

An open letter to the Public Editor of the *New York Times* concerning Darfur

Eric Reeves, 11 June 2013

Margaret Sullivan, Public Editor of the *New York Times*

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

I gather that my previous communication concerning the February 26, 2012 *New York Times* dispatch from the village of **Nyuru, West Darfur** (“A Taste of Hope Sends Refugees Back to Darfur”) seemed not to warrant a response. I assume further that the *NYT* continues to stand by this dispatch as a legitimate representation of the nature of life in Darfur at the time. This is such a deep and comprehensive failure of journalistic integrity that I feel obliged to circulate this second, fuller communication to you as widely as possible, and have begun by copying this email and distributing it by other electronic means. In short, this is an “open letter.”

I am of course aware that the *NYT* did feel compelled to run a relatively brief item in late May of this year on the occasion of UN OCHA head Valerie Amos’ brief, heavily controlled visit to Darfur. Indeed reporting could hardly be avoided since this was the occasion for her announcement that **300,000 Darfuris had already been newly displaced by mid-May of this year**. This is a staggering figure, especially given the fact that **more than 600,000 were also newly displaced in 2010 – 2012, according to the most reliable data available**. No mention was made in the May 2013 *NYT* report of how widely divergent the OCHA report is from what was reported by the *NYT* in February 2012. And it certainly should have been the occasion for noting that, altogether, almost **3 million civilians** have been displaced over the course of tens years of conflict in Darfur.

But the *NYT* dispatch by Jeffrey Gettleman from Nyuru offered not a picture of displacement but of people returning to their villages, and assumed that these were sufficiently numerous to suggest conflict in Darfur was ending: **“the biggest return of displaced people since the war began in 2003 [is] a sign that one of the world’s most infamous conflicts may have decisively cooled.”** This was a truly extraordinary and grossly misleading conclusion, since all evidence at the time—and since the filing of the dispatch—sharply, indeed overwhelmingly contradicts such a claim. Below is a partial reckoning of the inaccurate and poorly researched conclusions and comments in the dispatch.

For the sake of clarity, I should note first that *NYT* piece, misleadingly, does not consistently or clearly distinguish between Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Darfur and refugees in eastern Chad, making nonsense of many sentences. Both are immense populations, but while the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were **282,000 Darfuri refugees** in eastern Chad in February 2012; the most recent estimate, from both UNHCR and Doctors Without Borders (MSF), is **330,000**. In other words, despite the suggestion of Gettleman’s dispatch about the direction of refugee flows, the reality is that some **50,000 civilians have newly fled to Chad from Darfur** (many of these people were originally from Chad). Within Darfur itself there are more than **2 million people displaced in camps**; more are displaced without any place of refuge or relief (the resourceful and independent UN Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN] reported on April 19, 2013 that “an estimated **2.3 million people remain displaced** by Darfur’s decade-long conflict”).

Despite the failure of the *NYT* reporting from Darfur, the broader pattern of violence, rape, displacement, and acute deprivation currently experienced by those in the **Mornei** region (where **Nyuru** is located) has been captured with remarkable detail and authority in the steady stream of reports from **Radio Dabanga**, widely acknowledged as the most authoritative news source for Darfur over the past several years. Using Darfuri contacts on the ground throughout the region, the Darfuri diaspora in The Netherlands has created in Radio Dabanga an extraordinarily resourceful and geographically wide-ranging new form of electronic journalism—one evidently of no interest to the *NYT* or its reporters. Indeed, even as the single *NYT* dispatch was being filed from Nyuru, Radio Dabanga was providing reports from West Darfur of militia attacks on displaced persons and camps, suspicious fires in camps, rapes, water and food shortages—none, it would seem, of any interest to the *NYT* even as context.

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[*Compromising With Evil: An archival history of greater Sudan, 2007 – 2012*](#)

[All emphases have been added; I preserve the three-state division of Darfur in referring to events in West Darfur, from which "Central Darfur" has been arbitrarily carved, indicating with brackets where Radio Dabanga has used the new cartographic terminology.]

