

Humanitarian Conditions in Darfur: Relief Efforts Perilously Close to Collapse, in Two Parts

Eric Reeves, August 15, 2013

Without an urgent investment of major political energy and commitment, the international community is soon likely to preside over a catastrophic contraction of humanitarian capacity and access in Darfur. The world must put Khartoum on notice that there will be significant consequences if the regime does not permit unfettered humanitarian access and movement of relief supplies. The regime must also face real pressure to provide meaningful security for increasingly threatened camp areas, an effort that will entail bringing various militia forces under military and police control. Senior officials of the National Islamic Front/National Congress Party (NIF/NCP) must also face strong pressure to cease exacerbating ethnic tensions as part of an ongoing counter-insurgency campaign of unspeakable brutality. These political efforts to pressure Khartoum must come from the UN Security Council and UN Secretariat, as well as from those countries—especially in Europe, Africa, and the Arab world—whose continuing economic and diplomatic support enables the regime to cling to power amidst an economy that is imploding.

None of this is likely and suggests that the current downward trajectory of humanitarian conditions will become steeper, as it has for the past year and more. And yet despite the immense threats to human lives and livelihoods, we have far too little systematic or global data about issues of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and the availability of primary medical care. Further, there have been no recent broader evaluations of educational resources, mental health treatment, or pre- and neonatal care. Nothing is said of the epidemic of rape that continues to ravage Darfur, causing outrageous physical and emotional trauma, as well as rending families and communities. All UN officials are essentially silent or perfunctory in their comments out of deference to Khartoum's sensitivities over this issue. We know far, far too little, at least if we rely on UN sources, international news coverage, or the intimidated International Nongovernmental (Humanitarian) Organizations (INGOs) that continue to operate in increasingly threatening circumstances.

There are a host of issues defining the dramatic increase in threats to humanitarian relief for Darfuris who have now endured more than ten years of conflict, displacement, deprivation, and loss. Nearly all relate in one way or another to insecurity in the region, an issue I have recently addressed in a separate analysis (**Humanitarian Conditions in Darfur: A Climate of Violence and Extreme Insecurity**, 4 August 2013, <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4153>). What I attempt in the following is an expansion of topics addressed in this first analysis of insecurity, focusing more particularly on threats to vulnerable civilians and the humanitarians, and the more specific implications of insecurity for ongoing relief efforts. The analysis is in two parts: in **Part One** I try to offer more particular comments on the humanitarian implications of continuing, massive civilian displacement and address the key questions about humanitarian access.

The various sections of **Part Two** reflect the more obvious nomenclature and concerns of humanitarian relief workers, including assessment specialists. Primary sources are reports from Radio Dabanga and OCHA, as well as confidential conversations with those who have recently traveled to Darfur, including UN officials; collectively these speak to questions of malnutrition, water and sanitation, morbidity, primary medical care, and mortality.

Given the extensive nature of account offered here, inclusion of all recent relevant examples is impracticable. Extensive supplementary documentation is organized in a series of numbered **Appendices** at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4161>. What appears in the body of this analysis, as well as the **Appendices**, is the most representative examples from the past several months of the particular issue under discussion. Even together, however, they are far from comprehensive.

In one sense, then, I am attempting to provide an elaborate glossing of the assessment offered by the Association of Displaced Persons and Refugees in Darfur: **2013** is proving to be "the worst for Darfur camps, as record numbers of displaced struggle in abysmal conditions throughout the region.... In terms of the deterioration of security, economy, living conditions, and high influx rates of newly displaced people, our assessment shows that this year has been the worst so far" (published in Radio Dabanga, Nyala, 18 June 2013).

PART ONE: Displacement, Humanitarian Access, Ethnically-targeted Violence, and Aerial Assaults

[PART TWO is posted separately at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4169>]

What remains on the ground in the way of humanitarian capacity reveals a terrifying vulnerability. On July 4, 2013 violent conflict in Nyala, the largest city in Darfur, resulted in the killing of three humanitarian workers for World Vision. Three other World Vision international workers were injured, and the database used for food distribution was destroyed. It was initially unclear whether the organization could continue its work, although in the event it has decided to persevere. But the stakes were enormous: according to UN OCHA, *World Vision's "food aid distribution program supports over 400,000 displaced people in camps across South Darfur"* (OCHA Weekly Bulletin 28, July 14, 2013).

The precipitous loss of such a key implementing partner for the UN's World Food Program, which has extremely limited distribution capacity at the camp level, would have been devastating. Nor is the threat to humanitarians only recent: in its most recent Aid Worker Security Database, reveals that **since 2003, 47 aid workers have been killed**, 139 injured and 71 abducted in Darfur. Almost half those humanitarians killed have lost their lives following the assumption of protection responsibilities by the UN/African Union ("hybrid") Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), which on January 1, 2008 took over from its weak predecessor, the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS).

Sourcing for information about humanitarian conditions has become increasingly difficult as more and more INGOs withdraw or are expelled or intimidated into complete silence. For a number of years Khartoum has allowed no human rights reporting presence or journalists with freedom of movement. And those relief organizations that remain dare say no more publicly than the UN itself says on issues such as rape, mortality, malnutrition, and global morbidity: these organizations are well aware of Khartoum's penchant for expelling humanitarians or threatening them, directly and indirectly. The official UN reports—chiefly the weekly bulletins from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)—are of limited value and have done a poor job of conveying the extent of human displacement in the greater Darfur region (including eastern Chad and northeastern Central African Republic, with a combined total of almost 350,000 Darfuri refugees). To the extent that the UN has relied on UNAMID as a source of data and reports, it has been badly served, indeed hopelessly compromised.

A senior UN official recently provided me with significant clarification of displacement data, and his observations are reflected in the account below. The issue is critical because present and ongoing displacement, in one way or another, defines all other issues and humanitarian responses.

