that it has not been inclusive of the views of Darfur's displaced and civil society. The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), a coalition of armed movements in Sudan that includes the SLA/AW, SLA/MM, and JEM, recently issued a statement on the Qatari leadership in the Doha negotiations, saying that 'partial solutions' for rebuilding and developing Darfur 'ultimately only lead to further aggravation of the humanitarian and the political crisis in the region'.²⁷

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² UN DPI, "Top UN Peacekeeping Official Says Situation in Darfur remains 'very troubling' even while mildly encouraging developments made in Doha peace effort", 29 April 2013.

²³ Radio Dabanga, "Despite treaty, central Darfur tribal clashes resume", 12 April 2013.

²⁴ Radio Dabanga, "Tribes sign accord for peace, reconstruction and development in Central Darfur", 3 July 2013.

²⁵ International Donors Conference for Darfur, "Conference Results", 7 – 8 April 2013.

²⁶ Think Africa Press, "Darfur: Money Won't Buy Human Rights", Jehanne Henry, 5 April 2013.

²⁷ Radio Dabanga, "'Qatar Leadership should address root causes of Darfur Crisis' – SRF", 16 June 2013.

Ten years on, the war is not yet over. Rampant impunity persists across Darfur, as seen by the alleged involvement of ICC indictee Ali Kushayb in the attacks on Um Dukhun. The space for free expression of civil and political rights remains severely contracted. The lack of civil and political rights impedes the extent to which civil society and Darfur's displaced can participate inclusively in the Darfur Peace Process, a process many are already distrustful of and refuse to engage with. While positive that donors are expressing interest in funding recovery programmes for Darfur, increased funding is currently desperately needed for emergency humanitarian relief. Conditions within the camps remain dire and never fully recovered following the expulsion of ten international humanitarian NGOs and three national NGOs in March 2009 following the International Criminal Court's issuance of an arrest warrant against President Omar al Bashir. It is imperative that the international community, GoS, and armed opposition movements in Sudan renew efforts to create peace in Darfur.