

Sudan: New evidence of scorched earth tactics against civilians in Blue Nile Amnesty International

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New satellite imagery

and eyewitness testimonies from rebel-held areas in Sudan's Blue Nile State show that Sudanese military forces have resorted to brutal scorched earth tactics to drive out the civilian population, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

"We had no time to bury them": War crimes in Sudan's Blue Nile State

documents how bombings and ground attacks by Sudanese military forces have destroyed entire villages, left many dead and injured, and forced tens of thousands to flee — with many now facing starvation, disease and exhaustion.

Evidence gathered by Amnesty International indicates that villages in the Ingessana Hills, an area held for a time by the Sudan People's Liberation Army – North (SPLA-N) — endured multiple scorched earth offensives in 2012. Witnesses also described bombing attacks as recent as April 2013 that killed children and other civilians.

Satellite imagery of the Ingessana Hills, showing the destruction of several villages:

"This systematic and deliberate targeting of civilians follows a disturbing pattern that was used by the Sudanese government to devastating effect in Darfur," said Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, Amnesty International's Sudan researcher.

"Deliberately attacking civilians is a war crime. Given the scale, as well as the apparently systematic nature of these attacks, they may also constitute crimes against humanity."

The report also describes how some people had to choose between carrying their children to safety or carrying their elderly parents.

"Faced with attack, aerial bombardment and the prospect of starvation, those who are physically able have little choice but to flee — often after making painful decisions about who among the weakest should be left behind," said Jean-Baptiste Gallopin.

Some of those who were unable to run because of disability or age were burned alive in their

homes; others were reportedly shot dead by Sudanese troops and pro-government militia. In addition, soldiers and militiamen looted valuable possessions, including livestock, before systematically setting fire to houses. (...)

“The international community has failed to enforce the International Criminal Court’s indictment of President Omar al-Bashir who is wanted on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Darfur. The ongoing violations in Blue Nile demonstrate yet again that it is civilians who pay the price when impunity for war crimes goes unchecked.”

The current violence in Blue Nile began almost two years ago, following the formal secession of South Sudan from Sudan. The Sudanese government is fighting the SPLA-N, a rebel group that emerged in 2011 when the Sudan People’s Liberation Army became the army of South Sudan.

The armed conflict in Blue Nile is closely linked with the conflict in Southern Kordofan but has received much less international attention due in part to the logistical difficulties of travelling to the area.

Amnesty International is calling on the government of Sudan to immediately end indiscriminate aerial bombings and deliberate ground attacks in civilian areas and to grant immediate access to humanitarian organizations. (...)

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