



**National Human Rights  
Monitors Organisation  
(NHRMO)**

## **Civilian perspectives on the current ceasefire (cessation of hostilities) in the Nuba Mountains/Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states of Sudan**

September 2018

Between January and June 2018, the NHRMO spoke to 238 people in the areas under the control of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army – North (SPLM/A–N) in Nuba Mountains/Southern Kordofan (SK) and Blue Nile (BN) states of Sudan which are also known as the Two Areas. The objective was to understand their perspectives on the current ceasefire (cessation of hostilities) in SK and BN.

This document is an attempt to project civilian perspectives in the Two Areas on the ceasefire issue in order to provide a platform for the unheard voices in these areas. As a result, it is hoped that these civilian perspectives will reach regional and international policy makers as well as other advocates for peace and people's wellbeing in the Two Areas so as to bring pressure on the government of Sudan to improve the situation there.

### **Background**

The current hostilities between the government of Sudan (GoS) and the SPLM/A-N started in SK on 6 June 2011 and on 2 September 2011 in BN. The immediate trigger for the war were the orders issued in May 2011 by Lt General Ismat Abdul Rahman, Chief of Staff of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), to immediately disarm the SPLA soldiers of the Joint Integrated Units (JIU) based in SK by 1 June 2011. This order was a clear violation of the security arrangements protocol between the two parties which stipulated that the JIU forces should remain in their positions until 9 April 2012 in the case of South Sudan's secession arising out of the January 2011 referendum on whether the region should remain part of Sudan or become independent.<sup>1</sup> The referendum was one of the requirements of the 2005 Naivasha Agreement between Khartoum and the SPLA. The SPLA defended themselves and war erupted between the two forces. These SPLA soldiers based in SK (and BN), who had fought alongside the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of South Sudan for decades in a protracted war against the government of Sudan, later formed the nucleus of the SPLM/A-N.

Commenting on the war a wise old man said, "This war started 30 years ago. When the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005] was signed, we were happy but the war resumed. We asked about the reasons that led the NCP [National Congress Party government] to attack its own citizens again, despite the CPA, and some told us that the CPA did not address the root causes of the problem. In order to have lasting peace in Sudan, the root causes of the problem must first be addressed."

According to our human rights monitors' report, 1282 incidents were perpetrated against civilians between June 2011 to May 2016, when the current ceasefire started, resulting in the killing of at least 286 civilians and 690 injured persons, most of them children, women and the elderly. These figures represent the incidents that our

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<sup>1</sup> This information came from an SPLM/A-N source.

monitors were able to individually verify and document so the true number of death and injuries is likely to be much higher.<sup>2</sup>

### Unilateral Cessation of Hostilities /Ceasefire and the violations:

The first ever unilateral Cessation of Hostilities (COH) or ceasefire (CF)<sup>3</sup> was declared by Lt. General Malik Agar on 14 September 2015 in his capacity as Chairman of SPLM/A–N, and Chairman of the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)<sup>4</sup>.

***“We are fearing that there will be bombing, shelling or ground attacks again, since the ceasefire does not mean peace,”*** said a young woman in BN.

Subsequently, on 16 June 2016, President Omar Al Bashir [announced](#) the first unilateral COH/CF by GoS. The ceasefire significantly reduced the number of human rights violations committed by GoS in general and specifically stopped aerial bombardments, shelling and ground offensives.

However, there have been several renewals and/or extensions of the unilateral ceasefire by both parties since these first declarations were made, resulting in a period of calm unknown to these areas since 2011. Most recently, ceasefire announcements were made by [Lt. General Abdel-Aziz Al-Hilu](#), the current elected Chairman of SPLM/A–N on 1 June 2018 up to the end of November 2018 and by [President Al Bashir](#) in July 2018 up to 31 December 2018.

Despite these ceasefires, attacks against civilians have continued, albeit at a significantly reduced rate. Currently, the biggest threat to the civilian population in the Two Areas is the systematic looting of the communities’ livestock and other properties by Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and its allied militias. NHRMO has documented that between June 2016 and July 2018, a total of 20 civilians were



Figure 1: A baby injured in May 2016 - ©NHRMO 2016

killed, 10 injured and three abducted as a result of these looting raids. In total, the monitors recorded 67 incidents of human rights violations with 65 committed by GoS/SAF and its allied militias while two were committed by SPLM/A–N. The SPLM/A–N authorities took action against the perpetrators from within their ranks; both cases were taken to court and the perpetrators held accountable but there is



Figure 2: An old man injured in Heiban County, SK - ©NHRMO 2016

no evidence that GoS took any action against the perpetrators of human rights violations from their forces and/allied militias. Up to now, three people who were abducted are still missing and there is no news as to their whereabouts.

<sup>2</sup> NHRMO has been documenting the number of attacks against the civilian population of the Two Areas and the resulting deaths and injuries since 2011 and these monthly reports can be accessed at [http://www.sudanconsortium.org/darfur\\_crisis/SKBNUupdates.html](http://www.sudanconsortium.org/darfur_crisis/SKBNUupdates.html)

<sup>3</sup> The news of the COH appeared in an Arabic version of Sudan Tribune’s article *“Sudan Revolutionary Front declares cessation of hostilities with Government of Sudan for six months”* on 14 September 2015. No English version was found.

<sup>4</sup> The Sudan Revolutionary Front is a political alliance that brings together the two main factions of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army and the Justice and Equality Movement fighting the government of Sudan in Darfur as well as the SPLM/A-N of SK and BN.