First, the view from the *New York Times*:

"A Taste of Hope Sends Refugees Back to Darfur," [dateline: **Nyuru, West Darfur**], **February 26, 2012**

More than 100,000 people in Darfur have left the sprawling camps where they had taken refuge for nearly a decade and headed home to their villages over the past year, the biggest return of displaced people since the war began in 2003 and a sign that one of the world's most infamous conflicts may have decisively cooled.

[Returns from camps in Chad? in Darfur? This is never clarified—ER]

The millions of civilians who fled into camps, their homes often reduced to nothing more than rings of ash by armed raiders, are among the most haunting legacies of the conflict in Darfur, transforming this rural landscape into a collection of swollen impromptu squatter towns. And while the many thousands going home are only a small fraction of Darfur's total displaced population, they are doing so voluntarily, United Nations officials say, ***offering one of the most concrete signs of hope this war-weary region has seen in years.***

[A photograph caption accompanying the article, presumably written by the *NYT* correspondent or his editor, declares baldly]:

"Darfur was long known for the brutality inflicted upon its residents by militias, but [NB] **peace has settled on the region.**"

[On] a recent morning, ***thousands of Nyuru's residents were back on their land doing all the things they used to do, scrubbing clothes, braiding hair, sifting grain and preparing for a joint feast of farmers and nomads. Former victims and former perpetrators would later sit down side by side together, some for the first time since Darfur's war broke out, sharing plates of macaroni and millet—and even the occasional dance—in a gesture of informal reconciliation [] parts of Darfur finally appear to be turning around, for a few reasons. []***

Of course, all is not well in Darfur. More than two million people remain stuck in ***internal displacement or refugee camps***. But people who have been victimized and traumatized ***are sensing a change in the air and acting on it, risking their lives and the lives of their children to leave the relative safety of the camps to venture back to where loved ones were killed. []***

[I]n the past few months, word began to trickle back to Chad that the *janjaweed* were gone.

[The *Janjaweed* and comparable militia forces most certainly do remain in all regions of Darfur, if often recycled into various paramilitary guises (e.g., the Central Reserve Police, or *Abu Tira*, the Border Intelligence Forces, and the Popular Defense Forces—ER]

But, at the same time, there is a new police station standing on a hill, with a fresh coat of high-gloss blue, **and there are no reports of major violence.** []

[There were and continue to be many reports of "major violence"—none that the *NYT* bothered to read—ER]

François Reybet-Degat, the current head of the United Nations refugee office in Sudan, said that more than 100,000 people returned home to several different areas of Darfur in 2011, far more than in any year before that.

[Who are these "voluntary returns"? Are they IDPs or refugees? Conflating the two or leaving the issue ambiguous is utterly irresponsible—ER]

"It's an early sign of a bigger trend," he said. "There are still pockets of insecurity, but the general picture is that things are improving."

"...there are still pockets of insecurity..." but "peace has settled on the region."

This is a journalistic obscenity, a fantastically inaccurate claim, as insisted upon by every knowledgeable observer of Darfur with whom I have communicated. New violent displacement vastly outstrips "voluntary" returns and has for years, even if we accept the problematic UN figure of "100,000 returns" over the preceding year (see below). Indeed, violence is widespread and growing in scale as well as intensity. This began well before February 2012, so how could the *NYT* have misrepresented conditions so badly?

Here we must ask first why were there no credible Darfuri voices cited by the *NYT*? The all too obvious answer is that Khartoum's Military Intelligence was fully in control of Gettleman's very brief and highly localized visit, whether he knew it or not. None of the many Darfuris I've spoken with gives the slightest credence to quotations attributed to supposed "villagers" of Nyuru. All such quotations in the dispatch come from either a hopelessly self-interested UN and African Union presence in the region, or from people who knew that the consequences of speaking honestly, of not performing as they had been scripted, could be deadly.

