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THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SUDAN: THE FACTS

THE BACKGROUND

The Sudanese civil war has been fought off and on since before Sudanese independence in 1956. Despite a ten-year period of peace, the conflict rekindled itself in 1983. The war has largely been fought within southern Sudan between several Khartoum governments and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by John Garang. Perhaps one million Sudanese have died as a direct or indirect result of the war. Millions more have been displaced, and placed at risk of starvation through a combination of the continuing conflict and drought.

Humanitarian relief to the affected areas of southern Sudan is provided by Operation Lifeline Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan began in 1989 under the auspices of the United Nations, and with the approval and cooperation of the government of Sudan. Operation Lifeline Sudan is a consortium of aid agencies bringing together the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and 35 other non-governmental organisations. It seeks to bring food and humanitarian aid to those communities in southern Sudan most affected by the fighting and drought, communities within both government and rebel-controlled areas of the south. Operation Lifeline Sudan is present in 69 locations throughout southern Sudan. It has 355 international staff members, who in turn are assisted by 2000 Sudanese employees.¹

Operation Lifeline Sudan has been unprecedented in as much as the government agreed the delivery of assistance by outside agencies to rebel-dominated parts of southern Sudan. As the London *Guardian* observed on 25 April 1998:

Most of the people affected live in areas controlled by anti-government rebels and, until January this year, they were reached by flights from Kenya. Governments involved in civil wars usually refuse to authorise cross-border feeding, but the United Nations last year negotiated a unique agreement with the Islamic government in Khartoum under which it accepted flights to rebel-held areas.²

¹*The Daily Telegraph*, 27 April 1998.

² 'Millions still in need in Sudan', *The Guardian*, April 25 1998.

It is a matter of record that the Sudanese government has agreed the increase of the number of delivery sites in the south from 20 in 1993 to over 180 during the recent crisis, the vast majority of which are within rebel-held areas - in the full knowledge that perhaps more than half of such food aid never reaches the civilians for whom it is intended, being diverted by the SPLA for its own use. It is also a matter of record that the United Nations has praised the clear commitment of the government to Operation Lifeline Sudan over the years.

THE 1998 BAHR AL-GHAZAL CRISIS

That there is a humanitarian crisis in the Bahr al-Ghazal region of southern Sudan is clear. In April 1998, the United Nations has put the number of people at risk from food shortages at 350,000.³ In July it was said to be over two million people.

The crisis was precipitated by a rebel SPLA offensive in the area. In early 1998, Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, a SPLA commander who had previously supported the Sudanese government's internal peace process, led a rebel attack on the city of Wau, in Bahr al-Ghazal. Wau is the second-largest city in southern Sudan. This attack, and the rebel SPLA offensive within the Bahr al-Ghazal area that followed, led to a drastic deterioration of the security situation in that region. More than one hundred thousand people fled Wau, and other towns such as Gogrial and Aweil, as fighting intensified.

Kerubino's responsibility in large part for the crisis situation was touched on by CNN reports in early April which stated that "aid agencies blame Sudanese rebel who switched sides":

Observers say much of the recent chaos has resulted from the actions of one man, Kerubino Kwanying Bol, a founding member of the rebel movement... Two years ago, some SPLA leaders, including Kerubino, signed a peace agreement with the government... But earlier this year... Kerubino rejoined the SPLA. He aided rebel forces in sieges of three government-held towns, which sent people fleeing into the countryside.⁴

Newsweek also found Kerubino's involvement clear:

Aid workers blame much of the south's recent anguish on one man: the mercurial Dinka warlord Kerubino Kuanyin Bol.⁵

THE QUESTION OF ACCESS

For clear security reasons the government restricted aid flights going into parts of the area from 4 February onwards. The SPLA has previously shot down relief airplanes, and other civilian aircraft, in southern Sudan. The downing of these aircraft had resulted in considerable civilian loss of life, and led to air-delivered relief aid being suspended by aid agencies to all but Juba, the capital of southern Sudan for two years. It is also believed that the SPLA had received ground-to-air missiles earlier this year.

Of twenty-two landing sites in Bahr al-Ghazal, relief aid flights were initially only cleared for eight sites. As the security situation stabilised, and following United Nations requests, this partial restriction was lifted at the end of March, when the government opened up all the relief corridors, a decision conveyed to the United Nations Secretary-General on 2 April.