I. Displacement within Darfur and into eastern Chad

(See also Appendix I, "Displacement in Darfur and into eastern Chad," <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4161>)

Human displacement is certainly the most conspicuous point of intersection between insecurity and humanitarian conditions. In fact, no particular humanitarian issue, no individual threat to human life and welfare, can be separated from the vast insecurity that has been allowed to build over many years, and has terrified millions into flight. Of necessity, what follows speaks as often to violence and threats of violence as to the consequences of violence for the quality of life of those viewed by Khartoum as supportive of the rebellion in Darfur. This violence includes the effects of a relentless and indiscriminate campaign of aerial bombardment, the brutal use of rape as a widespread weapon of war, attacks on humanitarian capacity in Darfur, and denial of access to farmlands appropriated earlier in the vast conflict.

There are, according to a senior UN official and a [recent statement by the UN High Commission for Refugees](#), **"some 2 million people"** who remain displaced in Darfur, in addition to the refugees in eastern Chad and Central African Republic. The total figure then is likely over **2.3 million**, which is more than **1 million more people** than indicated in the OCHA Weekly Bulletins (the UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks, IRIN, was [using the figure of 2.3 million last April](#)). The figure cited by OCHA is the much more precise—but badly misleading—number of those in the 58 major camps for the displaced

who are being fed by the UN's World Food Program. This figure, now regularly published by OCHA, is **1.18 million people**; it is the only displacement figure offered. And yet it represents only about *half* the total displaced population, giving a distorted sense of the scale of the humanitarian need and suffering. This and the previously promulgated figure of **1.4 million** displaced are the ones that have been cited for many months by international news organizations, including the BBC ("As many as 1.4 million remain homeless after the decade-long conflict," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22649076>) and *Agence France-Presse* ("[this newly displaced 300,000 as of May 2013] adds to an **existing displaced population of 1.4 million in Darfur**").

In mid-May, OCHA head Valerie Amos had indeed announced that **300,000** people in Darfur had been newly displaced this year alone; at the same time she continued the misrepresentation of global displacement in Darfur by *declaring*, without context or qualification, that "**1.4 million** people [are] still living in camps." What Amos does not acknowledge is that this followed six years in which the total for newly displaced Darfuris was **1.5 million** (see "Taking Displacement in Darfur Seriously," June 3, 2013, <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4025>). What is unknown, of course, is how many of these more than **1.8 million** newly displaced persons remain displaced, or how many have been displaced multiple times (and thus each time counting as a "newly displaced person"). There is far too little relevant global humanitarian data from Darfur, and many estimates are based on less than adequate information. But given the steady accounts of movements into camps, and the difficulty of the displaced in returning to their farms and lands, it is fair to say that a very large percentage have remained displaced. And these are in addition to those displaced prior to 2007: the OCHA estimate as of January 1, 2007 was over **2 million** ("*Darfur Humanitarian Profile No. 26*," January 1, 2007).

Mark Cutts, head of office in Sudan for OCHA, has very recently offered some usefully clarifying qualifications to the officially promulgated number:

[Cutts said] the "actual numbers of IDPs [internally displaced persons] in camps are significantly higher [than 1.4 million] as many of the IDPs living in smaller camps/settlements are not included in these figures and many IDPs in the bigger camps remain unregistered." (UN IRIN [Nairobi], [August 15, 2013](#); *the IRIN report—"Briefing: the Humanitarian Situation in Darfur"—offers a good deal of additional insight*)

On the basis of these various data points and estimates, it is reasonable to conclude that the currently promulgated figure of **2 million** IDPs in Darfur is very likely low. A figure of **2.2 million to 2.5 million** for both Darfur and eastern Chad is much more plausible.

Where are the IDPs? This has become an increasingly difficult question to answer. Roughly half are in camps, where they are registered and fed by WFP. But the other half are in a variety of circumstances: some are, as Cutts indicates, in camps but unregistered or in settlements where registration has not occurred; some are still in flight (e.g., the recent fighting near Umm Dukhun displaced some **50,000** people); some have settled within host communities outside the camp "system"; and of a great many people we simply don't know—a cause for considerable concern, since we also have no global data for mortality (this at Khartoum's objection to any account of the issue). Indeed, we don't even have rough tabulations from the camps of those who have died from the effects of violence, or from the consequences of violent displacement into seriously unhealthy circumstances. The last UN figure for mortality was offered in a crude, "back-of-the-envelope" calculation by former head of UN humanitarian operations, John Holmes:

John Holmes, the undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, told a security council meeting yesterday that the previous number of **200,000** dead in fighting between rebel groups, some backed by the Khartoum government, was last tallied in 2006. "That figure must be much higher now, perhaps half as much again," Holmes said to the council. Answering questions from reporters, he later qualified the estimated number, by admitting the death toll of **300,000** "*is not a very scientifically based figure*" because *there have been no new mortality studies in Darfur, but "it's a reasonable extrapolation."* (*The Guardian*, April 23, 2008) (all emphases have been added by this writer)

Reasonable or not at the time, it is certainly an unreasonable figure to be citing more than five years later, with no greater effort at collating and analyzing data, some of which did not exist in 2008; and yet this is again the figure cited by virtually all international news organizations, which themselves take no cognizance of subsequent data or reports bearing on mortality. I argued in August 2010 that accumulated data, when aggregated, strongly suggest that some **500,000** people have died from all war-related causes since fighting began in 2003 (see "**Quantifying Genocide: Darfur Mortality Update**," August 6, 2010, at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=2269>). This analysis incorporates and supplements the [January 2010 mortality study by the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters](#) (CRED) in Belgium as well as an important subsequent research [report by "Darfurian Voices," July 14, 2010](#)). None of this is mentioned in references to mortality by news organizations—merely Holmes' badly dated and clearly untenable figure of "**300,000**."