So just where is the small village of **Nyuru** to which the *NYT* correspondent traveled? And just why was it selected? It is in West Darfur, about fifteen miles north of Mornei, the major town in the area and the center of district administration (West Darfur is geographically much the smallest of the three Darfur states; however, conditions in the larger regions are reflected in countless reports from North and South Darfur). Shortly after the *NYT* dispatch, and outraged by its misrepresentations, Darfuris in the area—to which no foreign journalists other than the *NYT*'s Gettleman has been given access—along with researchers at Radio Dabanga began a thorough investigation. This included an interview with the UNHCR representative for Chad, who denied that there had been **any** returns from Chad to Darfur. After publishing a series of stinging rebukes of the *NYT* account, Radio Dabanga also asked the chief administrative officer for the Mornei district—the *Farsha*—to investigate the claims in the dispatch. The *NYT* has seemed quite uninterested in his conclusions:

"The highest native administrator of Mornei, Izzedeen Abdurrahman, told Radio Dabanga **'there is no voluntary return of refugees from eastern Chad** to their villages in **Nuri [Nyuru]**.' He added that if anybody claimed he had been to Nuri [Nyuru] and saw refugees returning 'he must have confused trees with human beings.' [...]

"The *Farsha* returned to Nuri [Nyuru] and **found not a single returnee**. He explained that he did not deal with voluntary return files, as the most pressing issue in Nuri [Nyuru] and surroundings is the lack of security: **'80% of the people from Nuri [Nyuru] are still living in refugee camps in eastern Chad.'** **The rest of the people found shelter in camps in El Geneina, Mornei and Cisse:** 'These places are deserted, every school is destroyed.'" ("Farsha of Mornei: no voluntary return of refugees to Nuri (Nyuru), West Darfur," 10 April 2012, <http://www.radiodabanga.org/node/28283>)

I have heard not a single dissenting Darfuri voice.

What we have heard recently from the **Mornei** area (again, Mornei is only **about 15 miles from the NYT dateline of Nyuru**)? I include below a few excerpts from the scores of dispatches that Radio Dabanga has released over recent months with **Mornei** as a dateline; I also include reports from other parts of West Darfur, including excerpts which speak to humanitarian conditions on the ground in West Darfur and the relentless deterioration of human security, now frankly acknowledged by all international actors, including UNHCR.

If we want to know why [almost 1 million people have been newly displaced over the past three and a half years](#)—dwarfing even the untenably optimistic figure for returns attributed by the *NYT* to the UN—these are the dispatches we must read. And if we want to know why “returns” are so difficult to assess as “successful,” there is much here as well that speaks about the steady assaults—including rape and murder—directed against returning African farmers by Arab militia forces and armed Arab groups that have seized the lands and farms of these displaced people. As to deteriorating humanitarian conditions in West Darfur—logistically the most remote Darfur state—we must begin and end with accounts of the violence that has done so much to attenuate relief aid throughout Darfur. Accounts of this violence were appearing regularly at the time the *NYT* dispatch appeared, a large percentage with a **Mornei** dateline—15 miles from **Nyuru**.

- **Over 300 farms destroyed by herders near Darfur camp** (Radio Dabanga [**Mornei/also transliterated "Murnei," "Murni," "Murnay"**], **March 29, 2013**)

Herders “armed by the government” destroyed more than 300 vegetable farms near a West Darfur camp in retaliation to the alleged murder of two militiamen by a displaced last Monday. **[Typically in Radio Dabanga dispatches, “herders” refers to nomadic Arab groups, including militias, that are almost always well-armed—ER]**

Although the displaced confessed killing only of them in self-defense, families of both supposed victims have demanded to be paid exorbitant amounts of blood money. The sheikh denied it and **Mornei’s** residents staged mass demonstrations. Speaking to Radio Dabanga, the sheikh said ***the farmlands’ destruction by herders and their livestock is estimated at millions of Sudanese pounds***. The sites are all located in Wadi Sula’s Jumjum, Aishbara and Kabere areas, near the camp.

