

The Sudan Consortium
African and International Civil Society Action for Sudan

The impact of Sudanese military operations on the civilian population of Southern Kordofan¹ April 2014

The Sudan Consortium works with a trusted group of local Sudanese partners who have been working on the ground in Southern Kordofan since the current conflict began in late 2011. All the attacks referred to in this report were launched against areas where there was no military presence and which were clearly identifiable as civilian in character. **We believe that this information provides strong circumstantial evidence that civilians are being directly and deliberately targeted by the Sudanese armed forces in Southern Kordofan.**

In the last week of April, large numbers of civilians were reported to have been displaced from their homes in Delami County, South Kordofan as a result of a major new military offensive launched in Southern Kordofan by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Although exact numbers are difficult to establish, partners have cited estimates between 45,000 and 70,000.

The government offensive in Southern Kordofan appears to have been concentrated on Rashad, Al Abisseya and Delami counties in the north-east of Southern Kordofan. The situation on the ground remains fluid and information from Rashad and Al Abisseya counties has been difficult to obtain. However the Sudan Consortium's partners on the ground have been able to report firsthand on the situation in Delami County and have interviewed internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing from the fighting further north.

From 12 April onwards, several locations in Delami County, notably Aberi, Mardis and Sarafyi, were subject to heavy bombardment on a daily basis by artillery and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) deployed by the Sudanese Armed Forces. Having endured this bombardment for over two weeks, on 27 April the civilians inhabiting these locations were finally forced to abandon their homes as SAF ground forces advanced south from their stronghold near Delami town.

Whilst it is not possible to verify the exact number of civilian deaths which resulted from this offensive, in Delami County, Monitors on the ground report that at least four civilians were killed (a man and three girls) and 15 injured. The injured included six women and four girls. It should be noted that villages where the casualties occurred were at least 10 km from the military front lines, did not contain opposition military forces, and could not be considered as legitimate military targets.

¹ This month we are unable to include information about the situation in Blue Nile due to logistical issues, information about recent events in Blue Nile will be reflected in our next update.

In Delami County, monitors on the ground also received consistent and credible reports from IDPs, fleeing the advance of Sudanese government ground forces, in Rashad and Al Abisseya that government troops are systematically burning houses and destroying grain stores and water bore-holes as they advance into areas previously under opposition control.

Reports also indicate that Janjaweed militia, reconstituted as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), are fighting alongside the Sudanese government forces involved in this offensive.

Background to the current Sudanese government military offensive in Southern Kordofan

On 14 April, the Sudanese Defence Minister announced the onset of a “Decisive Summer Operation”, intended to “end the rebellion in Southern Kordofan, Darfur and Blue Nile.”²

Satellite imagery released by the Satellite Sentinel Project in mid-April shows that, prior to this announcement, SAF had already deployed batteries of multiple rocket launchers and self-propelled artillery to locations close to the confrontation line in Southern Kordofan.³ Satellite Sentinel also cited sources on the ground who had observed the mobilisation in the same area of increased numbers of Janjaweed militia – formally known as the Rapid Support Force (RSF) - alongside conventional Sudanese ground forces.

The deployment of the RSF to Southern Kordofan was confirmed separately by the *Sudan Vision* website, which quoted the Sudanese Minister of Defence as praising the “good humanitarian example” set by the RSF.⁴ This statement appears to contradict the widely documented allegations that the RSF has been responsible in recent weeks for serious breaches of international humanitarian law elsewhere in Sudan – including the deliberate targeting of the civilian population in Darfur.⁵

The government offensive in Southern Kordofan – which was still ongoing at the time of writing - appears to have been concentrated on Rashad, Al Abisseya and Delami counties in the north-east of Southern Kordofan. Although the Sudan Consortium’s partners on the ground have been unable to access Rashad or Al Abisseya, IDPs fleeing from those areas have reported that, following a sustained period of bombardment – both from aircraft but also from artillery and other ground-launched projectiles, including MLRSs - advancing RSF forces have systematically looted and burned houses and destroyed water bore-holes and grain stores in captured villages.

This pattern of attacks reported by IDPs from Rashad and Al Abisseya counties appears to have been replicated in Delami County– where Monitors have been able to verify events on the ground.