## Civilian views on the COH/CF:

The majority of the people spoken to by the NHRMO human rights monitors are happy with the ongoing ceasefire but shared some of their concerns which are outlined in this piece. Predictably, there are others who are not happy with the ceasefire as it does not signify the end of the war although they share similar fears and concerns as those in the first group. Current sentiments and perspectives regarding the ceasefire among the community have been summarised as follows:

### 1. The ceasefire is good.

At least there is no bombing, shelling or ground fighting. *“Before the pupils used to study in caves, but now in classrooms and the children are no longer afraid that they will be bombed in schools or elsewhere. Today, they can play joyfully even those who were traumatised are feeling much better now,”* said a teacher from Tobo, Alburam County, SK. Despite this, SAF Antonov planes continue to fly over the territory from time to time, rekindling the fears of horrific deaths, injuries and destruction from previous aerial bombardments. The memories indeed terrify the communities and are a sign that although there is no fighting, the war is not yet over.

### 2. The ceasefire is good but it is not enough.

A 39 year old woman from Heiban County, SK, said, *“When humans live between war and peace, it’s really the worst moment because war can resume any time.”* This view was supported by another woman from Umdorin County, SK, who said, *“the ceasefire is just the beginning of peace; we are waiting for full peace.”*

### 3. The cessation of hostilities only amounts to a political ceasefire without consideration for the wellbeing of the people.

*“If the Government of Sudan had the wellbeing of its people in mind, it would have allowed humanitarian aid to reach the affected persons, they could have signed a joint ceasefire with SPLM/A–N,”* said a 40 year old man from Delami County, SK. Those who share the same opinion added that the current ceasefire is unsustainable and fighting can resume at any time. An old man from Umhitan village, Delami County, SK said *“What we need from both sides is a joint ceasefire monitored by a third party, which will enable the people to cross from GoS side to SPLM/A N [and vice versa], we need a ceasefire that will allow humanitarian assistance to reach affected persons in Sudan... this will be a bit more serious and will give us hope for peace in Sudan.”*

All the interviewees were in agreement on at least one point; that the break and rest from aerial bombing, shelling and ground attacks was a welcome relief to them. Farmers and pastoralists (who are the majority in the Two Areas) are currently doing their work freely without the incessant fear of being bombed and losing their lives and properties; and they can now move safely from place to place within SPLM/A-N territories. However, our human rights monitors’ reports for the last few months indicate that there have been several incidents of people being attacked while working on their farms.



Figure 3: A woman injured in Delami County, SK - ©NHRMO 2016

A trader in Heiban County, SK, said *“for us as traders, the ceasefire helped us in terms of movement to bring commodities from different places.”*

Another old man from Umdorin County, SK, supporting the continuation of the ceasefire, said, *“the civilians have settled mentally and we wish there is everlasting peace in Sudan because we are tired of wars.”*

We also talked to a youth football team in Tobo, Alburam County, SK. This is what a member of the team said, *“For us we are very happy and believe the ceasefire or cessation of hostilities is good, we are able to move from place to place and even play matches with other football teams. We are able to play and exercise.”*

Whilst it is undeniable that the ceasefire has drastically improved the day to day lives of many of the people of SPLM/A-N controlled areas of SK, the ceasefire does not address the humanitarian situation and is therefore not people focused. In addition, the ongoing incursions are having an impact on food security, which is exacerbated by the GoS previous tactics of ensuring poor harvest through its timing of bombing.

## **Conclusion**

The unilateral cessation of hostilities or ceasefire by both parties is highly welcome and we commend both parties for that. We urge both parties to maintain it (without violation) and to work towards upgrading it to a **joint cessation of hostilities or joint ceasefire** that will lead to sustainable peace. Of utmost and urgent importance is the unconditional acceptance of unfettered humanitarian access for the sake of the vulnerable conflict affected people in the war zones.

## **Recommendations**

### **The GoS:**

- Ensure SAF and its paramilitary forces or allied militias must stop all forms of attacks against civilians including the looting of livestock and the killing of innocent civilians.
- Ensure SAF and its allied militias must hold accountable anyone who does not comply with the ceasefire agreement.
- Should do all in its power to upgrade the current unilateral ceasefire to a joint and monitored ceasefire.
- Should allow unconditional humanitarian access and unhindered flow of humanitarian assistance to the Two Areas.
- Should resume discussions with SPLM/A-N for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

### **The SPLM/A–N:**

- Should continue to respect its declared cessation of hostilities and ensure that it is fully implemented.
- Should continue to hold accountable anyone found to be violating the ceasefire.
- Should work hand in hand with the AU and the international community to take advantage of the unilateral COH/CF as a goodwill gesture and to negotiate a comprehensive peace agreement with GoS in order to end the war for good as well as secure humanitarian access.

### **The AU, UN and International Community:**

- Should expand the efforts of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) so that it can help the two warring parties to reach a comprehensive peaceful resolution of the conflict, or at least agree to sign a joint COH or CF, that allows delivery of humanitarian assistance, which can be monitored by the AU, the UN or both.
- Should invest in the existing atmosphere of goodwill by the warring parties to exert more effort to help start peace talks in order to achieve just and sustainable peace in Sudan.
- Should aim at ending the suffering of the vulnerable people first and find ways for securing the flow of humanitarian aid and assistance to the conflict affected people of Sudan.