On Thursday, ***11 displaced women, including two babies, were attacked by pro-government militiamen in their farm near Mornei. Three of them were critically injured, and one of the babies in the hospital in coma.*** ••

- **Mornei: More than 10 herders’ attacks in a week** (Radio Dabanga [**Mornei, West Darfur**], **October 15, 2012**)

Residents of camp Mornei in West Darfur complained to Radio Dabanga about the ***recurring attacks carried out by herders against them and their farms***, on Monday 15 October. According to a camp representative the displaced have been exposed to more than ***10 attacks during the last week*** and that the most recent incident happened on Monday morning. The representative said ***a number of displaced persons were shot and beaten with whips when they tried to prevent herders from entering their farms in Wadi Jangary, south of Mornej***. He added that beatings and looting against camp’s residents by herders have increased in the past two days, adding that on ***farms in all of Wadi Jangary, Arro, Toure, Korney Toura were targeted.*** ••

- **Abbala militants rape “3 displaced women” in West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [**Mornei camp**], **March 25, 2013**)

A group of militants ***raped three displaced women*** on Saturday in ***Mornei camp, West Darfur***. A relative of one of the victims told Radio Dabanga that the militants are Abbala tribesmen. The Abbala militants attacked the three women who were on their way back to the camp from their farms in Wadi Tour, south of **Mornei**, the relative added. Another source said that the ***Abbala militants raped the women at gunpoint and added that they released the women late Saturday night***. The source revealed that the three victims were taken to Mornei hospital for treatment. Moreover, the source complained about ***the high percentage of attacks displaced people, women in particular, by pro-***

government militia. ["Abbala" is the most common term used by Radio Dabanga for camel-herding nomadic Arab groups—ER] ••

• **Baby in coma after militia attack near Darfur camp** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei], March 28, 2013)

Eleven displaced women, including two babies, were attacked by pro-government militiamen in their farm near a displaced camp in West Darfur on Thursday. Three of them were critically injured, and one of the babies is in the hospital in coma. Beating the victims with sticks, rifle butts and whips, **militants warned them the land was for grazing and not for farming,** the head of sheikhs and omdas of Mornei camps told Radio Dabanga.

They burned the winter crops of onions, peppers, tomatoes and okra, and threatened to kill whoever returned to the site, located in Wadi Misa, south of Mornei, the sheikh said. All of the victims were taken to the hospital. **Speaking to Radio Dabanga, the sheikh affirmed that UNAMID troops stationed in the vicinity “failed” to protect the displaced, despite the “serious” events that took place in the area recently.** ••

• **West Darfur displaced “unable” to farm due to presence of militias** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei], February 4, 2013)

Displaced living in Mornei, West Darfur, are complaining about their inability to cultivate their winter crops outside the camp because of the presence of pro-government militias stationed outside the area. A camp leader told Radio Dabanga on Monday the militiamen have been based outside Mornei since the tribal clashes between the Abbala and Beni Hussein broke out in Jebel ‘Amer, North Darfur on 5 January. He said **there is virtually no life outside the camp** and appealed to government authorities and UNAMID to send patrols to the area so that displaced can cultivate their crops and collect firewood. ••

• **Government selling land belonging to Mornei IDPs in West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei], January 27, 2013)

Residents at internally displaced persons camp at **Mornei** in West Darfur complained that the land they were displaced from named Bobai Amer is being sold off as residential land. **A camp leader said to Radio Dabanga the land which is used for farming, is being sold by Muhammed Arbab Khamis of the ruling National Congress Party, agreed with the chief of Bobai Amer for 200 Sudanese Pounds a piece.** On Thursday 10 **camp leaders met with Khamis to ask why he is selling their land and where the money is going. The witness said Khamis told them that if camp residents don’t want to return to their lands as they were invited to, the government will distribute their land.** On the money question he said it was none of their business. ••

• **Five Mornei residents taken to hospital after militia attack** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei], April 3, 2013)

Around 20 gunmen loyal to the government attacked ten people from Mornei camp in West Darfur. The militia arrived on horses and camels as the displaced people were preparing coals four km outside of the camp. **Witnesses said the gunmen used whips and rifles to beat the camp residents. They said the attack left five people seriously injured.** They were taken to the hospital in Mornei for treatment. ••

§ The attempt to seize the lands and farms of the displaced extends throughout West Darfur, and indeed all of Darfur. This process of confiscation and appropriation has continued unabated for years and indeed seems to be accelerating. None of this is mentioned in the NYT dispatch.