What we **do** know about displacement, violence, and mortality is that they have always correlated highly with one another. Especially valuable data appeared in *The Lancet* in 2004, during the most violent phase of the genocide (October, 1, 2004, "Violence and mortality in West Darfur, 2003-2004," <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15474133>). This study suggested an extremely high correlation between violent displacement and displacement per se, and in turn mortality. If causes of mortality increasingly became the living conditions produced by violence rather than its direct effect, the general correlations remain extremely high. More recently Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières ([MSF](#)) [noted](#) that displacement of approximately **50,000** people in the Umm Dukhun area of West Darfur had resulted in very considerable numbers of people suffering from gunshot wounds or disease related to the precipitous haste with which these people fled the violence in the region:

The majority of people who died while fleeing Central [formerly West] Darfur, Sudan, earlier in the year perished as a result of violence, and mostly by gunfire, according to a retrospective mortality survey released on Tuesday [August 6, 2013] by the international medical humanitarian organisation Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). "Between January and May 2013, tens of thousands of Darfuri refugees and Chadians fled Darfur and sought refuge in the Tissi area of neighbouring Chad. The survey, carried out by MSF's epidemiological research division, Epicentre, reveals that **119 of the 194 deaths (61 percent) reported by family members were caused by violence.**" ([Press release, August 6, 2013](#))

The descriptions of those arriving in camps—or simply halting in the open, without resources, exhausted and unable to continue—come regularly from Radio Dabanga, and give some sense of how dangerous displacement can be, and how great the fear is that drives people to flee. These reports also indicate very substantial, if unquantified, human mortality. Tens of thousands have died in the past three years; we have no assembled data to suggest how many tens of thousands. Given conditions in the camps as represented in the reports offered here, mortality has inevitably accelerated in recent months. The most vulnerable are of course children, and they have been dying in large numbers, primarily from diarrhea. Pregnant women are also particularly vulnerable.

- About **1,500 newly displaced families** from the areas of Tabaldia and Abu Jabra fled to Girayda after militias attacked the two areas last week. "**The families are living in inhuman conditions, without any food, water or shelter,**" an activist from Girayda told Radio Dabanga. He added that **around 600 families arrived to Girayda from the areas of Tabaldia** and are now staying in the vicinity of the city. (Radio Dabanga, Girayda [also Gereida], 12 May 2013)

- [T]he total number of new arrivals at Kalma camp from the areas and villages south and east of Nyala, Labado and Muhajeriya amounts to 41,441 families since the beginning of March. Speaking to Radio Dabanga on Wednesday, Kalma's Sheikh Ali Abdulrahman Al Taher said that "the humanitarian conditions of the new arrivals are critical." He reported that 327 new families arrived at the site on Wednesday alone. "They lack food, water, and medicines." (Radio Dabanga, Kalma camp, outside Nyala, May 8, 2013)

OCHA reports in its June 28 Bulletin from Yassin:

- The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has highlighted the plight of an estimated 5,200 displaced people in East Darfur who need urgent assistance. The report underscores

that the people are in need of water, health services, education, shelter, non-food relief supplies and agriculture assistance. "Most of the displaced people have integrated into the host community, placing increased pressure on existing services. Findings showed that there are chronic water shortages in Seleah and Yassin towns, with animals sharing the same water sources as the displaced and host communities," the report says. "In Abou Adid, there is no water yard and people walk up to 15 kilometres to reach the nearest water source."

Many of the displaced are virtually invisible: MSF reports that,

More than 20,000 people are almost cut off from aid in South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal state after fleeing violence in the disputed border region with Sudan, warned the international medical organisation Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) today. Food and drinking water is in short supply and the people in the camps are living in substandard conditions."

There is apparently confusion about whether these people are IDPs in South Sudan or refugees from South Darfur. It matters little to people like a camp leader, Ajok Wol, speaking from a place where "there is almost no plastic sheeting for building shelters despite the imminent rainy season. 'Here we only try to survive'" (MSF press release July 8, 2013). Too many will not survive the ravages of diarrhea, malaria, and malnutrition.

In eastern Chad refugees have become almost invisible during the past ten years, despite the fact that this refugee population is enormous, especially in an area that has so few resources, especially pasturage and water. Tensions have run high on a number of occasions between Chadians in the region and Darfuri refugees. The recent massive displacement into Chad comes after years in which the population had remained approximately 280,000. These people face conditions that are perhaps even more desperate than those of IDPs in Darfur, given the difficulty of reaching the area from N'Djamena and even Abeche (all dispatches here are from Radio Dabanga):

- **About 2,500 new Sudanese refugees at camp Goz Amer in eastern Chad are living poor humanitarian conditions without health or medical services, a shortage of food and plastic sheets,** a sheikh of the camp has told Radio Dabanga. (Goz Amer refugee camp, eastern Chad, July 2, 2013)

- **Large numbers of Sudanese refugees at camp Konokono in eastern Chad are enduring difficult conditions as they still lack plastic sheets** at the beginning of the rainy season. The head of the camp, Issa Tijani, explained to Radio Dabanga that **"nearly half of the population of the camp is living under difficult humanitarian conditions, as they live in the open without plastic sheets."** (Eastern Chad, July 12, 2013)

- The Sudanese refugees of camp Treguine in eastern Chad have complained of the **high rates of malaria, diarrhoea, deterioration of the environmental health, lack of medicine and plastic sheets, echoing the displaced of Darfur.** Sheikh Ali Yaqoub, of Treguine told Radio Dabanga that they suffer from the spread of disease, especially among children, women and the elderly in the holy month of Ramadan. (Eastern Chad, July 24, 2013)