³ 'U.N. Confident it Can Avert Sudan Famine', News Article by Reuters on April 28, 1998 at 19:48:18.

⁴ '1 million people face famine in Sudan, Ethiopia', April 10, 1998. Web posted at: 6:04 p.m. EDT (2204 GMT)..

⁵ *Newsweek*, May 18 1998.

On 2 April 1998, the BBC reported that the United Nations had confirmed that they were able "to resume aid flights to all areas of Bahr el Ghazal province in southern Sudan".⁶ On the same day Reuters reported that:

Relief agencies... stepped up air support operations in southern Sudan after the government granted them full access to airstrips in the famine-hit areas, U.N. officials said. The government decision allows U.N. agencies to land at 50 airstrips in Bahr el-Ghazal region, 25 of which are key to the relief effort, said U.N. World Food Programme spokeswoman Brenda Barton.⁷

The Reuters report cited a statement from Operation Lifeline Sudan which stated that flights had resumed. The OLS statement said:

This new clearance allows OLS agencies to fly in the month of April to more than 50 locations in Bahr el-Ghazal and to 180 countrywide.⁸

The *Guardian* recorded the resumption of aid flights. The paper also quoted the World Food Programme's Nairobi spokeswoman Brenda Barton:

We got permission to fly to more than 180 locations throughout the south, all but five of those we requested.⁹

Oxfam also stated that in its briefing on the situation in southern Sudan:

As the severity of the food shortages has become clear, the Government of Sudan has allowed access... to over 50 airstrips in Bahr el Ghazal and 180 airstrips throughout the south, far better access than has been allowed in the past.¹⁰

The government is obviously not present in SPLA-controlled areas. It has to rely on OLS assessments of problems and situations. The United Nations would then make requests to the government for greater access, requests which have been unconditionally granted in throughout this emergency.

On 22 April the government agreed to WFP's request for the use of additional air transport. The government also offered the use of Sudanese airports such as those at El-Obeid and Malakal from which to fly aid to the affected areas - a move which would lessen transport costs as relief flights were being routed in from Kenya. In a joint letter to the government of Sudan dated 22 April, both the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the UNICEF executive director thanked the government for its cooperation in humanitarian issues. On 25 April, Reuters recorded that the United Nations "applauded a move by the Sudanese government to grant clearance" for additional flights. The report quoted Operation Lifeline Sudan as saying:

This timely approval follows a statement by the World Food Programme that unless permission was received to double or triple its airlift of food aid to southern Sudan within a matter of days, the Bahr el Ghazal area would face a catastrophe.¹¹

⁶ 'Aid flights to resume to southern Sudanese province', News Article by BBC on April 02, 1998 at 10:13:50.

⁷ 'Sudan Lifts Ban on U.N. Flights to South', News Article by Reuters on April 02, 1998 at 14:39:33.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *The Guardian*, April 25 1998.

¹⁰ *Briefing Document on the Emergency in the south of Sudan*, Oxfam, May 1998.

¹¹ 350,000 Sudanese Have No Food, Charity Group Says. News Article by Reuters on April 25, 1998 at 11:33:30.

On the same day Associated Press reported that the Sudanese government had “appealed to humanitarian organizations to supply food and medicine to parts of southern Sudan facing famine”.¹²

The Sudanese government’s co-operation with international agencies was also touched on in a 30 April letter to the government from Philip J. Clark, the WFP representative in Sudan:

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Government of Sudan for its co-operation in facilitating the efforts of the United Nations to meet the urgent food needs of thousands of people in Southern Sudan who require our help.

The access issue was touched on once more by Brenda Barton in a Reuters article on 2 May. The WFP spokeswoman said that avoiding a crisis depended on three factors - the availability of food, free access by more aircraft to affected areas and the distribution of seed for this season’s crop. She stated:

Of the three, the most perilous at the moment is seed.¹³

That access is not the problem was also confirmed by the British aid agency, Christian Aid. Christian Aid’s overseas director, Jenny Borden stated on 1 May that:

Our problem is not access, as with airlifts, but resources.¹⁴

The issue of access was perhaps comprehensively addressed by Mr Ross Mountain, the United Nations Assistant Emergency Relief Coordinator designate, in a letter to the Sudanese foreign minister:

We... gratefully acknowledge that since the lifting of the flight suspension over Bahr Al Ghazal on 31 March, the Government of Sudan has consistently responded positively to all of the UN’s requests for additional aircraft. We were also very pleased to be informed by you of the Government of the Sudan’s willingness to grant approval for any other aircraft needed to meet the humanitarian needs of Sudanese populations whether in Government or rebel-controlled areas.¹⁵

Mr Mountain also touched on the issue of access during a press conference held on 3 May in Khartoum:

I note in great appreciation that the Government of Sudan has responded positively to all requests for authorisation of additional aircraft which have been made by the U.N. during this current crisis. I also welcome the Foreign Minister Ismail’s readiness to meet any other U.N. requests for additional aircraft.¹⁶

OPERATION LIFELINE SUDAN, THE WFP AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY: “OUR PROBLEM IS NOT ACCESS... BUT RESOURCES

¹² ‘Bob Geldof appeals for help for famine victims in southern Sudan’, News Article by AP on April 25, 1998 at 11:44:54.

¹³ ‘Seed not food a priority for Sudan - agencies’, News Article by Reuters on May 02, 1998 at 11:48:01.

¹⁴ ‘British Agencies at Odds on Sudan Aid’, News Article by Reuters on May 02, 1998 at 11:26:29.

¹⁵ Letter to the Government of Sudan from Mr Ross Mountain, United Nations Assistant Emergency Relief Coordinator, Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, 4 May 1998.

¹⁶ Comments made by Ross Mountain, United Nations Assistant Emergency Relief Coordinator designate and Director of the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, Geneva, to the press conference on 3 May 1998, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Khartoum, Sudan.

As early as February 1998, the United Nations had appealed to donors for US\$ 109 million for the Sudan. Some US\$ 43 million of that appeal had been ear-marked by the WFP to buy and transport 25,000 tonnes of food for communities in southern Sudan affected by the famine. By the time of the crisis less than 20 percent of the funding deemed as essential had been raised.

In 1997, the United Nations received only 40 percent of the US\$ 120 million dollars it had sought for that year's appeal. The UN stated that this shortfall had "seriously compromised the ability to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis". David Fletcher, WFP's co-ordinator for southern Sudan and Kenya, stated that the current humanitarian crisis in Sudan were a "culminative effect" of last year's lack of money and described the 1998 appeal as a "minimum".¹⁷

As of February, the 1998 appeal had only raised US\$ 7.85 million. This underfunding has continued into 1998. In June 1998, the World Food Programme has stated that for the period April 1998 to March 1999, its Sudan operation had an overall shortfall of approximately US\$ 117 million.¹⁸

It is perhaps for this reason that although the government of Sudan gave the World Food Programme permission during February for 14 flights, the WFP only sent two flights. Similarly, although during the same period the government gave permission to UNICEF for twenty flights to Bahr al-Ghazal, UNICEF sent only three flights. Operation Lifeline Sudan officials have themselves admitted these facts. A Reuters report on 2 May stated that while OLS officials said that the initial flight bans in February had exacerbated the current crisis:

They concede Khartoum has since approved every flight request to Bar el Ghazal and that the organisation flew to less than half the destinations they requested in April.¹⁹

It may also have been the case that UNICEF and the WFP chose to limit their own flights into the war-affected areas for their own security considerations.

Throughout April the World Food Programme appeared to be handicapped by its lack of funds. On 3 April the World Food Programme noted that it had only received US\$ 7.3 million out of a total of US\$ 58 million required to meet the crisis.²⁰ On 21 April Agence France Press reported that "the WFP is also plagued by a lack of funds", and that "an extra six million dollars is required to pay for the emergency food and logistics for Bahr el-Ghazal".²¹ Commenting on the humanitarian situation in Sudan, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan also admitted funding difficulties, stating that "donor fatigue" was making it hard to raise the necessary funds that the specialised agencies would have to push harder.²²

On 28 April, Carl Tintzman, the co-ordinator of Operation Lifeline Sudan, admitted that OLS relief operations had been hampered by a lack of resources.²³ On 1 May the World Food Programme once again appealed for funds from the international community for the affected areas. It appealed for US\$ 65.8 million to finance emergency airdrops.²⁴

The veteran British journalist Lord Deedes was visiting southern Sudan at the time of the crisis. With the benefit of being on the ground, on 27 April he also reported the funding difficulties:

¹⁷ 'UN appeals for 109 million dollars in aid for Sudan', Agence France-Press, 19 February 1998.