• **Confiscation of houses “attempt to dismantle camp” in West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [Garsila, West Darfur], May 31, 2013)

In an apparent **attempt by the Sudanese government to dismantle the camp for displaced persons in Garsila, West Darfur**, authorities have been **confiscating the houses of displaced persons and redistributing them to military commanders and other officials**. Sources told Radio Dabanga that this is being done by presenting the displaced with a bureaucratic catch-22 situation. The displaced are forced to present documents to prove ownership of the land, or to pay a SDG 500 (\$115) fee “to complete the registration procedures.” **Authorities have occupied the displaced houses and have redistributed them to leaders of the civil service, security, police, and army**, sources told Radio Dabanga. “The authorities of the area threaten the displaced: either pay or be removed from your lands.” **[Such extortion schemes are increasingly common and take many forms—ER] ****

• **Armed men seize farms in West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], July 13, 2012)

A group of **pro-government armed men assaulted a number of farmers in West Darfur**. After insulting and beating them, they **burned down their farms**. The men driving a land cruiser attacked the farmers on Tuesday evening in Jimmaizat Babiker and Hajer Bager, west of For Baranga. A farmer told Radio Dabanga that the **militants expelled them from their lands and threatened to kill him if they returned**. The farmer said the **armed men warned the farmers the area is meant for grazing and not for agriculture according to our source. The commissioner of For Baranga, Suleiman Khater Zayed, visited the area on Wednesday and echoed the exact same words. ****

• **Returnees’ homes, provisions destroyed by fire in West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [Shibait Urdu, West Darfur], May 30, 2013)

Eight families that returned voluntarily to the area of Shibait Urdu from camp Abu Suruj in Sirba locality, West Darfur are suffering under poor humanitarian conditions after fire destroyed their homes, shelter, belongings and stocks of food last week. A displaced woman from Abu Suruj told Radio Dabanga that the eight families representing a **total of about 80 individuals returned to Shibait Urdu** because of the difficult living conditions at the Abu Suruj camp. The source says that it was their intention to grow some food by working their fields. ******

• **Armed militias seize farms in Kreinik, West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], July 8, 2012)

IDPs returning to their lands in **Kreinik, 36 km east of Geneina**, found that **their properties had been seized by armed militias**. A sheikh [told Radio Dabanga that] **IDPs returning to cultivate their lands during the rainy season in West Darfur were stopped by militias. ****

• **West Darfur land settled by people from Niger, Chad, Central African** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], June 22, 2012)

Displaced people in camps in **El Geneina, West Darfur**, revealed that around one **hundred thousand square feet of their lands has been occupied by new inhabitants from Niger, Chad and Central Africa**. A sheikh from **Mornei** camp told Radio Dabanga that the occupied land included the areas of Masteri, Beida, Dowany, Kokoriya, Jory, Gubeya, Jeing, **Mornei** and many other areas. **He also stated that the new inhabitants have started changing the names of the area, cutting down large trees, demolishing graves and farming on it in attempts to erase the former symbols of the areas. ****

• **New settlers in Darfur chase returnees from their farming lands** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], June 17, 2012)

Displaced Darfuris in camp Kendeby of West Darfur have been chased from their farming lands in the area of Sirba, north of the capital el-Geneina. They told Radio Dabanga that several **returning IDP’s have been threatened with weapons while they were trying to sow their seeds**. They say that **settlers instead of the returnees from the area have taken the fertile agricultural lands in the localities of Miraya, Agi Ra, Kurk and Dumta. Displaced Darfuris in camp Kendeby of West Darfur have been chased from their farming lands in the area of Sirba, north of the capital El Geneina.**

According to a community leader, the settlers had **beaten five women who went out of camp Kendeby for farming** in Dumta areas last Thursday. The settlers **confiscated their seeds after beating them with a whip. The men warned them not to come back again.** ••

• **Armed militias seize farms near Garsila, West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [Garsila, West Darfur], July 9, 2011)