The engine of displacement in Darfur

My earlier analysis of insecurity in Darfur looked closely at the engine of displacement; and while it is important to note again that violence is more chaotic than in the early years of the genocide, while there is a great deal more inter-tribal fighting among Arab groups, as well as a huge surge in banditry and violent extortion, the most consequential and destructive military force in Darfur now comprises the pro-regime militias, which in the words of Darfuri lawyer and human rights activist Saleh Mahmoud have become a "state within a state." The allegiance of these militias is certainly a matter of dispute in any number of cases; what is not in dispute is that Khartoum has used the militias for the most brutal counter-insurgency tactics of ethnic destruction, and that ethnic tensions have been repeatedly exacerbated by Khartoum. In **Senate testimony of June 19, 2013**, Jehanne Henry of **Human Rights Watch** put the matter trenchantly:

Of the 300,000 newly displaced this year, nearly 200,000 fled inter-ethnic fighting. These conflicts are said to reflect weak or absent law enforcement, and Sudanese authorities have repeatedly said they do not control these "tribal" fights. But this analysis overlooks the Sudanese government's responsibility. No matter what the root causes of inter-ethnic fighting—and there are many—the Sudanese government has a responsibility to protect its civilians and to prosecute those responsible for committing criminal offenses. Moreover, the government has not been a bystander in these conflicts. Massive attacks are being carried out against civilian populations by forces using government equipment and involving government security officials....

Henry's key conclusion seems both indisputable and of enormous significance:

Inter-ethnic fighting in Darfur today should be understood as a consequence of Sudan's support for certain ethnic groups to fight alongside the government, the so-called "Janjaweed" militia, and of failing to rein them in, disarm them, or provide any accountability for past serious crimes.

The failure to hold Khartoum accountable for its past actions is revealed in a **June 2013 report by Human Rights Watch** based on satellite photography:

Satellite images confirm the wholesale destruction of villages in Central Darfur in an attack in April 2013 by a militia leader sought by the International Criminal Court, Human Rights Watch said today. The images show the town of Abu Jeradil and surrounding villages in Central [formerly West] Darfur state almost completely burned down, Human Rights Watch said. Villagers who fled the area told Human Rights Watch in May that Sudanese government forces, including the militia leader Ali Kosheib, had attacked the area. ***More than 42 villagers are believed to have been killed and 2,800 buildings destroyed.***

"Satellite images show the total destruction of villages during the April attacks in Central Darfur," said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "How can the Sudanese authorities claim there's nothing they can do when their own security forces were involved and the war crimes suspect Ali Kosheib is on the loose?" Human Rights Watch analysis of ***satellite imagery found that more than 2,800 buildings were probably burned down in Abu Jeradil and four neighboring villages, which is 88 percent of all buildings in the area.*** (Sudan: **Satellite Images Confirm Villages Destroyed**; ICC Suspect Involved In Attacks Remains At-Large, Nairobi, 19 June 2013)

That "inter-ethnic fighting in Darfur today should be understood as a consequence of Sudan's support for certain ethnic groups" is a conclusion also supported by the work of Jérôme Tubiana and Claudio Gramizzi in "**Forgotten Darfur: Old Tactics and New Players**" (Small Arms Survey, [July 2012](#)). They look at the unnoted explosion of ethnic violence in late 2010 and 2011, directed against the Zaghawa tribe of Minni Minawi in eastern Darfur (Minawi, the only rebel signatory to the disastrous 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, defected from the regime in late 2010, precipitating the assault on Zaghawa civilians). Tubiana and Gramizzi note:

Significantly, the Government of Sudan has partly shifted away from using Arab proxy militias only to rely on newly formed (and newly armed) non-Arab proxies. This development has fundamentally changed the ethnic map of eastern Darfur, drawing on previously latent tensions between non-Arab groups over land, ethnicity, and local political dominance—and ***generating some of the most significant ethnically directed violence since the start of the conflict in 2003.***

The **Union of Dar Massalit** writes also argues in the same vein:

[The militias] are driven in reality by the government's policy of ethnic manipulation in Darfur which is meant to achieve multiple objectives for the regime: [a] rewarding loyal tribes and militias by reallocating rich lands to them, and allowing militias to keep war booty [b]

evicting populations from areas rich in newly discovered resources, such as gold, or traditional resources, such as fertile agricultural lands, to pave the way for government control and allocation to investors; [c] weakening of the ethnic base of the rebellion and of tribes reluctant to join government's war efforts in Darfur. (**Sudan Democracy First Group, monthly newsletter**, 11 July 2013)

Finally, **Yasir Arman, Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan**, articulates the tactical and strategic goals of the NIF/NCP:

The National Congress Party (NCP) deliberately created new states in Darfur ["East" and "Central" Darfur] on an ethnic basis targeting Arab and non-Arab tribes. For they received a clear signal that the Arab tribes are no longer interested in the gimmicks of the NCP but rather are seeking a new way of co-existence and a common future in Darfur, away from the policy of divide and rule of the NCP.

The NCP decided to divide the Arab tribes themselves, and to play them against each other. This is a serious situation that further threatens the social fabric of Darfur and Sudan. By doing this, the NCP is not only threatening the present Sudan but also the future of Sudan, and the most precious capital that Sudan has through hundreds of years: the social fabric that is based on mutual recognition, mutual co-existence and tolerance. (**Statement of August 13, 2013**; lightly edited for clarity)

Successive peace negotiators and heads of the UN/African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), as well as many within the humanitarian community, refuse to acknowledge or speak about the ethnic dimension of conflict, displacement, and human destruction in Darfur. This mollifies Khartoum, but does a deep disservice to the truth about what drives current fighting.

At the same time, there is only minimal reporting by UNAMID on the increasingly numerous attacks that are openly directed against civilians, both within and outside the camp areas. A considerable number of representative examples of these attacks can be found in **Appendix IV ("Direct assaults on civilians, inside and outside camps,"** <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4161>).