2 Sudan Vision, “Defence Minister Declares Start of Decisive Summer Operation to End Rebellion,” 14 April 2014, available at <http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/details.html?rsnpid=234529>

3⁰ Satellite Sentinel Project, “Human Security Alert: Massive Mobilization of Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in the Nuba Mountains,” 15 April 2014, <http://www.satsentinel.org/report/human-security-alert-massive-mobilization-sudan-armed-forces-saf-nuba-mountains>

4 Sudan Vision, “Sudan’s Defence Minister Vows Decisive Summer for Darfur Rebels,” 12 April 2014, available at <http://news.sudanvisiondaily.com/details.html?rsnpid=234444>.

5 See e.g. Human Rights Watch, Sudan: “Renewed Attacks on Civilians in Darfur,” 21 March 2014, available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/21/sudan-renewed-attacks-civilians-darfur>; see also US Department of State Press Release, “U.S. Concern about Sharp Escalation of Violence and Insecurity in Darfur,” 26 March 2014.

The Sudanese government offensive in Delami

On 12 April, the area around Aberi village in Delami County was hit by rocket/artillery fire, reportedly launched from Sudanese Air Force positions in Umburabeda. These indiscriminate and long range attacks on Aberi and its neighbouring villages continued on a daily basis throughout April, with monitors documenting over 200 artillery and rocket shells landing in populated areas between 12 and 27 April.

Despite the inherently inaccurate and indiscriminate nature of the rocket launchers (which have a range of over 20km and are designed to saturate a large area with a large number of shells, rather than to achieve pin-point accuracy) the number of casualties reported to have been caused directly by these rocket attacks in Delami was relatively low – four killed and 15 injured.⁶



Girl injured in a rocket attack on Aberi village, 14 April



Shell crater, Aberi village, 17th April

The fact that the shelling in Delami County did not result in more widespread loss of life does not diminish the fact that use of these indiscriminate weapons against civilian is a clear breach of international law. As if to emphasise its disregard for the safety of civilian population, the SAF followed up the shelling/rocket attacks by launching several air strikes on Aberi and neighbouring villages, using high-explosive FAB-500 parachute-retarded bombs to target grazing cattle and farmers who were clearing land for cultivation.

⁶ Monitors on the ground recorded the following casualties in Delami County between 12-27 April: Killed – one man, three children. Injured – five men, six women, four children.



Cattle killed by an air strike on Uruma village, Delami county on 29 April



Crater caused by high-explosive parachute bomb, Deri village, Delami county, on 18 April

In those parts of Southern Kordofan which were not facing ground attacks by Sudanese Armed Forces in April, the number of air strikes on civilian areas reduced slightly in comparison with March. However, civilians in these areas, and particularly women and children, continue to bear the brunt of the military campaign being waged by the government of Sudan.

Over the period 27 March – 9 April, before the “Decisive Summer Offensive” was formally announced, the SAF targeted several villages in Al Buram county, using its fast Sukhoi attack jets to drop high explosive, FAB-500, parachute-retarded bombs on civilian population centres. The SAF also deployed its older fleet of Antonov bombers to drop the more crudely constructed, but equally indiscriminate, “barrel bombs”.

The air strikes in Al Buram in April killed two civilians (one child and one pregnant woman) and injured six others (three women and three children). The attacks also destroyed 21 houses.



A family stand in the ruins of their house in Aldar village, Al Buram county, destroyed in an air strike on 27 March



Houses in Taguli village, Al Buram county, destroyed by a barrel bomb dropped from an Antonov bomber on 2 April



Pregnant woman injured by a barrel bomb dropped on Taguli village, Al Buram, county 2 April. The mother of three later died of her injuries.



