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The North-South Sudan Conflict, 2012

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, Members of the Committee, I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to speak before you today on the deepening humanitarian crises in Sudan and South Sudan.

Less than a year after celebrating the peaceful separation of South Sudan from Sudan as a sign of great hope, we now see these two countries directly reengaged in open conflict—and potentially, on the brink of all-out war. We are deeply concerned by the actions, including aerial bombardments and ground attacks, and incendiary rhetoric of both the Sudanese and South Sudanese governments and urge leaders on both sides to deescalate. The situation we face is indeed urgent. The potential for war threatens to exacerbate the two countries' already grave humanitarian needs and undermine nascent development gains in South Sudan.

As President Obama said in his video message to the people of Sudan and South Sudan last week, we fear that any progress made toward peace and prosperity for these long troubled nations is now “at risk of unraveling.” As Ambassador Lyman has outlined, the Administration is vigorously urging both sides to resume negotiations and working with our international partners to bring them back to the table.

We know that lasting peace, stability and sustainable economic development will not be secured overnight as these two states emerge from more than half a century of war. However, in both countries, the cost of continued and escalating conflict will be directly borne by the women, children and most vulnerable communities in both countries. These are resilient people; they have endured through 50 years of war, but we are seeing significant increases in malnutrition, food insecurity and the distressed movement of people that signals increasing suffering and need.

Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States

Fighting that erupted last year in Sudan's Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile has now escalated into cross-border conflict and displaced, killed and severely affected over half a million people.

In both states the conflict has disrupted harvests, commercial trade, and social services and significant humanitarian needs. It has derailed critical long-term development work and efforts to reach the milestones laid out by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Without a cessation of hostilities, the urgent humanitarian needs present today will continue to increase. We are already seeing a marked increase in severely malnourished children arriving in South Sudan. We fear that these children only hint at the tragic situation now unfolding in areas humanitarians cannot reach. And with the imminent onset of the rainy season, time is not on our side.

For those who remain in areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) of Sudan, the outlook is grim. While some trade and aid still flows to parts of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, barely a trickle of relief reaches areas controlled by SPLM-N. The Government of Sudan continues to block the international community from reaching those in need, and all local coping mechanisms will soon be exhausted. USAID food security experts expect that 200,000 to 250,000 people in Southern Kordofan are now facing a food emergency if the conflict and restrictions on humanitarian access continue. In Blue Nile, households could experience a food emergency by August.

We continue to call on all parties to the conflict to allow immediate and full access for international humanitarian aid and on the Government of Sudan to agree to a proposed tripartite UN-African Union-Arab League agreement to allow assessment, access and monitoring of humanitarian assistance to all civilians in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. U.S. government partners and the UN stand ready to immediately deliver food and humanitarian assistance, and we continue to explore options to provide aid to those in need.

Citizenship Status and Returns to South Sudan

Since October 2010, approximately 375,000 South Sudanese have returned from Sudan to their homeland and new country. Armed with hope and expectations for a new life in their homeland, many returnees arrived to discover limited basic services and other challenges.

However, between 300,000 and 700,000 South Sudanese remain in Sudan. The Governments of Sudan and South Sudan's April 8 deadline for South Sudanese living in Sudan and Sudanese living in South Sudan to regularize their residency status has now passed. Despite robust diplomatic efforts by the United States and others in the international community, the two parties neither reached a final agreement on their citizens, nor did they extend the deadline, leaving South Sudanese in Sudan with uncertain status. We hold Khartoum and Juba responsible for the safety and security of these people.

Recent violence carried out against South Sudanese nationals remaining in camps in East Darfur may be a dangerous foreboding of events to come. The Government of Sudan should refrain from all incendiary and heated rhetoric. The international community is poised to respond to immediate needs of vulnerable populations in Khartoum and other areas of Sudan should humanitarian needs increase.

The international community has created contingency plans for the potential movement of up to 500,000 returnees as well as continuing support to returnees in transit. In addition to bolstering resources at transit sites and exploring options for new locations, USAID's programs include flexible mechanisms such as rapid response funds that enable a quick response to the onset of emergency needs and support to contingency planning efforts through prepositioning of life-saving humanitarian supplies.

Once returnees reach their final destinations, they face the challenge of reintegrating into host communities that rely primarily on agriculture to meet their basic needs. To jumpstart the lives of returnees in South Sudan, USAID programs are improving access to basic services such as clean water and health care, helping farmers improve their agriculture practices and enhancing families' food security and livelihood opportunities.

I recently returned from South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, where I saw firsthand the challenges faced by returnees who had become accustomed to living in one of Sudan's urban centers such as Khartoum. They are struggling to adjust to a rural setting with few to no services or opportunities for work and income.

Support to returnees is complicated by a growing range of humanitarian emergencies and restricted access due to conflict, weather, and poor infrastructure. Unfortunately, as humanitarian needs escalate throughout South Sudan, the critical resources needed to enable returnees to build a new life will grow increasingly constrained. Of great concern is the recent estimate by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization that 4.7 million South Sudanese – or over half the population of the fledgling country – will be food insecure in 2012.