¹⁸ 'South Sudan relief operation greatly underfunded': WFP, News Article by AFP on June 12, 1998 at 09:30:23.

¹⁹ 'Seed not food a priority for Sudan - agencies', News Article by Reuters on May 02, 1998 at 11:48:01.

²⁰ 'Relief Flights to Sudan Resume', Panafrican News Agency, 3 April 1998.

²¹ 'UN warns of catastrophic famine in southern Sudan', News Article by AFP on April 21, 1998 at 09:01:58.

²² 'Secretary General warns of famine in southern Sudan', News Article by AP on May 02, 1998 at 11:46:24.

²³ 'U.N. agency optimistic in can avert Sudan famine', News Article by Reuters on April 28, 1998 at 20:03:15.

²⁴ 'British Agencies at Odds on Sudan Aid', News Article by Reuters on May 02, 1998 at 11:26:29.

Pressure on Operation Lifeline Sudan is intense just now because the famine in Bahr el Ghazal threatening some 400,000 is worsening. WFP now talks of needing 22,000 tonnes of food in the next year at a cost of some 22 million pounds. There is not the smallest hope of donors coming up with that kind of money.²⁵

The situation has been confused even more as aid agencies themselves have been presenting contradictory messages. The World Food Programme's Brenda Barton stated on 2 May that the WFP was not treating the situation in southern Sudan as famine:

Definitely we are not saying there is a famine.

The WFP then went on to say that:

We believe we have all the food we need to meet the immediate needs of the population of southern Sudan.²⁶

The British Disasters Emergency Committee, a grouping of fifteen national aid agencies, stated on 1 May that it was not issuing a famine appeal:

because for the moment there is enough food and other supplies stored in (neighbouring) Kenya and elsewhere.

The British Disasters Emergency Committee then reversed its decision. It is also clear that it is not only Sudan which has been affected by this intransigence on the part of the international community. CNN reported in early April that parts of Ethiopia are also facing famine. In early April the UN issued an appeal for emergency food aid, stating a need to purchase 60,000 tons of food to avert starvation in affected parts of Ethiopia. CNN reported that only Japan had responded, offering funding for 2,500 tons of food. CNN quoted Khaled Adly, the WFP's director of operations in Ethiopia as saying:

At this point, we've got less than 5 percent of the contributions we need. Unless more comes in soon, we could be faced with another crisis before long.²⁷

THE SUDANESE PEACE PROCESS

In its letter of 2 April to the United Nations Secretary-General, the Sudanese government restated its belief that only a cease-fire would help alleviate the crisis situation, and called on the international community to bring pressure to bear on the SPLA to accept such a cease-fire. The government accepted calls for a ceasefire made during the peace negotiations in 1997. Rebel leaders have stated that they intend to escalate the war.²⁸ The London *Guardian* reported in May that:

Extraordinary as it might seem to those watching television pictures of the malnourished people of Bahr el Ghazal at feeding centres, the SPLA and its supporters are prepared to continue the war even while the north appears to be ready to sue for peace.²⁹

²⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 27 April 1998.

²⁶ 'Seed not food a priority for Sudan - agencies', News Article by Reuters on May 02, 1998 at 11:48:01.

²⁷ '1 million people face famine in Sudan, Ethiopia', April 10, 1998. Web posted at: 6:04 p.m. EDT (2204 GMT).

²⁸ 'Sudanese opposition expect increased military activity', News Article by Anews on May 03, 1998 at 00:37:51. (Arabic.News.com)

²⁹ *The Guardian*, May 11 1998.

The SPLA once again refused to agree to a ceasefire, even for humanitarian reasons, as called for at the May 1998 peace talks in Nairobi. The government continued to support calls for a ceasefire. In July 1998, under considerable pressure from the international community the SPLA finally accepted a three-month ceasefire to facilitate humanitarian access to parts of southern Sudan.

The present Government of Sudan came to power in 1989 with a civil war already in progress. The present Government appears to have accepted the need for a negotiated settlement of the conflict from the beginning of its administration. On coming to power, it began working towards a negotiated end to the civil war. Since 1989, there have been over twenty rounds of negotiations and peace talks, held in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, and Germany.