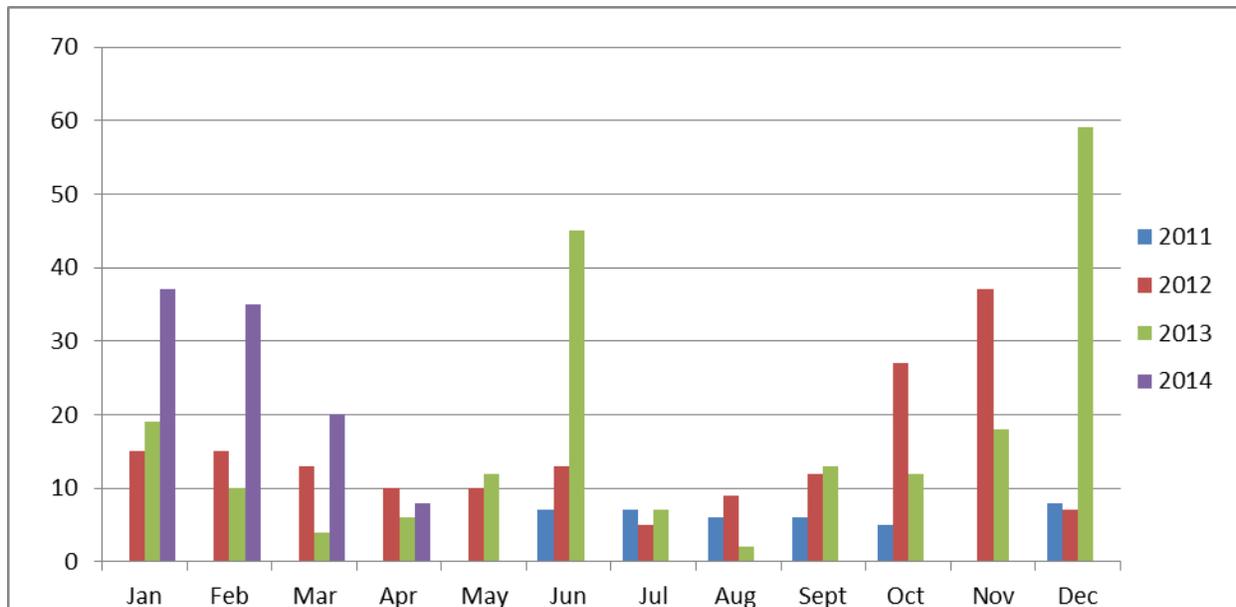
Man outside his burned house following an attack on Aldar village (Boram County) on 29 March.

The cumulative impact of the conflict on the civilian population in Southern Kordofan

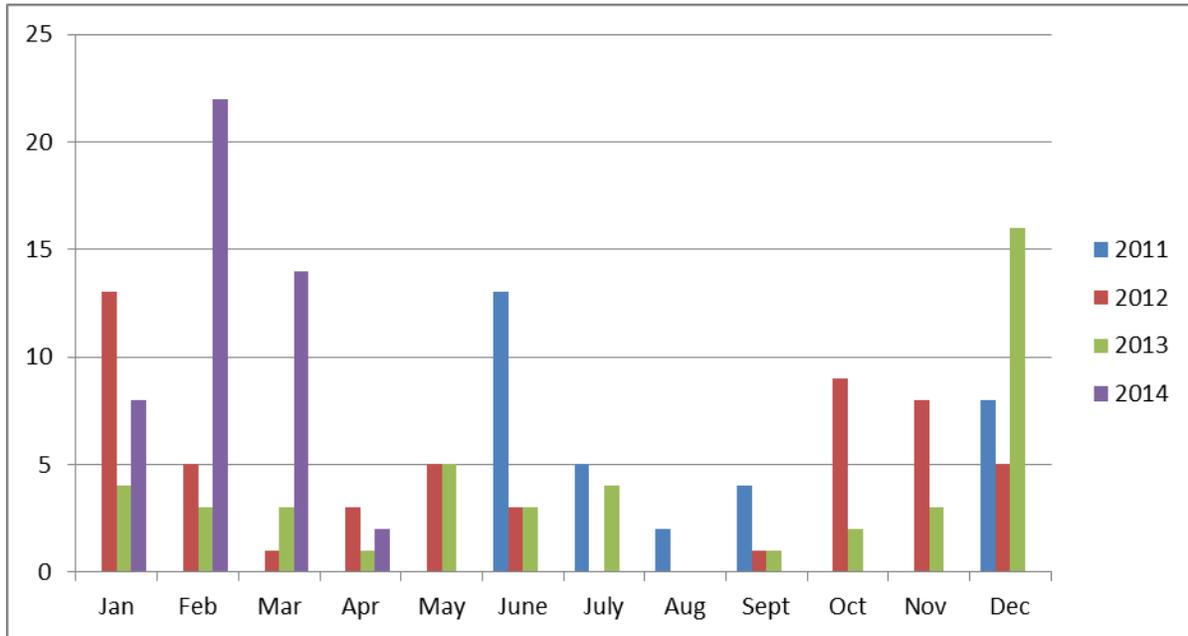
Since the current conflict in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile began in 2011, the civilian population has borne the brunt of the attacks launched by the Sudanese government. The graph below shows the number of air strikes launched against civilian settlements by the SAF since the conflict began.