II. Humanitarian Access

(See also **Appendix III, "Denial of humanitarian access, civilian access to farmlands,"** <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4161>)

The complex variability in both the scale and nature of Khartoum's denial of humanitarian access are illustrated by two very different, very recent reports. In the one case, there has been considerable attention given internationally to the regime's refusal to grant visas to 20 workers for the UN High Commission for Refugees, a key operating agency of the UN and one that will be critical in any assessment of returns by the displaced persons if there is ever an opportunity:

Of the **37 international staff** of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees based in Darfur, only 17 currently have valid permits to continue their work. Permits in the other 20 cases have not been renewed, despite extended follow-up by UNHCR with the relevant Government authorities. In a joint statement issued in Khartoum, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Ali Al-Za'tari and UNHCR Representative Kai Nielsen voiced their regret that ***humanitarian activities for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur have had to be scaled down as a result of the non-renewal of the work permits.*** They noted that UNHCR's work in North Darfur has been particularly affected. None of the UNHCR international staff based in the state capital of El Fasher have been granted permits to return, with the last remaining staff having been asked to leave at short notice in early July. ***"The result is that for over a month, UNHCR has been unable to effectively undertake protection and assistance activities for IDPs in North Darfur,"*** they stated. (**UN News Centre**, 6 August 2013)

The U.S. State Department characterized the withholding of visas as tantamount to "**expulsion**" of the UNHCR workers (Associated Press [UN/New York], 6 August 2013). Previous expulsions of humanitarians—including thirteen of the world's finest INGOs in March 2009—have brought no more than bluster from the international community, and such bluster is unlikely to be effective on this occasion, although Khartoum may calculate that it loses nothing by granting the visas, and may then seem to have "cooperated."

This continues a pattern evident for several years: Khartoum's gradual, and sometimes abrupt, reduction in the number of international relief workers in Darfur. And given the levels of violence in North Darfur and the activities of the regime's militia proxies, it is not hard to understand why witnesses with an ability to leave Sudan are hardly welcome by the NIF/NCP. The urgency of humanitarian access has been repeatedly declared by various UN and UNAMID officials, most recently by Mashood Baderin, the UN's independent expert on human rights in Sudan (notably, Baderin was denied access to Darfur in June 2012 by the Khartoum regime). Speaking of the desperate needs at Otash camp outside Nyala, Baderin said as the rainy season was getting underway in earnest:

"The difficult conditions facing people in the camp, especially women and children, was terrible," he told a news conference in Khartoum. "The tents were inadequate and most of the new IDPs (internally displaced people) have resorted to using local materials to construct makeshift shelter." They need "immediate help and attention to avoid a humanitarian disaster" as the rainy season nears. (Agence France-Presse [Khartoum], 20 June 2013)

And yet supplies, including tents and shelter as well as food and medicine, have been continually obstructed by Khartoum. The logistical challenges to the efficient delivery of sufficient humanitarian assistance in Darfur are enormous in any event, but the means of delay and attrition are insidiously numerous. Independent human rights expert for Sudan Baderin was, in fact, speaking about camps to which there is at least fitful access. Perhaps understandably, he made no mention of eastern Jebel Marra, which has endured **for more than three years** a humanitarian blockade in many ways similar to that of the Nuba Mountains in the 1990s and now again. With a few small exceptions, there has been no humanitarian relief, no supplying of food or medicine, not even humanitarian assessment of this brutalized population. Instead, Khartoum continues with relentless aerial attacks on the region, killing people, destroying livestock and agricultural production, and creating an unbearable atmosphere of terror. Unable to gain access, the UN's response has largely been to stop talking about eastern Jebel Marra—not a particularly helpful response to the plight of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

But access is denied by the Khartoum regime and its proxies in a great many ways, often with some subtlety, more often with a ruthless cruelty. One of the most callous was reported by Radio Dabanga on August 5, 2013 from Golo in central Darfur:

A pregnant woman and her baby died in Golo in Central Darfur on Monday when pro-government militiamen, who were allegedly imposing tolls on vehicles leaving the town, refused to let her pass. One of the relatives of Rauda Mohamed Al Tahir told Radio Dabanga that Al Tahir had gone into labour, and was having complications with the birth of her first child. She was being transported to Nertiti hospital for an emergency caesarean section. The vehicle transporting her was stopped by militiamen at the gates of Golo, who demanded that her family pay a toll of SDG1,000 (\$225). The relative said that the family did not have that amount of money, so the ***militiamen refused to let them pass, "even though we explained the situation to them and in spite of Rauda's screams of pain." Both mother and child reportedly died shortly afterwards.***

There could hardly be a more apt image of what the people of Darfur have endured for ten years, and what may soon become wholesale restrictions on movement by UN agencies (such as UNHCR) and INGOs. We are not to that point, and a number of locations are still within the reach of humanitarian relief efforts. But the signs of attenuation are everywhere, and as access is increasingly denied, people within a badly weakened population will die in greater numbers.

Access is denied on a basis that is so routine, and so poorly reported, that only the most egregious instances seem to develop any visibility. This is certainly not the fault of Radio Dabanga, which reports

regularly on its own research and that to be found in **OCHA's "Weekly Bulletins"** on Sudan as a whole. Recently Radio Dabanga reported:

Sudanese authorities do not want humanitarian organisations to assess the needs of around 4,000 people in Central [formerly West] Darfur who are affected by the clashes in the area of Umm Dukhun. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, authorities in the State capital Zalingei have advised humanitarian organizations not to carry out assessments and field missions until after the peace agreement between the Salamat and Misseriya tribes is signed. In the **Humanitarian Bulletin of this week, UN OCHA** states that due to security concerns, ***humanitarian agencies have been unable to assess the needs of some 4,000 people verified by the International Organisation for Migration who fled their homes to areas in and around Umm Dukhun.*** (Zalingei, [formerly West] Darfur, 13 June 2013)

It is important to remember that despite such grim reports, Darfur has not yet reached the nadir. And yet, dismayingly, Khartoum's obstruction is so great—of both the humanitarian community and UNAMID—that there is an understandable assumption that access has been entirely compromised. In the abstract, this is true, since at any given moment all areas of Darfur are subject to Khartoum's blockade, depending on military circumstances and regime ambitions for a particular population. But despite these intolerable denials, the world must respond to the needs of humanitarian efforts in Darfur, which still reach hundreds of thousands of people who are utterly dependent on such assistance. The international community must ensure that financial resources are adequate to the tremendous costs of ongoing operations. The desperately overwhelmed humanitarian community must not find itself struggling for funds as well as doing its vital work.

