

To: All Member States of the African Union Peace and Security Council

Cc:

H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson, African Union Commission

H.E. Thabo Mbeki, Chairperson, AU High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan

23 January 2013

Your Excellencies,

Re: Ending the humanitarian and political crisis in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states, Sudan

On the eve of the next African Union (AU) meeting on Sudan and South Sudan, we appeal to you, our leaders, to do all you can to end the violence and restore peace to the people of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile in Sudan. The war that has raged between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) for over 18 months cannot be allowed to claim more lives and endanger the chances of peace in the wider region. The time for resolute action and strong leadership is now.

Nearly one million people are already affected and the situation is getting worse as both parties launch new dry season offensives. Intense and indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilian areas by the Sudanese Armed Forces is terrorizing communities, killing and maiming on a daily basis. The conflict is a scar on Africa, made worse by the fact that it bears many of the hallmarks of the state-sponsored violence inflicted on the Nuba people in the 1990s. It is a cycle of violence that only our African leaders can, and must, now break.

Credible reports from the Two Areas confirm what we have been hearing from our brothers and sisters on the ground: the humanitarian situation is verging on catastrophic. It is no exaggeration when the experts warn that a man-made famine looms.

An estimated 700,000 people in the SPLM-N-controlled areas, mainly women, children and the elderly, have little or no access to food, water, sanitation or healthcare. More than 18 months of bombing, shelling and ground attacks have meant that few have been able to grow and harvest staple crops. To make matters worse, aid agencies are barred from these areas, forcing many to seek sustenance from roots and leaves, or to eat a meal only once every *five* days. The serious health and developmental implications for the many children subjected to this level of deprivation and violence are deeply disturbing.

Unless African leaders seize the opportunity to take decisive and firm action to demand an end to the violence, a whole generation of children may be lost to war.

As civil society organisations from Sudan, South Sudan and across Africa, we appreciate your attempts over the last year to encourage the warring parties to resolve their differences and allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need. We especially welcomed the 24th October Communiqué (PSC/MIN/COMM/1(CCCXXXIX)) which set a deadline for the parties to hold direct negotiations to agree an immediate ceasefire as a matter of priority. However, despite these concerted efforts and those by leaders such as former President Thabo Mbeki, no relief has been delivered and no guns laid down.

We urge former President Thabo Mbeki, as the Chair of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan and South Sudan (HIP), to ensure that his report to the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) includes firm and decisive recommendations on Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile: at a minimum, both parties should be required to meet time-bound milestones and be held accountable for non-compliance. This has been stipulated in relation to other outstanding issues concerning the border region, notably Abyei and border demarcation. Given the lives that are at stake, the AU PSC should ensure that Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile are accorded a similarly determined response that provides no leeway for further delays, prevarication or inaction. The situation is now too critical to allow civilians to be held hostage to further political intransigence.

More must be done to ensure there is a cessation of hostilities, unhindered humanitarian assistance for all civilians in need and direct talks between the two parties to peacefully resolve their long-standing grievances.

We urge you to seize the opportunity of the forthcoming AU meeting on Sudan and South Sudan on 25th January 2013 to:

1. Instruct the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-N to agree to an immediate cessation of hostilities and allow immediate unimpeded humanitarian access, with measures to verify compliance and consequences for non-compliance;
2. Urge the Government of Sudan and SPLM-N to enter into direct political talks, based on their June 28th 2011 Framework Agreement, with time-bound milestones and consequences for non-compliance;
3. Renew the mandate of the AU HIP as an independent mediator to assist the parties to peacefully resolve the conflict in the Two Areas, and address the root causes of the violence; and
4. Send a high-level delegation from the AU PSC to both sides of the conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile to demonstrate active engagement and enable a firsthand assessment of progress.

We appreciate the opportunity to present these recommendations as we firmly believe that only unified and sustained high-level political pressure will break the deadlock in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. Failure to rise to this challenge will jeopardise our shared dream of Sudan and South Sudan living as two viable states side by side in peace. Now is the moment for the AU to demonstrate its leadership and ability to produce African solutions for African problems so that the peace of Africa is truly assured by the exertions of Africans themselves.

Sincerely,

Sipho Theys

Action Support Centre - Regional hub of over 100 African NGOs

Hannah Forster

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies

Africa Democracy Forum

Ambassador Ochieng Adala
Africa Peace Forum

Osman Hummaida
African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies

George O. Okong'o
African Research and Resource Forum (ARRF)

David De Dau
Agency for Independence Media (AIM) - South Sudan

Albaqir Mukhtar
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