

**Press statement of the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
Sudan Mission
27 June 2011**

The past week has allowed me to visit four very different areas of this vast and beautiful country: Khartoum; South Sudan; the North-South border area; and Darfur. I have had the opportunity to speak with Government officials, human rights defenders, internally displaced people, members of the international community, and my UN colleagues, whose work – in very trying conditions – I truly appreciate. I received a warm welcome everywhere, and am grateful for the hospitality shown to me by so many Sudanese.

I come away with at least one common theme from the four areas I have visited: the hope and aspirations of all Sudanese people for a better future. Whether in the North, South, or Darfur, their desire for peace and fulfillment of their fundamental rights to freedom from want and freedom from fear was both palpable and pervasive.

South Sudan

I began my mission in Juba where I was struck by the ubiquitous enthusiasm for the birth of a new country. At the University in Juba, I stressed how human rights should serve as the foundation for this new State, integrated into the Constitution and laws of the land. It was heartening to see so much enthusiasm. It was also sobering to realize how much remains to be done.

Combating discrimination, creating space for political participation, realizing economic and social rights, and pushing for accountability will be major challenges for the new Government. Women must play a key role in meeting these challenges, and respect for women's rights will be crucial to their empowerment and participation. Providing health services and education to a new generation of Southern Sudanese will require significant resources. These vital services should be delivered in a gender-sensitive manner to ensure girls are not left out of the picture.

The new Southern Sudan will also require disciplined, well-trained security services that represent a source of protection – not a source of threat – to the average citizen. Soldiers and police must be screened before being trained and put on active duty. During my visit, I heard alarming reports of numerous killings, arbitrary arrests and prolonged pre-trial detention in Southern Sudan. The large number of civilians killed in Southern Sudan so far this year is simply unacceptable. In particular, the lack of accountability to date on abuses, including rape and torture of trainees, committed last year inside the Rajaf Police Training Centre is of concern. I trust that the Government of South Sudan will soon make public the findings of its investigation into this matter and will use this case as an example to promote accountability more broadly among state agents in all sectors.

A senior Government official I met put it very aptly: *'It is not in our best interest to cover things up. If we want to be assisted, we need to open up, be transparent. If we are defensive and protective, we will lose friends.'* I fully agree with him – and I was

impressed by the general good will and transparency of the Government in Juba. But a greater challenge will be transforming this goodwill and transparency into concrete action that will change the daily reality for the South Sudanese.

I appeal to the Government of South Sudan to deal with impunity seriously. The new beginning should be marked by a frank and public discussion of the most difficult human rights issues.

But there will be no quick fixes. A massive mobilization of resources and sustained effort on the part of the international community will be crucial to making the most of the opportunity to build the kind of country the South Sudanese people and Government desire – and deserve. I am convinced that South Sudan can and will be a peaceful and prosperous country, where the rule of law is respected and human rights are protected. But for that to happen, the international community must be there for the long haul.

The Transitional Areas

The utter devastation I saw in Abyei was a chilling warning of what might become of the border area. Some *tukuls*, (simple thatch-roofed houses) were still smoldering during my brief visit there, and looters still roamed among the ruins in the presence of the Sudanese Armed Forces. All the civilians are gone.

To the south of Abyei, in Turalei, South Sudan, I spoke with a woman who had fled Abyei with her family. She told me, *“I fled amidst the sound of gunfire and shelling. I would like to go back to Abyei when it is secure. Now it’s still not safe. I feel safe here. I would like the international community to give us shelter and water. Here it is scarce. It is as if we’re fasting.”*

Her story – coupled with what I saw in Abyei -- illustrate the urgent need for the protection of civilians affected by the continuing conflict all across the North-South border area. The violence and massive destruction in Abyei must be prevented from spreading further in the Kadugli area and other parts of South Kordofan and the border area. A thorough human rights investigation in Abyei and South Kordofan and public report are necessary as soon as possible. I am distraught to learn that an IDP camp in Turalei was attacked by an armed group, just 2 days after my visit, resulting in several casualties. This illustrates the precarious situation in which the very basic right to life of the civilian population is under threat and so often flagrantly violated.

I urge all parties to agree to a ceasefire and make protection of civilians a priority. The displaced on both sides of the border need humanitarian assistance where they are, as well as accurate information allowing them to decide if and when they should return to their homes. The Governments in the North and South must do their utmost to facilitate access for humanitarian actors to assist those in need and for human rights officers to speak with victims.

A military solution to the conflict in the border is not an option. The recent agreement regarding Abyei is encouraging, but a broader political solution will be necessary to stem the current conflict in South Kordofan and to prevent it from spreading further. And the human rights principles of non-discrimination, inclusion, and accountability must be the cornerstones of any political agreement that will last.

Darfur

Some eight years after the beginning of the conflict, too little has changed for the people of Darfur. While it was encouraging to hear reports of returns beginning in West Darfur, many people remain displaced, and are receiving far too little assistance. They live in fear of attacks on their communities, of rape and of being arbitrarily detained.

The simple acts of gathering wood or accessing fields for farming remain unsafe for many women and girls, and rape is still too common an occurrence, despite efforts by the Government of Sudan and increased protection patrols by UNAMID. Recently displaced women that I spoke with in Zamzam IDP camp and Tawila had received little assistance, and the United Nations and other humanitarian actors in Darfur have been seriously hampered by visa restrictions and a serious shortage of NGO partners.

While the security situation has improved and apparent calm has returned in some areas of Darfur, greater effort from all sides is necessary to reach a sustainable peace. I am convinced that a sustainable peace in Darfur will only be achieved when the rights of Darfurians are firmly embedded in an inclusive agreement. I strongly encourage all actors to join the efforts of the African Union and the United Nations to conclude a comprehensive agreement. And I call on the Government of Sudan to create a human rights environment in Darfur – and across Sudan – that is conducive to discussing, creating and sustaining peace.

Central to this environment would be the lifting of the state of emergency and guaranteeing freedom of expression, freedom from arbitrary arrest, and freedom of association. The broad powers granted to the National Intelligence and Safety Service to arrest and detain for long periods must be brought in line with the international conventions that Sudan has ratified. I greatly appreciate my discussions with the Governor of North Darfur and other Government officials on prolonged detentions, including of UNAMID staff, and trust that prompt action will be taken to remedy this situation.

Impunity, marginalization and discrimination have gripped Sudan for far too long and have driven multiple conflicts and decades of violence. The Government of Sudan, the Government to-be in the South, and the international community all have the opportunity to work to overcome these challenges, in order to help all Sudanese to fulfil their hopes for peace and development. The people of Sudan deserve our utmost support and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights hopes to continue to be an active partner to see their rights become a reality.