Radio Dabanga was informed by a female refugee that displaced women from Garsila, West Darfur, are currently complaining about **armed militias who apparently seized their farms, thus preventing their cultivation. The witness indicated that a group of the militia went to the Gedo, Gallinja and Gang Kosi areas, where several shepherds bring their herds, to take their land and set up their own farms with the Government's support.** ••

• **Displaced father and son beaten by would-be rapists in West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [Sirba Locality, West Darfur], May 28, 2013)

A displaced man and his son have been beaten by militiamen in their house at **Kendebe camp in Sirba Locality, West Darfur** on Sunday. Sources told Radio Dabanga that the militiamen entered the house and **attempted to rape a female family member. When the man and his son intervened, the militiamen beat them severely before fleeing.** The pair was taken to the camp clinic for medical treatment. **Another group of militiamen attacked two displaced people from the same camp as they made their way from Bir Dageeg camp on Sunday.** The camp sheikh told Radio Dabanga that when militiamen opened fire on two men one called Girba suffered a broken leg and another, Hak Murkez received a heavy beating. ••

• **Gunmen storm house in El Geneina camp, West Darfur—three injured** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina], May 20, 2013)

Three people were injured on Saturday night when gunmen stormed the home of the displaced family of Ahmed Yahiya Suleiman in Abuzer camp in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. Witnesses from the camp told Radio Dabanga that two gunmen broke into Suleiman's house at night while he was not at home. **They opened fire on his wife, his son and daughter.** The three injured were transferred for treatment to a hospital in El Geneina. •

• **UNHCR “in race against time” to deliver aid to Sudanese refugees in Chad** (Radio Dabanga [Tissi, eastern Chad], May 17, 2013)

Following the **displacement of tens of thousands of people from Sudan to Chad**, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) says it is “in a race against time” to deliver aid to them before the rainy seasons begins. In a press briefing on Friday, UNHCR spokesman Dan McNorton said the agency “is requisitioning aid for tens of thousands of Darfur refugees in eastern Chad amid fears that heavy rains will cut off access to the group.” This year more than **50,000 people**, both Sudanese and Chadians who were living in Darfur, fled violent hostilities to Tissi, just across the border. **Roads to the area become impassable during the rainy season lasting from May to November and the first rains have already fallen. The region has little infrastructure and new arrivals place a strain on the local communities.**

Earlier this month *Médecins Sans Frontières* drew international attention to the problem: “Humanitarian assistance is urgently needed before the looming rainy season cuts off road access to many areas ... time is running out.” ••

• **[West] Darfur's Umm Dukhun “virtually deserted” after clashes resumed** (Radio Dabanga [Umm Dukhun, West Darfur], May 30, 2013)

Umm Dukhun city in [West] Darfur, which has witnessed renewed violent tribal clashes **between the Salamat and Misseriya tribes, was virtually deserted as of Thursday morning.** In addition, shops and markets have been closed since hostilities resumed earlier this week. Local sources told Radio Dabanga

that **only about 100 families remain in Umm Dukhun, while the rest of the town's inhabitants—about 80,000 before clashes first erupted on 4 April—fled to neighbouring Chad.** ••

§ **The humanitarian crisis in the Mornei area had been deteriorating rapidly even before the bizarrely rapturous NYT account of February 2012; both previous and subsequent accounts offer a stark and inescapable picture of suffering and deprivation. Most of this derives from the violent insecurity in Darfur that the Khartoum regime considers a strategic weapon. The brutal conditions in which people are living throughout the camps of West Darfur, as well as South Darfur and North Darfur, have received scant attention in recent years—from the NYT or indeed any non-Sudanese news source. Given the truly staggering number of displaced persons, the acute vulnerability of the camps, the ongoing violence and consequent human displacement, the extreme attenuation of humanitarian relief, and the growing despair of people who have endured more than ten years of genocidal conflict, this lack of attention and concern is disgraceful.**

• **Sudan: Harsh Weather Has Many Living Rough in Mornei Camp, West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei camp], June 7, 2013)

