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SUDAN CSW warns of possible war crimes perpetrated by North Sudan in South Kordofan

Christian Solidarity Worldwide is deeply concerned at continuing fighting in South Kordofan, Sudan, where northern forces appear to be increasingly making use of aerial bombardment of civilian targets and other tactics, including rape as a weapon of war, which constitute war crimes and are reminiscent of the earlier north-south civil war.

Fighting broke out in South Kordofan on June 5 after the northern government threatened to attack any southern forces that had not left the area by June 1. The violence also follows flawed gubernatorial elections that returned Ahmed Haroun, a man wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes in Darfur, to office. So far over 70,000 people have been displaced in fighting that has been characterized by the targeting of civilian areas, with such towns as Kauda, Kadugli, Talodi, Delami and Um Durain being bombed by Antonov planes and MIG fighter jets, and shelling being reported in El Azarak.

Yesterday one woman was confirmed dead, and two men and four children injured when the town of Kauda was attacked by an Antonov bomber. The total number of casualties is yet to be tallied. In addition, a mother was killed along with her three children and a teacher after a house in Um Sediba was bombed.

There are increasing reports of the use of rape as a weapon of war by northern forces. On June 15 the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and its allied militia are reported to have lured seven women from Sheeir Camp into government houses previously occupied by Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) ministers and parliamentarians in Kadugli Town, and raped them there. On June 17, three women were reportedly raped at different locations in the town. There are also reports of rapes taking place in Kweik County, where many people displaced by the fighting have been taking refuge.

Reports indicate that the SAF and allied militias are hunting down and extra-judicially executing suspected SPLM supporters, ethnic Nuba, and Christians, including women and children, at random. CSW has also heard worrying but credible accounts indicating that Egyptian United Nations Missions in Sudan (UNMIS) forces reportedly colluded with northern forces to forcefully disperse Nuba civilians who had fled to their encampment in Kadugli for safety. More recently, government security agents in Kadugli removed six Nuba staff members from a UNMIS flight that was evacuating staff to Wau, and have detained them.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "Since signing it the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the northern regime has consistently undermined or delayed its provisions at every possible opportunity. Consequently, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the current fighting in South Kordofan, and the earlier occupation and effective ethnic-cleansing of Abyei Town, are part of its effort to circumvent the CPA by creating conditions that make it impossible for the people of these areas to determine their future in a popular consultation and referendum respectively. In addition, the deliberate targeting and extra-judicial execution of civilians and use of rape as a weapon constitute war crimes, and their alleged resurgence would appear to mark an unwelcome return of the appalling tactics adopted by the al Bashir regime in these areas in the past. For over twenty years this regime has brutalised the marginalized peoples of Sudan, and suppressed civil society in northern Sudan. It is time for the international community to take robust action to confront the northern

government in order to bring an end to the violence and ensure that the remaining CPA stipulations are enforced. Such action should also include the urgent review and overhauling of the UN force currently stationed in Sudan, and its replacement with a force that is both mandated and willing to be pro-active in enforcing peace and protecting civilians. In addition, the UN must undertake a thorough investigation into allegations regarding the conduct of Egyptian troops stationed in Kadugli, ensuring that any found guilty of deliberately allowing civilians to come to harm are swiftly brought to justice.”