

Christian leaders condemn terror in Sudan's Kordofan

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Nairobi, June 14 (ENInews)--Christian leaders from around the world are calling on the international community to intervene in the violence in Sudan's Southern Kordofan border state, where an air bombing campaign is causing "huge suffering" to civilian populations and endangering humanitarian assistance.

Church and aid officials say more than 300,000 people are trapped, cut off from relief and unable to flee the region where the Sudan Armed Forces has been fighting the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the former rebels aligned groups in the oil state. The fighting, which has been going on for a week, is raising fears of an increased death toll, after clashes escalated to include artillery and aircraft.

"This violence is a major threat to the stability of Sudan just as the new state of South Sudan is coming into being. The humanitarian challenge is already great, and the risk of another Darfur situation, with civilian populations at the mercy of government-supported terror, is a real one," said Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In a news release on 14 June, Williams said Christian leaders represented in the Sudan Ecumenical Forum and Council of Churches and others throughout the world deplored "the mounting level of aggression and bloodshed ... and the indiscriminate violence on the part of government troops against civilians."

On the same day, artillery shelling was reported near Kadugli, the state's capital, while two Sudan Armed Forces planes bombed the airstrip at the town of Kauda, in the latest in a series of aerial attacks, Hua Jiang, spokeswoman for the U.N. Mission in Sudan, was quoted as saying in the Integrated

Regional Information Networks, a humanitarian news service.

"International awareness of this situation is essential. The U.N. Security Council, the EU, the Arab League and the African Union need to co-operate in guaranteeing humanitarian access and safety for citizens," Williams said.

The Sudanese government in Khartoum denies targeting civilians in the region where many fought alongside the former rebels. Reports say the Nuba Mountains area was one of the hardest hit and most bitterly fought over of all in the two-decades-long civil war.

Williams said numerous villages have been bombed with more than 53,000 people being driven from their homes. A new Anglican cathedral in Kadugli has been burned down in the fighting which has also confined in their compound, the UN personnel in the town, such that they are unable to protect civilians.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has also strongly condemned the violence, and urged the international community to intervene in the crisis.

At its 9-14 June Council meeting in Geneva, the group urged the international community, particularly the United Nations (U.N.) and the African Union (AU), "to use all possible measures to stop hostilities, protect civilians, and allow humanitarian access to all parts of Sudan, and in particular South Kordofan."

"Eyewitness accounts from church sources indicate the Sudanese government forces were going house-to-house, pulling out suspected opposition sympathizers and in some instances killing them on the spot," the LWF said.

"These reports all point to a new chapter of ethnic cleansing being carried out by the government of Sudan," the group noted. "The atrocities are taking place in an area just north of the South Sudan border, where many of the people support the South."

The Rev. Andre Karamaga, the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, said that the cry of the people to the international community was: "please tell the world what is going on; appeal to the U.N. to protect the people, appeal to the AU to do their part." He said the atrocities contravened the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the pact signed between

the rebels and the government to end the civil war.