

February 1, 2012

Ambassador Susan E. Rice
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

RE: Time to Consider a Cross-Border Aid Initiative into War-Torn Areas of Sudan

Dear Ambassador Rice:

The undersigned organizations write to urge the U.S. government to initiate steps immediately to ensure the delivery of food and medical aid to civilian populations living in areas to which the Sudanese government has blocked humanitarian access in South Kordofan and Blue Nile. In initiating these steps, the U.S. government should, as well, continue with its diplomatic efforts to pressure Khartoum to allow international humanitarian aid organizations to access populations in need throughout the two states, regardless of whether those populations are located in government-controlled or SPLM-North-controlled areas. These on-going diplomatic efforts should also be designed to ensure the free movement of populations within the two states and the cessation of Khartoum's indiscriminate bombardment of civilian populations.

However, given the failure, to date, of the U.S. government to pressure Khartoum to agree to negotiated access arrangements, concrete steps must be taken outside of the diplomatic realm to avert a famine in the two states. As was recently acknowledged by both Ambassadors Susan Rice and Princeton Lyman, the humanitarian situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile is dire and may deteriorate into a famine in the coming months. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network warns that conditions in these two states are anticipated to reach emergency levels by March. This is one level short of famine.

Reports obtained by the Enough Project from civilians on the ground in South Kordofan indicate that the Sudanese government is blocking the distribution of any humanitarian aid into areas located in the Nuba Mountains controlled by the SPLM-North. While Khartoum has announced that it will allow the Sudanese Red Crescent Society access into some areas within South Kordofan and Blue Nile, eyewitness testimony gathered by Enough indicates that the distribution of aid is restricted to certain government-controlled areas. Despite Khartoum's claims of aid distribution in the two states, eyewitnesses confirm that food is scarce, medicine is in short supply, and that civilian populations are starving and therefore increasingly susceptible to infectious diseases, such as malaria.

Moreover, there are reports that forces are inhibiting the movement of civilians within the two areas, which, in turn, makes it even more difficult for civilians to access the paltry aid, if any, that is available.

The undersigned organizations recognize the implicit complications involved in initiating any operations to deliver food and medical aid to populations inside Sudanese territory without Khartoum's permission. However, the humanitarian situation on the ground has deteriorated to such an extent that the imperative to save lives now outweighs these logistical and political concerns. We understand the concerns of some international humanitarian aid organizations over non-consensual aid efforts in Sudan, chief among them, the fear that Khartoum will respond by denying international organizations access to Darfur. Even in Darfur, the situation is deteriorating. Despite the recent agreement between Khartoum and one of the rebel groups in Doha, a genuine peace is unlikely any time in the near future without an inclusive process. Ongoing reports of bombings by the Government of Sudan, along with the continued arrest and detention of human rights advocates, civil society leaders, and UNAMID staff are extremely troubling. Since 2010, the United Nations has reported over 200 attacks in Darfur which have displaced over 375,000 civilians. There continues to be concern about the limited access that both humanitarians and peacekeepers have in the region which restricts the delivery of aid and monitoring of the security situation.

The U.S. government should take into account the need for continued humanitarian access in Darfur in devising a comprehensive plan to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to civilian populations in the areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. Consequently, measures should be taken to ensure that unimpeded humanitarian access and protection of humanitarian workers is also prioritized in Darfur and all over Sudan. Above all, the government of Sudan should not be allowed to continue using the situation in one region against efforts at assistance in other regions to exacerbate the suffering of its own people.

The U.S. has a long history of providing cross-border aid in the absence of Khartoum's acquiescence. From the mid-1980s, a number of NGOs courageously delivered U.S. assistance to areas throughout South Sudan and border areas in the North where the Sudanese regime attempted to obstruct humanitarian access. These efforts saved hundreds of thousands of lives, both before Operation Lifeline Sudan and parallel to it. Similar cross-border operations in the 1980s supported by the U.S. government saved countless Ethiopian lives when the regime in Addis Ababa blocked aid access to vast swathes of northern Ethiopia and what is now Eritrea.

It is regrettable that diplomatic efforts to negotiate with Khartoum access into the two areas have not yet succeeded. This fact, however, cannot mark the end of the U.S. government's engagement on this issue. The government of Sudan's denial of food and medicine to, along with ongoing, indiscriminate bombardment of, its own people amounts to the purposeful creation of near-famine conditions and intentional forced displacement in these two regions.

In the face of Khartoum's failure to protect its citizens, the international community has a responsibility to step in and take measures to ensure the delivery of necessary aid to Sudanese civilians. This responsibility transcends issues of sovereignty, behind which the regime in Khartoum should no longer be allowed to hide. Therefore, we call on the U.S. government to take a leading

role in immediately planning and initiating actions with allies to ensure that necessary food and medical aid reaches the people of South Kordofan and Blue Nile with or without Khartoum's permission.

Respectfully,



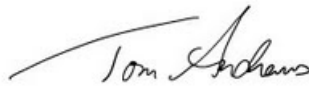
John Bradshaw
Executive Director
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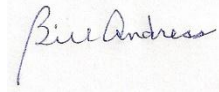
John Prendergast
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Bill Andress
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