**"Khartoum Moves to Strip Citizenship of 'Southern' Sudanese"**

**By Eric Reeves**

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Among the many crises growing more desperate by the day in Sudan, one has been largely overlooked: On April 8 the Khartoum regime will strip all "southerners" of their citizenship in the North. No matter that as many as 1 million people will be denied citizenship solely on the basis of their ethnicity; no matter that many were born and have lived all their lives in the North; no matter that these people meet the traditional international criteria for citizenship, (birth, long residence, property ownership, even pension rights). The regime in Khartoum is determined to proceed with what will be nothing less than an ethnic culling of the population in the North.

Most of these people will find that life without citizenship—with only vague "residency" permits—to be intolerable. Already subject to discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, culture, and religion, they will find that in the new dispensation they are completely excluded. President al-Bashir has made explicitly clear that cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity have no place in the North after southern secession. Even now there has been a marked increase in harassment and violence against Christian churches and priests; young "southern" men, identified solely on the basis of their ethnicity, are victims of press gangs recruiting for militias fighting in Blue Nile and South Kordofan; discrimination has always been intense, but is rapidly becoming intolerable.

So what will be the fate of these 700,000 "southerners"? What will be the consequences of their feeling they must leave their homes in the North, however debilitating this existence has been? The answer is that they will attempt to move to South Sudan, a country completely unfamiliar to a great many. And they will encounter extraordinary obstacles, beginning with the long and arduous trek by bus or barge.

The International Organization for Migration, or IOM, has declared that such an undertaking is "impossible," far beyond any available logistical capacity—and April 8 is only seven weeks away. Moreover, late March marks the beginning of the rainy season, when many roads become simply impassible. Those returning are likely to have few of the resources necessary to resume agricultural livelihoods, and they will be arriving in a country that is already desperately struggling with humanitarian crises all along the border regions with the North. Some 110,000 Dinka Ngok remain displaced from Abyei, mainly in Warrap state. Tens of thousands have fled the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan to South Sudan’s Unity state; many additional tens of thousands have fled from Blue Nile to Upper Nile state; and many more tens of thousands have fled to Ethiopia. The U.N. estimates that it needs $145 million to respond to these populations alone, and this says nothing about the immense needs within Blue Nile and South Kordofan, where many hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced or are in desperate need, having come under bombardment by the government for several months. Khartoum continues to deny all international humanitarian access to these populations.

Belatedly, the international community is recognizing the full scale of the broader humanitarian crisis, and particularly the acute food shortage created by displacement and insecure conditions in the border regions. Valerie Amos, the U.N.'s chief humanitarian official, very recently warned "the situation in [South Sudan] as a whole is extremely precarious, and the risk of a dangerous decline is very real.” All this is compounded by the deliberate destruction of the fall harvest of sorghum in both Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains (where late spring planting was also disrupted by relentless, indiscriminate aerial attacks on civilians and their agriculture). The humanitarian crises in the South are mirrored among displaced populations in these two northern states.

While the world sees all this as threatening vast human catastrophe, Khartoum sees only diplomatic or military advantage—an opportunity to further weaken South Sudan, increasingly with an eye to military seizure of southern territory in the oil regions. Certainly the regime is well aware of the consequences of compelling hundreds of thousands of "southerners" to flee into an already tumultuous, unstable, and deeply threatening environment. The men who dominate in Khartoum have long been expert in deliberately creating and exacerbating humanitarian crises.

This was true during the terrible famine in Bahr el-Ghazal (1998), during the humanitarian blockade of the Nuba (1990s), and during civil war in the South, when Khartoum regularly denied air access (and thus virtually all access) to Operation Lifeline Sudan, which served millions of people. In Darfur Khartoum has for eight years manipulated and denied humanitarian relief in immensely destructive fashion. It's hardly surprising that following the southern self-determination referendum (January 2011), Khartoum closed many border-crossing areas to the South, thus halting the movement of food and other items, contributing to severe food shortages.

By creating such a compressed timeline for compulsory "repatriation," Khartoum knows perfectly well this will vastly compound the humanitarian difficulties in the South. Indeed, this is the reason that Khartoum has halted the movement of barge traffic on the White Nile carrying returnees: to prolong their ordeal and desperation on arrival. Perhaps this deliberate distress inflicted on South Sudan is meant to create diplomatic leverage in resolving the dispute over oil revenues, where Khartoum's negotiating brinksmanship has backfired and compelled the South to shut down all oil production. But exacerbating humanitarian crises is unlikely to succeed in changing the views of the southern leadership.

Ominously, the more likely explanation is that this is all to further weaken the South and make it more vulnerable to military incursions of the sort we have seen this week at Jau, and in relentless aerial bombardment of sovereign southern territory. If conflict resumes, it will be a war of attrition, a war in which humanitarian needs are simply used as another weapon—and great numbers of civilians will die. It will, in short, be like all wars waged by this regime.

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