But the unfortunate truth is that donors have in many cases given up on Darfur as a lost cause; the situation is so little reported, and so often inaccurately, that many are apparently satisfied with the easy conclusion that some sort of unhappy stalemate has been reached, some equilibrium in the suffering and destruction, and that violence will atrophy from exhaustion. Certainly the claims by various UN and UNAMID officials in the past have deliberately encouraged precisely such an outlook, indeed claiming at various times that violence has largely ended, that returns of the displaced are on the uptick, and—most shamefully—that there really are no obstacles to humanitarian relief imposed by Khartoum.

Here it must be said that the "returns" of formerly displaced persons are celebrated excessively and often incautiously—and rarely in the context of the continuing human displacement that dwarfs in scale the number of "returnees." In a particularly dismaying example of international news reporting, the *New York Times*, on the basis of dubious and self-interested UN claims about "returns" of displaced persons, declared this to be a "sign that one of the world's most infamous conflicts may have decisively cooled" ([Nyuru, West Darfur, February 26, 2012](#)). It would be difficult to imagine an assessment more inaccurate—or, given the struggle to convince the world that humanitarian needs in Darfur remain vast and urgent, more destructive.

Insecurity may certainly collapse entirely the international humanitarian mission in Darfur: we are closer to that point than at any time in the preceding ten years. But at the moment the UN and the humanitarian community have at least some access to many of the 58 camps that are listed in the UN's most recent census, representing a considerable consolidation of what were formerly considered discrete camps or weren't camps so much as settlements of IDPs in urban areas. But access in Darfur is always relative and arbitrary—relative to the insecurity and bureaucratic obstructionism that may always be placed in the way of work, and arbitrary because the larger patterns of civilian destruction are various and in many ways uncontrollable.

Loss of road access

Khartoum has also allowed key roads, ever surface arteries in Darfur, to become impossible to use for travel of any distance because of insecurity, or at least claimed insecurity. UNAMID is rarely in a position to challenge denials of humanitarian road access, since its own access is so limited by Khartoum's security forces. But the effect is not only to threaten humanitarian movement and the patrols of UNAMID, but to create terrible risks for civilians attempting to travel to and from camps for the displaced:

- Pro-government militiamen intercepted three trucks carrying displaced persons between the El Salam camp and Nyala, in South Darfur, on Tuesday evening. A man who resisted the attack was seriously injured. The El Salam-Nyala road has had a **"heavy presence of militiamen"** since last weekend. (**Heavy militia presence on El Salam-Nyala road in South Darfur**, Radio Dabanga, El Salam camp, 20 June 2013)

- Pro-government militiamen are reported to have surrounded the El Salam camp on Saturday and blocked the road connecting the site to Nyala, the capital of South Darfur. Sources said the militants denied the displaced access to and from the camp and harassed young women. Sheikh Mahjoub Adam Tabeldiya of camp El Salam told Radio Dabanga he is concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the area. He said the militants were on camels, in cars and **wearing military uniforms**. (**Militia surrounds South Darfur camp, blocks road to Nyala**, Radio Dabanga, El Salam camp, 17 June 2013)

- Two commercial vehicles en route from El Fasher, capital of North Darfur, to Nyala in South Darfur, were hijacked and robbed, allegedly by pro-government militiamen on Monday evening. A witness told Radio Dabanga that about 12 gunmen mounted on camels ambushed the vehicles near Abu Hamra in North Darfur. (**Trucks hijacked, village pillaged by gunmen in Darfur**, Radio Dabanga, El Fasher/Kass, North Darfur, 31 July 2013)

The major artery between the two main cities of el-Fasher and Nyala is often closed, or becomes simply a gauntlet of extortion check-points. Both the displaced and those not displaced often have no idea of the dangers that lie ahead on the roads they feel they must travel.

THE FOCAL POINT: Access of the displaced to their farmlands and homes

In the long term, the most destructive denial of access is Khartoum's sanctioning of actions by armed forces that keep farmers from returning to their lands and homes. Again and again, Radio Dabanga reports in detail on the intimidation and threats against the overwhelmingly African/non-Arab populations who have been displaced into camps. If these people seek to return to their lands—as Khartoum, the UN, the AU, and the U.S. have encouraged—they face beatings, kidnappings, torture, rape, and murder. The perpetrators are often referred to by Radio Dabanga and its sources as "herders," meaning Arab nomadic pastoralists, herding camels and cattle. These "herders" are typically heavily armed, and indeed often constitute militias, typically armed by Khartoum and certainly not restrained by the regime in their *de facto* seizure of farmlands on which to graze their livestock.

Unless lands are restored to those who have been brutally forced from them over the past ten years, there is no long-term peace possible in Darfur. And yet the issue in this stark form is often mentioned only in passing by those who profess themselves concerned about peace in Darfur. Instead of attending to this fundamental issue, whose peaceful resolution becomes more difficult by the day, self-proclaimed "peacemakers" indulge in flogging the moribund Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD), claiming that it represents a viable basis for peace negotiations. This is despite the fact that the DDPD has been overwhelmingly rejected by Darfuri civil society and the consequential rebel movements—and has, in more than two years, done nothing to reverse the pattern of land appropriation.