South Sudan

The Government of South Sudan's decision in January to halt oil production—the source of 98 percent of government revenues—prompted it to announce the implementation of an austerity budget. In the absence of alternative sources of funding or resumption of oil production, it will be impossible for the government to pay for its current operations—including salaries for public employees, the military, and police; longer-term capital investment; and block grants to South Sudan's 10 states.

We are deeply concerned about the potential harmful effects of South Sudan's impending budget crisis on the people of South Sudan, and the potential loss of development gains achieved since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement—important improvements in child mortality rates, school attendance, access to clean water and so forth. The U.S. Government is working with other donors to assess how South Sudan's austerity budget—and potentially deeper spending cuts in the future if the oil shutdown continues without additional sources of revenue—will impact their current development programs. Many donors are already shifting their resources to humanitarian activities. This enormous fiscal gap and potential shift in donor resources to cover resulting humanitarian challenges could result in significant backsliding for this new and fragile state.

Moreover, a direct confrontation between the two countries would place greater demand on basic service delivery at the expense of the longer-term institution building that the U.S. Government and the international community has supported in South Sudan over the last seven years.

On April 20, the UN shifted into crisis response mode in preparation for their potential declaration of emergency status in South Sudan. Their decision was based on some 20 situational triggers, including the surge in fighting and conflict, attempts to invade oil fields, signs of coordinated action among militia groups, and the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan's decision not to extend the April 8 deadline to regularize residency. In an emergency mode scenario, the UN would prioritize the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance while ensuring the safety of remaining critical staff. Some U.S. Government partners have already had to temporarily suspend operations in northern border areas of South Sudan due to insecurity, particularly bombings. Meanwhile, the UN and NGO partners continue to pre-position food and relief supplies to ensure full flow of humanitarian assistance to increasing numbers of those in need.

Our ongoing emergency programs and flexible funding mechanisms are poised to meet the growing humanitarian needs across South Sudan, whether as a result of inter-ethnic conflict, militia violence, large-scale returns or other urgent humanitarian need.

Marginalized Populations

Recent violence in Jonglei State of South Sudan among the Lou Nuer, Murle, and Dinka ethnic groups has affected at least 140,000 people since late December 2011—a product of unresolved inter-ethnic and inter-communal issues that were sidelined in the quest for South Sudan's independence. This pattern of exclusion—in which certain populations do not benefit from development gains or have a political voice—permeates society in Sudan and South Sudan.

Exclusion and marginalization, whether pursued as policy or a result of weak governance institutions, can become powerful drivers of conflict, much like what we are seeing in Southern

Kordofan and Blue Nile State today, and in Eastern Sudan and Darfur in the recent past. In South Sudan, long-lived tribal animosities and an extreme lack of development and economic opportunity, combined with state failure to protect and provide an effective response to violent cattle raids, led to deadly cycles of attacks and counter-attacks between Murle and Lou Nuer communities last year.

In diverse countries like Sudan and South Sudan, it is essential that minority groups such as the Nubians, the Beja, the Darfurians, and the Nuba of Sudan, and all the minority tribes of South Sudan have voices in the institutions of their government. Members of these tribes' human rights must be protected, and their communities have a right to share in the benefits of development in their respective countries.

Instead, even as pockets of stability have developed in West Darfur, recent reports indicate a ratcheting up of conflict against Southern Sudanese living in Darfur, with two recent attacks on an internally displaced persons' camp populated by Dinka and an attack on Sharif Village, where Dinka were accused of celebrating the South Sudan military's capture of Heglig. This violence has potential to undermine these pockets of peace and security and threaten prospects for recovery in these areas. We are gravely concerned by these reports of violence and continue to work with international partners to call for calming messages and a reversal from the heated rhetoric.

The inclusion of all populations is a fundamental issue of good governance. When groups feel excluded, their grievances deepen, and they are more easily mobilized by actors that promote violence as a means for change. To assist in the integration of communities and to counter perceptions that government institutions are incapable of serving their communities, USAID is providing South Sudanese local and state authorities the equipment they need to communicate quickly and effectively with each other in remote areas, as well as infrastructure that raises their profile in their communities. At the same time, USAID seeks to reduce the pool of ready recruits for violence by engaging at-risk youth in productive, income-generating activities. For instance, high-frequency radios and other equipment USAID provided to local and state authorities have in some cases prevented violence when authorities were able to warn communities about planned revenge attacks.

Let me end with a note of hope, despite the formidable challenges. During my recent visit to South Sudan's Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, I met the Warawar Peace Committee, where villagers have been conducting peace dialogue with the nomadic tribes across the border. They have resolved many of the classic struggles between the herders and farmers, enabling both to live in peace and participate in a Peace Market that has thrived for several decades in this border region. They are determined to help their children have a better life and are proud of their ability to withstand what they see as politically motivated violence in neighboring areas.

Conclusion

Continued escalation of the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan will serve no purpose other than to further exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation. As President Obama noted in his statement to the people of Sudan and South Sudan last Saturday, “The presidents of Sudan and South Sudan must have the courage to return to the table and negotiate and resolve these issues peacefully.” The people of their countries already face too many hardships and have earned a chance at peace, stability, and enhanced livelihood; they deserve no less.

Thank you. I look forward to taking your questions.