The displaced people of camp Mornei in West Darfur have complained of the poor conditions, in particular with regard to an acute shortage of plastic sheets. **A displaced man from the camp reported to Radio Dabanga that they have not received any type of plastic sheets from the local authorities or organisations working in the field for nearly four years. “The recent rainfall and dust storms destroyed most of the plastic sheeting in the camp, and has forced some people to live in the open.”** He appealed on behalf of the displaced via Radio Dabanga to all the organisations operating in Darfur to provide plastic sheets for the camp, especially as the rainy season has arrived. ••

• **Mornei camp in West Darfur facing water crisis** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei camp], 11 February 2013)

Displaced residents of **Mornei camp** in West Darfur are **facing an acute drinking water crisis, due to the lack of fuel to operate the water stations in the camp.** One of the camp's sheiks told Radio Dabanga on Sunday, 10 February, that the camp is facing a water crisis due to the lack of fuel to operate the water stations in the camp. The sheikh added the water stations have not been operating for five consecutive days due to the lack of fuel. **He claims that the responsible humanitarian organization has stopped providing fuel to the camp due to the fact that UNICEF suspended its fuel support.** ••

• **UN: more than 50% water pumps broken in West Darfur camps** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], May 24, 2013)

In its latest report, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that most of the water pumps in **displaced camps in and around El Geneina**, capital of West Darfur, are not working. **“Access to water is problematic as 63 out of 93 hand pumps in the nine camps are not functioning.** The nine camps have an estimated population of 119,000 people, according to the (Sudanese Humanitarian Aid Commission) HAC,” it was stated on Friday's report by OCHA. The sites include Abu Zar, Adamata, Dorti, El Hujaj, El Riad, Jama Krinding One and Two and Sultan House. OCHA says the information was cross-checked with all the camps' representatives.

OCHA further stated that an estimated **7,300 households out of 17,000 do not have latrines, while another 5,000 do not have access to communal latrines,** which further depicts deterioration in the provision of acceptable sanitation facilities in the camps.

A total of eight out of 14 basic primary schools are without WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) facilities, while 20 out of 34 child friendly spaces in the camps remain closed, the UN agency declared. ••

• **El Riyadh camp: one medical clinic for 30,000 residents** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina] August 28, 2012)

Radio Dabanga was informed today that there is **only one medical clinic available at the El Riyadh camp in El-Geneina, West Darfur. The camp counts 30,000 residents who claim to face a serious**

humanitarian crisis. A camp's activist told Radio Dabanga that the three most serious issues in El Riyadh are lack of security, lack of water and lack of medical services. He added there is also scarcity of nurses and of midwives at the camp. **The source said this situation arose after June 2011 when the Government of Sudan expelled medical international humanitarian organizations from the camp. He explained the international organizations were substituted by the Sudanese Ministry of Health.** ..

• **Short rations make malnutrition rife among children in [West] Darfur camps** (Radio Dabanga [Nertiti camp, West Darfur], May 30, 2013)

In the camps of [West] Darfur, **displaced children are suffering from malnutrition and lack of food with no health organisations able to provide support.** This is proving to be an added affliction, over and above the intense rainfall and deteriorating security situation that residents must cope with each day. A camp leader told Radio Dabanga that there are about 35 children suffering from malnutrition at Camp Khor Ramla and similar cases have been **reported in Nertiti, El Salam and other camps south of Nertiti.** He pointed out that due to a failure to reach an agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP), **food ration distribution was suspended in the camps—a measure that has been in effect for almost two months.**

The [camps'] sheiks appealed to international organisations to expedite the provision of humanitarian aid, health and tarpaulins as a matter of urgency before a veritable humanitarian disaster erupts in the camps Nertiti. **“We urgently need tarpaulins and medicines to address the situation, especially as the rainy season has arrived.”** ..

• **Poor health conditions leave dozens dead in Mornei** (Radio Dabanga [Mornei], September 21, 2012)

Residents of **Mornei camp in West Darfur** are suffering from poor health conditions as **diseases like malaria, typhoid and diarrhea are spreading rapidly.** In addition to the rapidly spreading diseases, the residents suffer from malnutrition and a lack of health-care and medication. One of the sheikhs told Radio Dabanga that **the report [composed by the camp sheikhs] revealed the death of 64 elderly and 30 children between the ages of one and five over the past two weeks.** In addition, the report confirmed that the majority of deaths are a result of diseases like malaria and typhoid. ..

