

**Continuing Crisis in Sudan: USCIRF Presents Eyewitness Accounts**  
**Remarks by USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo**

Hello and welcome. My name is Leonard Leo and I am the Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. I am joined today by Representatives Chris Smith and Frank Wolf, as well as fellow Commissioners Felice Gaer and Richard Land. Thank you all for attending this important press conference and moving photo exhibit documenting the human rights violations and humanitarian crisis unfolding as we speak in the southern part of Sudan.

Sudan has been a major focus of our bipartisan, federal U.S. commission since we were established by federal law more than a decade ago. USCIRF found the abuse of religion for political purposes to be a major factor in the civil war that ravaged southern Sudan and the North-South border regions from 1983 until the signing of the U.S.-brokered Comprehensive Peace Agreement (the CPA) in January 2005.

That war's millions of victims were overwhelmingly Christians and traditional African religionists, but also included Muslims, especially in the Nuba Mountains, opposed to Khartoum's Islamist policies.

While the CPA has ended and South Sudan is an independent nation which supports religious freedom, we stand together today to strongly condemn the violations of human rights and humanitarian law that the Sudanese government, lead by President Bashir, is perpetrating in the two states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile.

In late October, USCIRF staff traveled to South Sudan to investigate reports that Sudanese forces or militias have violated international human rights law, including freedom of religion or belief, and targeted people based on their religious identity. USCIRF interviewed religious leaders from the Nuba Mountains, refugees from the two states, and representatives of international organizations. USCIRF was among the first U.S. government officials to travel to Yida refugee camp in South Sudan, where more than 20,000 refugees from the Nuba Mountains have fled targeted violence and a humanitarian crisis.

With the publication of the trip findings we are releasing today and this photo exhibit, USCIRF hopes to shine the light on and increase vital attention to the government of Sudan's violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Its business as usual in Khartoum. International Criminal Court indictee President Bashir's is once again brutally targeting people, as he did during the North-South civil war and the genocide in Darfur, based on religion and ethnicity, and killings thousands by denying food assistance. The only difference now is where these atrocities are taking place – this time it is in the Nuba

Mountains and Blue Nile. As one teacher from Southern Kordofan who fled to Juba told us, “They want to arrest us, they don’t want their own people to live.”

Refugees we interviewed told us that Sudanese Armed Forces and government-backed militia killed and arrested people solely on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, and/or political affiliation and that the government of Sudan is bombing innocent civilians and denying urgent international, unrestricted humanitarian assistance to people in need.

Khartoum is responsible for a humanitarian disaster in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. 230,000 persons reportedly are internally displaced in Southern Kordofan, living in caves and in the mountains, and more than 50,000 persons from the two states have fled to neighboring countries. Fields, farms, and crops have been destroyed and bombings have prevented farmers from harvesting crops. Medical facilities have been damaged and staff has fled. Adding to the crisis, President Bashir and Governor Haroun, another International Criminal Court indictee, have not allowed the international community to distribute food and medical assistance to civilians. The crisis is expected to worsen with the increased ground offenses that recently started. And even those who have found refuge outside of Sudan face grave humanitarian needs. USCIRF staff met refugees in Juba and Yida refugee camp who had received little if any international assistance in terms of housing, food, medical care, or education for the thousands of children who have fled violence and hunger.

In its campaign against the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, President Bashir’s government arrested and killed people based on a blacklist it had created of Christians, Nuban civil society leaders and teachers, and representatives of the SPLM-North. Refugees spoke of witnessing the killing and arrest of known Christians. Pastors from Kadugli shared their stories of friends and families urging them to flee because soldiers had come to their houses asking for them by name.

Refugees reported that Sudanese soldiers attacked houses of worship, and they entered churches and mosques, shooting and/or threatening parishioners who had sought sanctuary and to pray for an end to the violence. The government also dropped bombs on houses of worship, at times during services. Churches and mosques were shot at, burned down, and doors and windows torn down; documents and religious papers ripped apart; and supplies, vehicles, and electronic equipment looted.

We have seen these atrocities committed over and over again in different parts of Sudan for more than 20 years. It is happening again today in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. It must stop, and the international community must respond immediately and forcibly.

The only way to end the violence, address humanitarian needs in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, stop human rights abuses throughout Sudan, and prevent further violence is through strong international pressure. Unfortunately the world has been silent, and that silence must end. We call on the U.S. government to once again build an international coalition to implement the following recommendations:

- Press the government of Sudan to allow unrestricted humanitarian assistance to all areas in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile;
- Support an independent international inquiry into reported violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile and bring perpetrators to account;
- Impose financial and other sanctions on officials responsible for human rights abuses in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, and work with our allies to do the same.
- Support a national, inclusive, and diverse consultation and constitution drafting process in Sudan that would address nationwide political and economic injustices; and
- Do not provide economic assistance and debt relief to the government of Sudan until it allows unrestricted humanitarian assistance to persons in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, ends hostilities, and abides by its international commitments to universal human rights.

Thank you.