These negotiations have been complicated by the hostile intervention of outside powers, and by the fragmentation of the rebel movement in the early 1990s. Even so the Sudanese Government was able to negotiate and sign the Khartoum Peace Agreement on 21 April 1997. It was signed between the government and Riek Machar, representing the Southern Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM), which was the largest of the rebel groups taking part in the peace process. Other signatories were: Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, for the SPLA/Bahr el-Gazal Group; Theophilus Ochang Lotti, for the Equatoria Defence Force; Kawac Makwei, for the South Sudan Independents Group; Samuel Aru Bol, for the Union of Sudanese African Parties (USAP); and Arok Thon Arok, for the SPLA/Bor Group.

The Agreement stated that there is to be a free and fair - and internationally monitored - referendum in southern Sudan after four years, to determine whether the people of the south desire independence or federation. In the interim period there is to be a southern government, the Southern States Coordination Council, the president of which is Riek Machar. The Agreement provides that Southerners shall be equitably represented in all constitutional, legislative and executive organs at the Federal level.

The significance of the Agreement is that it represents perhaps the boldest and most sustained effort in Sudanese history to bring about a just and lasting settlement to the Sudanese civil war. In tandem with implementing the Peace Agreement, the Government has drafted a new Constitution for Sudan, the implementation of which is dependent upon approval by referendum.

The only obstacle to a peaceful resolution of the war is the continuation of violence by one faction of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Movement, a grouping led by John Garang. Garang's political record is a questionable one. He was a *protégé* of the bloody Mengistu regime in Ethiopia until that *regime* was toppled and his movement has been responsible for systematic abuses of human rights and wide-scale atrocities in the course of the civil war. His commitment to peace has been ambiguous and it has been claimed that the SPLA is being encouraged by the United States to continue its war as part of Washington's pressure on the government of Sudan.

The peace process is mediated internationally by the regional Inter-Government Authority on Development (IGAD), a regional grouping of heads of state. The government has confirmed its willingness to abide by the outcome of the IGAD peace process, accepting the IGAD declaration of principles as a basis for negotiation in July 1997.

The last round of negotiations in Nairobi in November 1997 were disrupted by new and contradictory demands by the SPLA. Indeed Garang was quoted by the BBC as saying that: "We intended not to reach an agreement... This is what we did and we succeeded in it."³⁰ The international community must bring pressure to bear upon the SPLA to negotiate for a peaceful, negotiated and just settlement of the conflict.

³⁰ *Summary of World Broadcasts*, 15 December 1997.

THE SPLA AND FOOD AID DIVERSION

The government's concern about rebel diversion of international food aid is well founded. Such diversion merely strengthens the insurgents, and in so doing prolongs the war. Under Operation Lifeline Sudan food and humanitarian aid is delivered to rebel-controlled areas of southern Sudan, in effect to structures controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Army. It is a matter of clear record that the SPLA has long been associated with the systematic deliberate diversion of food aid in the course of the Sudanese civil war.

At the height of the 1998 famine crisis in southern Sudan, for example, it was revealed that the SPLA was diverting international food aid away from starving communities in Bahr al-Ghazal and using it to sustain the rebel movement. An Agence France Presse report on 21 July 1998, entitled 'Aid for Sudan ending up with SPLA: relief workers', stated that:

Much of the relief food going to more than a million famine victims in rebel-held areas of southern Sudan is ending up in the hands of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), relief workers said Tuesday... Estimates start at 10 to 20 percent and range upwards, with the Roman Catholic bishop of the southern diocese of Rumbek, Caesar Mazzolari, putting it at 65 percent.³¹

The organisation presented by the SPLA as its 'humanitarian' wing, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), has been revealed to be both totally controlled by the SPLA and to have been closely identified with the planned theft and diversion of emergency food aid intended for famine victims and refugees.

The SPLA has repeatedly used food aid, and its denial, as a weapon in their war against the Sudanese government. In so doing it has been at least partly responsible for the famines that have resulted in the deaths of so many Sudanese civilians.

In its premeditated efforts to deny food to those areas of southern Sudan administered by the Khartoum government, SPLA forces have shot down civilian relief airplanes, threatened to shoot down other airplanes delivering food aid, and attacked both overland food convoys and relief barges coming down the Nile. The SPLA regularly attacked trucks delivering emergency food aid by road. On one occasion, for example, SPLA gunmen killed 23 relief workers, drivers and assistants in such an attack.³²

In addition to denying food to communities associated with, or dominated by, the government of Sudan, the SPLA also diverted food aid and relief supplies from civilians under its control to sustain its own military operations. The human rights organisation African Rights has reported that:

On the whole, SPLA commanders and officials of the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA, its humanitarian wing), have seen relief flows as simple flows of material resources. The leadership has also used aid for diplomatic and propaganda purposes.³³

African Rights further documented in relation to the SPLA's previous record of food aid diversion that:

A large proportion of their consumption was food aid. Sudanese who were in Itang during that period later reported they routinely saw trucks being re-

³¹ 'Aid for Sudan ending up with SPLA: relief workers', News Article by AFP on July 21, 1998 at 08:23:48.

