

Bishop Andudu Speaks to the UN about South Kordofan and the Nuba

An Anglican bishop who fled his home in the South Kordofan region of Sudan accused the Khartoum government on Friday of bombing civilians, blocking humanitarian aid, and committing "ethnic cleansing" against black African Nuba people in the conflict-wracked area.

South Kordofan lies on the border with the newly independent country of South Sudan and has been the site of clashes between government troops from Sudan's Arab north and forces aligned with the south's Sudan People's Liberation Army, and backed by the Nuba.

The Rt. Rev. Andudu Adam Elnail urged the U.N. Security Council to ensure that U.N. peacekeepers remain in South Kordofan to help facilitate a cease-fire that would hopefully lead to a negotiated peace. He also called on the council to pressure the Sudanese government to allow humanitarian organizations into South Kordofan to provide food and medicine to thousands of needy people.

Many inhabitants of South Kordofan fought for the south during the country's more than two decade civil war against the north and are ethnically linked to the south. Thousands of soldiers in the southern army hail from the fertile and militarized Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan whose people practice Islam, Christianity and animism.

Elnail, the bishop of Kadugli, South Kordofan's capital, testified Thursday before the House Foreign Relations Committee in Washington and came to New York to lobby members of the Security Council and press his case for urgent action at a U.N. news conference.

"There is a lot of killing going on, and we consider this as ethnic cleansing," Elnail said. "We call on the international community to investigate."

Sudan attacked the Nuba people in the 1990s in violence that many labelled a genocide.

Elnail fled Kadugli in early May after his church offices were burned, buildings near his house were shot at, and churches of other denominations were also set on fire. He said he receives regular phone calls and emails from parishoners about bombings, including in fields, which has prevented people from planting crops.

"The government of Sudan is not allowing humanitarian organizations to give any food," Elnail said, which means many are hungry now and there will be nothing to eat in September or October.

The bishop said witnesses also told him about mass graves of people attacked by government forces. Details about mass graves were also described in an internal June report by Sudan's U.N. peacekeeping mission obtained by AP. And The Satellite Sentinel Project, a U.S. group, said in report last month that satellite photos appeared to show three large mass graves in the same area in Kadugli.

In late June, representatives from the north's ruling National Congress Party and southern-aligned opposition forces signed an agreement in Ethiopia aimed at restoring peace in South Kordofan and neighbouring Blue Nile state.

But on July 1, Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir said the northern army would continue its campaign in South Kordofan. The northern government insists it is not targeting civilians.

A message left for Sudan's U.N. ambassador seeking comment on the bishop's accusations was not immediately answered.

The Sudanese government refused to extend the mandate of the U.N. peacekeeping force that had been monitoring the 2005 north-south peace agreement ending their civil war. It expired when South Sudan became independent on July 9, but peacekeepers are still in South Kordofan wrapping up the mission.

Elnail criticized the Egyptian peacekeepers in South Kordofan, accusing them of not protecting civilians during violence before the mandate expired.

"We need the presence of U.N. in Sudan to monitor the situation so that the cease-fire can be made, and we have access to another negotiation which can bring peace and bring us freedom to the people of Nuba," Elnail said.

He urged deployment of "neutral" peacekeepers. He also called on the African Union and the Arab League "to consider the situation in the Nuba Mountains."

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