This problem cannot be ignored or finessed; the militias and Arab groups that have seized the farmland of African farmers for pasturage feel that this land is their payment for conducting Khartoum's genocidal bidding earlier in the war. They will not give up their claims willingly or easily, even as their continued presence and threatening behavior makes peace impossible. Again, the most telling examples are reported by Radio Dabanga; most included here are very recent, but the problem is of longstanding seriousness:

- Hundreds of displaced people have fled back to Neem camp in East Darfur [formerly part of South Darfur] after new settlers on their original lands attacked them, when they returned with state authorities as part of the programme of voluntary return. Witnesses said on Wednesday the **old Neem camp residents were taken with authorities including the state governor to resettle on the land they were originally displaced from. On arrival they said militants started shooting heavily into the air**

and threatening to kill the returnees if they did not leave the area, even though senior government officials were present. (Ed Daein, 18 May 2012)

• **An armed group of 30 members traveling on horses shot a man and tried to expel farmers from their land near Gereida in South Darfur. Witnesses said the men entered a village and shot Muhannad Yacob from Al Safa while he was tending to his farm.** They said Yacob was taken to hospital in Gereida for treatment. They added that militias try to take over farmlands belonging to displaced people as many are still living in the camps, forgoing the right to their land. (Gereida, South Darfur, 14 June 2012)

• **Multiple farmers from throughout Darfur have complained of "armed pro-government herdsmen" trespassing on their farms and beating and harassing them. Similar reports have reached Radio Dabanga from South, West, and Central Darfur states of herdsmen allowing their camels and livestock to graze on farms. Farmers who face up to them are reportedly "beaten, lashed, and threatened with death." Farmers from the Manawashi, Marshang, and Duma in South Darfur, Zalingei, Garsila, Mukjar and Bundisi in Central Darfur and Foro Baranga and El Geneina in West Darfur have told Radio Dabanga they face fierce attacks by the herdsmen.** (Darfur, 31 July 2013)

• The farmers of Kabkabiya locality in North Darfur have expressed concern of the failure of this year's planting season due to several factors. One of the farmers explained to Radio Dabanga that he although there have been good rains, **the current planting season threatens to be failure as armed herdsmen are grazing camels and cattle in the farms. "They do this by force of arms, beating farmers and threatening them with death if they confront them," the farmer said.** (Kabkabiya, North Darfur, 7 August 2013)

• A group of ten displaced women have been beaten and whipped by **"armed pro-government militiamen" as they tended their farms near to Kassab camp in Kutum, North Darfur.** Witnesses told Radio Dabanga this week that the **women were forcibly lashed. The militiamen then reportedly threatened to kill the women "because they keep farming and are no longer afraid of being whipped."** (Kutum, North Darfur, June 21, 2013)

• The poor security situation in Central Darfur state has **resulted in a failed planting season for the displaced of the camps in the vicinity of state capital Zalingei,** said the coordinator of the camps. He added to Radio Dabanga that the humanitarian situation in the camps is dire.... "The security situation has deprived them of the opportunity of exercising their daily lives, so the autumn of this year has not been encouraging." The coordinator expressed **concern of a deepening humanitarian crisis should the agricultural season fail altogether.** Throughout Darfur, banditry by marauding armed groups can make it difficult for the displaced to move outside the camps, according to daily reports reaching Radio Dabanga. **This is especially true for those who leave the camps daily to plant and tend farmland.** (Zalingei Camps, [formerly West] Darfur, July 30, 2013)

The crisis represented in these and other dispatches cannot continue to be ignored or treated as anything other than a fundamental issue in restoring peace to Darfur. That this is at once so obvious and so little noted with appropriate urgency must occasion despair for the fate of the long-suffering people of Darfur.

(See **Appendix III for further examples of denial of farm access,** <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4161>).

The trend toward increased militia harassment, extortion, rape, and murder is also suggested by this very recent dispatch from Radio Dabanga:

Pro-government militias are said to be "spread in an unprecedented way" around camps for displaced persons in South Darfur, having robbed a number of local residents by the roadside. Speaking to Radio Dabanga, witnesses said that especially residents of camps El Salam, Attash and Dreige—all located near the state capital Nyala—are affected. "A number of displaced from Dreige were robbed on Wednesday evening at gunpoint, including Zakaria Hassan Abbakar and Hassan Musa Juma," a source said. He added that five sheep were stolen from the displaced man Siddiq Abdullah Mohamed. On Monday, gunmen opened fire on Mohamed Yahiya Adam Ishaq of camp El

Salam. The victim was shot on the chest and had his both legs broken. Source said the gunmen also stole Ishaq's money, jewellery and horse. According to reports, several displaced persons living in the Attash camp have also been robbed by the gunmen, who took mainly mobile phones and money. (**Unprecedented spread of militiamen around South Darfur camps**, Nyala, 2 August 2013)

III. Indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilians

(See also Appendix V, Aerial bombardment of civilians, <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4161>)

I have analyzed in considerable detail the long and shameful history of the NIF/NCP regime's indiscriminate aerial attacks on humanitarians and civilians, extending for more than two decades ("They Bombed Everything that Moved: Aerial Attacks on Civilians and Humanitarians in Sudan, 1999 – 2011," updated June 2012, <http://www.sudanbombing.org/>). I continue to find it incomprehensible that the international response to these attacks—all war crimes, and in aggregate clearly crimes against humanity—is so lacking in resolve, so tepidly critical, and so completely without a threat of consequences. In both Darfur and South Sudan, as well as currently in the Nuba Mountains of South Kordofan and Blue Nile State, aerial attacks are carried out primarily by Khartoum's Antonov "bombers"—not really bombers at all, but Russian cargo planes retrofitted to allow crude, shrapnel-loaded barrel bombs to be pushed out the cargo bay. They fly relentlessly and—at some 5,000 meters in altitude—they fly impervious to any ground fire.

Such attacks are quite without without militarily useful precision, and targets are often clearly civilian in nature (villages, water sites, agricultural fields). However savage the use of military aircraft may be in Syria, the number and destructiveness of aerial attacks there do not begin to compare with what we have seen for two decades in greater Sudan. Some **2,000 confirmed aerial attacks against civilian and humanitarian targets** are assembled in detail by means of my data spreadsheet (including date, number of bombs, target, casualties, source). This number of course represents only a small percentage of the attacks that have actually occurred; the vast majority have not been reported or not reported by a sufficiently reliable source.