§ **And within weeks of the NYT dispatch, the following report appeared; the inability to transport food supplies and fuel to pump water is entirely a function of insecurity, an insecurity that Khartoum has bred by allowing the Arab militia groups to operate with complete impunity against civilians and humanitarians.**

• **WFP reduces rations in El Geneina camps** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], May 9, 2012)

A group of displaced people from 10 camps across El Geneina said the World Food Programme told them on Monday that **their rations of maize will be reduced by 50 percent.** They said this have caused widespread discontent in the camps that are already suffering from food shortages and hunger. A camp leader that attended the meeting told Radio Dabanga that the **WFP representatives justified the reduced ration by not being able to transport the required quantities, as truck drivers are reluctant to move around with the current security situation.** ..

§ **With terrifying regularity, Khartoum either expels or intolerably constrains the work of international humanitarian organizations, again something not mentioned in the NYT dispatch:**

• **Sudan government halts work of 50% NGOs in West Darfur capital** (Radio Dabanga [el-Geneina, West Darfur], January 23, 2013)

As of 1 January 2013, the government of Sudan halted the work of 50 percent of the NGOs working in El-Geneina camps, West Darfur's capital, several sources told Radio Dabanga on

Wednesday. **Five out of the 10 foreign organizations were informed by the government in mid-2012 that they could no longer exercise their activities at the camps [beyond the end of the year]**, sheikhs from 10 different sites affirmed. They emphasized the organizations were not expelled from Sudan. Instead, [the sheikhs] continued, organizations were ordered to stay in El-Geneina, hand over their resources to camps' residents and **focus their programs on voluntary return villages.** ••

And while Khartoum's regular and militia forces have long attacked camps for the displaced, a shocking incident on June 9, 2013 gives a sense not only of civilian vulnerability, but of the danger faced by humanitarian workers:

• **UN chief: 'shock, sorrow' at killing of NGO worker in Nertiti North, West Darfur** (Radio Dabanga, [Nertiti, West Darfur], June 11, 2013)

The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan "expresses shock and sorrow at the **the killing of a staff member of a humanitarian non-government** organization on 9 June 2013 in North Camp, Nertiti [West] Darfur." Radio Dabanga reported on Monday that on the previous night formations of pro-government militias and government troops (SAF) allegedly attacked camp Nertiti North for displaced people in [West] Darfur, **killing a doctor, injuring 15 residents, and torching a medical nutrition centre and 54 houses. Dr Adam Mohamed Hamid was the medical director of the camp's nutrition centre, which belongs to a foreign organisation that works with children.**

Hussein Abu Sharati, spokesman for the association of displaced persons and refugees of Darfur, told Radio Dabanga that **government forces supported by militias** launched the attack from all directions. "They used Land Cruiser vehicles and opened fire, **killing Dr Adam Mohamed Hamid, medical director of the nutrition centre at the camp** and wounding 15 others."

A spokesman for the displaced persons criticised UNAMID for not intervening and protecting the displaced, and concluded: **"The nutrition centre belongs to a foreign organisation that provides nutrition for children. The killing of Dr Hamid and the torching of the centre proves that the government clearly does not want any organisations to assist the displaced of Darfur."** ••

§ **West Darfur is also the region in which rape of women and girls has been most frequently reported**, a grim distinction given the epidemic of sexual violence in Darfur, one that figures nowhere in the NYT account of February 2012, even as it has been prominently reported not only by Radio Dabanga but a number of human rights organizations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Physicians for Human Rights), as well as by Doctors Without Borders (MSF). And the **Mornei area** has certainly not been spared. For an overview of these reports, a more comprehensive bibliography with links, and a soul-destroying compendium of individual sexual assaults, see ["RAPE AS A CONTINUING WEAPON OF WAR IN DARFUR: Reports, bibliography of studies, a compendium of incidents."](#)

What should we make of the fact that none of these accounts comports with what the New York Times reported in February 2012 from Nyuru, West Darfur—none of them...?

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