

**Sudan border state fighting affects 1 million, famine looms-western MPs**  
**By Katie Nguyen, Alertnet**  
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LONDON (AlertNet) - The United States, Britain and Australia must urgently address the humanitarian crisis in Sudan's South Kordofan and Blue Nile states which risk suffering a man-made famine, a coalition of 98 politicians has said.

In an open letter to their respective foreign ministers, the politicians compared the Sudanese government's crackdown in South Kordofan and Blue Nile to its offensive to crush a decade-long rebellion in the western region of Darfur.

"Once again, civilians, mainly women and children, are caught in the cross-fire as the Sudanese Armed Forces and associated militias wage war," the letter said.

"In an effort to drive the population from their land through fear and starvation, the Government of Sudan has blocked humanitarian assistance ... targeted civilians ... and carefully timed offensives designed to disrupt the planting and harvesting seasons."

More than 1 million people have been severely affected by fighting between rebels and government forces in the two areas bordering South Sudan, according to the United Nations. More than 200,000 have fled to neighbouring South Sudan and Ethiopia.

Experts are now warning of a "very real prospect of a man-made famine by April," the letter said. "There is an obligation to try and stop this horror, and we must seize every opportunity to bring it to an end."

Fighting broke out in South Kordofan in June 2011 and spread to Blue Nile in September 2011.

One of the signatories to the letter, Britain's Baroness Cox, visited the two regions last month and described the situation as "absolutely horrendous".

"It is attempted ethnic cleansing. The worst features are of course the constant aerial bombardment," she told AlertNet in a telephone interview. "We saw Antonovs flying over, dropping bombs on markets, on to people harvesting their crops, on to schools."

She said that in South Kordofan's Nuba Mountains people were hiding in caves to escape the bombs, and in Blue Nile they were taking scant cover in the banks of riverbeds and under trees.

"They're hungry because they can't either plant or harvest crops. Clean water is quite difficult to access. Healthcare is very, very limited -- little and far between -- so the humanitarian situation is dire," Cox said.

U.N. and other humanitarian aid agencies say they have been barred from the region by the Sudanese government, which denies the charge and insists there is no humanitarian crisis there.

As with most of Sudan's conflicts, the roots of the fighting in Blue Nile and South Kordofan stretch back decades. Tens of thousands of fighters in both states sided with southern rebels during the civil war against Khartoum that started in 1983.

A 2005 peace deal ended the civil war, ultimately clearing the way for South Sudan's independence in July 2011, but it left the two states in Sudan.

The SPLA-North rebels in South Kordofan and Blue Nile say they are fighting to protect ethnic minorities from repression, while Khartoum accuses them of spreading chaos with the backing of their old comrades in South Sudan.

Blue Nile is rich in chrome and is a production site for gum Arabic, used as a stabiliser in soft drinks.

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