Bombing attacks on civilian settlements in Southern Kordofan: June 2011- April 2014

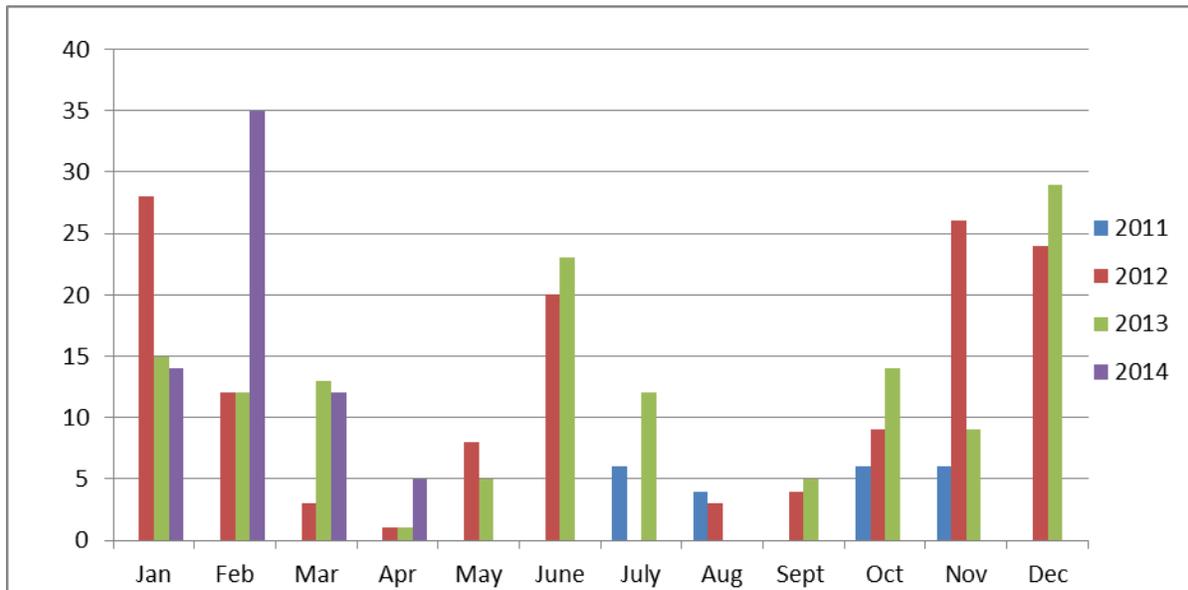
Subsequent graphs show the numbers of civilians killed and injured as a result of those attacks. These graphs do not include deaths or injuries caused by indiscriminate shelling or long-range rocket attacks.



Civilians killed by bombing attacks in Southern Kordofan: June 2011 - April 2014



Civilians injured by bombing attacks in Southern Kordofan: June 2011 – April 2014



Conclusion

The most recent information available to the Sudan Consortium from partners on the ground indicates that the government of Sudan continues to pursue a deliberate strategy of waging war against the civilian population in Southern Kordofan. As well as targeting the civilian population directly with air strikes and artillery attacks, the Sudanese government appears also to be attacking the infrastructure

resources and social and educational amenities necessary for the population to sustain a meaningful existence, as underscored by the attack on Mercy Hospital in Gidel on 1 May.⁷

This strategy – whether deployed by the government of Sudan in the Nuba mountains in the late 1980s and 1990s, or in Darfur since 2003 – appears to reflect a consistent intention on the part of those commanding the Sudanese counter-insurgency operation, not only to use conventional tactics to attack opposition military personnel, installations and related targets, but to seek, in violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, to destroy - or at least to force the mass displacement of - the civilian population currently living in opposition held territory.

⁷ This attack was reported by Nuba Reports, “Sudan Targets Only Hospital in the Nuba Mountains,” 5 May 2014, and the Washington Post, “US Doctor: Sudan Dropped 11 Bombs Near Hospital,” 5 May 2014.