

Sudan bishop seeks US satellite to find mass graves

WASHINGTON — A Sudanese bishop Wednesday called on US lawmakers to deploy satellites over war-torn Southern Kordofan to help locate mass graves to ensure evidence of killings does not disappear.

Giving evidence to a House committee, Bishop Andudu Adam Elnail spoke of "a war of horror... creating ethnic cleansing in the Nuba Mountains."

Witnesses had told him of seeing two diggers move in at night to dig two big pits at a school in a town called Tilo, he said.

Bodies had been brought to the place and "the people was put in the body bags, wide body bags, and they were put in the pit," Elnail said.

"The United States should deploy its own satellites to ensure that the reported mass grave sites are not tampered with," he said.

"This evidence, from eyewitness reports and satellites, should be preserved and investigated, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

Fighting has raged in the ethnically divided border state of South Kordofan since early June between the Sudanese army and Nuba militiamen, who fought with the SPLA, the former rebel army of the south, during their decades-long civil war with Khartoum.

After South Sudan won independence in July, South Kordofan remained under the control of the government in Khartoum.

"We are not alone calling for the international community to help us, but all the people in the world," the bishop pleaded. "We are calling for real action in the region of Nuba Mountains and other marginalized areas."

Committee chairman Christopher Smith said some of the attacks on South Kordofan could have been carried out "to provoke a fight that could derail" the independence of South Sudan.

While there were no estimates of death tolls in the fighting in South Kordofan, "we do know that more 73,000 people have been displaced," he said.

Africa specialist Bradford Phillips, who is director of the "Persecution project" which works with repressed populations called for an air exclusion zone over Sudan.

"These men make Libya's (Moamer) Kadhafi look like a choir boy. There is no justification, in my mind, for a bombing in Libya while we do nothing in a place like the Nuba Mountains."

It was "essential that the international community bring pressure to bear on the United Nations to immediately declare a humanitarian emergency in the Nuba Mountains and impose a no-fly zone to stop the bombing campaign and allow humanitarian access," he added.

The committee was meeting as the United States unveiled a plan to prevent genocide, seeking to shake up the bureaucracy which hampers a swift response to unfolding atrocities.

President Barack Obama ordered a review of US approaches to deter such mass crimes, established an Atrocities Prevention Board to alert top officials to developing crises and introduced a visa ban for those guilty of war crimes.

"Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States of America," Obama said in a presidential study directive.

But Republican Congressman Frank Wolf railed at what he saw as US inaction. "The UN has failed. These are war criminals. They're war criminals. That's it."