In March 2005 the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1591, effectively prohibiting all military flights into and over Darfur. Since that time **more than 500 confirmed offensive bombing attacks against civilians in Darfur** have been recorded (see data spreadsheet at www.sudanbombing.org).

The deadliness of these aerial attacks in Darfur is suggested by an incident from **April 2011**:

- Twenty-seven people were killed, including 18 women and 9 children, when an Antonov plane dropped several bombs on the areas of Koberi and Gurlengbang in the southern part of the Jebel Marra region. Six women were also injured in the air attack. A witness told Radio Dabanga that the airstrikes led to the burning of 27 houses and also the death of sheep and cattle. **He stated that the bombed areas had been free of any rebel presence. (18 women and 9 children killed in air strike in Jebel Marra, Darfur, Jebel Marra, April 28, 2011)**

Attacks have continued relentlessly and remorselessly to the present:

- The Sudanese Air Force has on Sunday reportedly bombed areas around Umm Gunja in South Darfur. The air raid, a source said, was followed by artillery shelling by machine guns. On Thursday, **three women were injured after shells "resulting from clashes in Nyala" hit the Dreige camp for displaced**. The wounded were transferred to a hospital in the state capital. Sheikh Mahjoub Adam Tabaldiya of El Salam camp near Nyala said the site's population is "terrorized." **Several people, during the air raids, were cultivating their vegetable gardens near El Salam and rushed back to the camp in fear. "This is compromising the livelihoods of the displaced."** (Sudan Air Force bombs South Darfur villages, El Salam camp, July 8, 2013)

Although bombing attacks have been reported throughout Darfur, the civilians **of eastern Jebel Marra**—in the very center of Darfur and a rebel stronghold—have for a number of years borne the brunt of these attacks, even as they have endured since early 2011 a virtually total humanitarian blockade imposed by Khartoum:

• **At least seven people have died and dozens more were wounded when Antonov** and MiG aircraft, allegedly belonging to the Sudanese Air Force, subjected parts of North Darfur to "an intense aerial bombardment." Speaking to Radio Dabanga from Dubbo al Omda in East Jebel Marra on Sunday, witnesses said that the initial bombardment occurred between 7am and 10am, and included Kadja and Dady, as well as the Abu Zaid agricultural project. "The air raids on the area then resumed, and continued into Sunday evening." Three brothers—Hawe Yahya Omar, Adam Yahya Omar, and Walid Yahya Omar—died in one attack, while Gaber Abdurahman Yousuf, and his sons Adam Jaber, Mohammed Jaber, and Noor Mohammed Jaber died in another. **Witnesses said that the bombardment was so intense that people were simply not able to escape.** In addition to dozens of wounded, large numbers of livestock perished, and many people fled towards Zamzam camp and the city of Shangil Tobay. However, most of the citizens of the area are reportedly taking cover in the wadis and the mountains. (East Jebel Marra/Tawila, 11 August 2013)

And most recently, in attacks that apparently involved MiG-29s, Khartoum has bombed eastern Jebel Marra steadily for days:

• Air raids "carried out by the Sudanese Air Force" on East Jebel Marra continue for a third consecutive day, local sources affirm. They were not yet able to confirm any casualties. MiG aircrafts have reportedly bombed Dubbo al Omda and surrounding villages of North Darfur, "on Tuesday morning and afternoon." Witnesses could not yet confirm any casualties to Radio Dabanga as people fled towards several directions and most are still hiding. *"Farmers left their crops, and pastoralists lost their livestock and camels due to the constant shelling," sources said.* They stressed that local communities, especially children, women, and the elderly, are facing a "humanitarian crisis" caused by extreme difficult conditions and poor health as they must constantly flee. (East Jebel Marra, 13 August 2013)

Another danger from this pattern of indiscriminate bombing of civilians is unexploded ordnance (**UXO**)—munitions that don't detonate on impact, but remain dangerous and susceptible of detonation simply by handling. Children have been the all too predictable victims of this unsurpassably indiscriminate violence:

• **A bomb explosion has injured nine children—seven seriously**—on Friday morning from Kalma camp for Darfuri refugees in eastern Chad. The camp is close to Umm Dukhun, which recently saw fierce fighting between the Misseriya and Salamat tribes. The unexploded munition could be a remnant from that conflict. A family member of one of the injured told Radio Dabanga that the children were playing near Umm Dukhun at around 10 am when the munition exploded. (Kalma camp, **Eastern Chad**, 28 June 2013)

• **Four children died last Wednesday after reportedly coming into contact with residue from bombs dropped on the water wells of Rofota, East Jebel Marra.** Musa Haroun (8), Saleh Mohamed (9), Om Kalthoum (12) and Ibrahim Yahiya Yaqoub (17) went to inspect the wells that were damaged by bombs dropped by a "Sudan Air Force Antonov." Witnesses told Radio Dabanga that soon after returning home, the children all complained of the swelling of their bodies and nausea. This developed into diarrhoea and they also developed a rash. **The symptoms deteriorated until all of them died last Wednesday morning.** Residents suspect that the children came into contact with rainwater contaminated by residue from the bombs. (East Jebel Marra, 26 June 2013)

• **A violent explosion killed two children and injured three more on Friday at El Salam camp for the displaced near Nyala,** the capital of South Darfur. The children reportedly **found an unexploded munition** while they were playing outside the camp. They brought it into the camp and were examining it in their house when it exploded, killing Kamal Mohamed Adam and Nahla Jalal Mohamed Adam, and wounding Aduma Abkar Muhammad, Hawa Jachia and Amna Adam Jachia. (El Salam camp, June 9, 2013)

[PART TWO is posted separately at <http://www.sudanreeves.org/?p=4169>]