³² *Denying "The Honor of Living": Sudan A Human Rights Disaster*, African Rights, London, 1997, p.116.

³³ *Food and Power in Sudan*, African Rights, London, 1997, p.5,7.

loaded with food at the camp stores: at times on a daily basis. Often they were just going to the nearby training camps, but relief supplies were also sometimes sold, or used on military operations in Eastern Equatoria and Upper Nile. The SPLA 'taxed' the supplies for the refugees, reselling substantial amounts of food on the market and earning millions of Ethiopian Birr. This income... was used to purchase vehicles and other equipment for the SPLA... Much relief was sold in Ethiopia: traded for cash, clothing, cattle and other items. By 1990, the Itang camp manager was even managing to raise enough revenue to buy vehicles for the SPLA, and was publicly commended by John Garang for doing so.³⁴

The SPLA's capacity, in conjunction with the then Ethiopian authorities, for deception in relation to foreign aid within SPLA-controlled refugee camps in Ethiopia has also been placed on record:

Huge refugee programmes were implemented with almost no assessment or monitoring. When relief workers or donors visited the camps, it was by appointment only and under tight government (and, more discreetly, SPLA) control. Former camp residents described how a visit would be prepared in advance. Weapons and other obvious signs of military presence would be hidden. Signs of relative prosperity... would also be concealed. Sometimes a few refugees would be specifically instructed to wear sack-cloth. No refugee was allowed to talk to a foreigner except in the presence of a fairly senior SPLA official. Then the conversation would be through a translator, who could distort and censor what was said.³⁵

SPLA supporter Bona Malwal's 1991 article 'Questions the SPLA can no longer ignore' mentioned the SRRA's close identification with the SPLA:

It has become evident that the humanitarian wing of the SPLA, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) has failed to achieve much of its agenda primarily because of its close attachment to the military aspects of the SPLA.³⁶

African Rights also reports that there was no evidence that funds made available to the SRRA from the money raised by Bob Geldof's Band Aid consortium ever resulted in relief being delivered.

That this systematic and deliberate diversion of food and humanitarian assistance continues to this day has been confirmed by a member of the SPLA/M's executive. Dr Peter Nyaba, a current member of the SPLA/M National Executive Committee, is well placed to describe SPLA policy in respect of the diversion of food aid from civilians to the SPLA. He had previously served as a SPLA military commander on the ground in southern Sudan. In his 1997 book *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan: An Insider's View*, Nyaba reveals that:

(S)ince humanitarian assistance is only provided for the needy civil population, the task of distribution of this assistance fell on specially selected SPLA officers and men who saw to it that the bulk of the supplies went to the army. Even in cases where the expatriate relief monitors were strict and only distributed relief supplies to the civilians by day, the SPLA would retrieve that food by night. The result of this practice led to the absolute marginalisation and brutalisation of the civilian population.³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.72/73, 76/77.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.74/75.

³⁶ Bona Malwal, *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, June 1991, pp.2, 4-5, 8.

³⁷ Peter Nyaba, *The Politics of Liberation in South Sudan: An Insider's View*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 1997, p.53.

Nyaba's comments appear to be confirmed by a relief worker interviewed at the height of the current humanitarian crisis. The aid worker stated that the SPLA recovered food from civilians to whom it had been given:

Probably more than half the food we distribute goes to the SPLA. The rebels go from family to family demanding it.³⁸

The *Financial Times* reported in May 1998 that the SPLA was instrumental in obstructing food aid delivery to areas believed to be sympathetic to rival southern Sudanese leaders:

The SPLA has repeatedly stopped food getting to areas controlled by Riek Machar, a faction leader who split from John Garang, the SPLA's leader, in 1991. Its local bosses regularly prevent aid organisations moving into areas outside their remit.³⁹

The British newsletter *Africa Analysis* recorded that in late 1997 at least 37 trucks of food and fuel, supplied in large part by USAID and the Norwegian Church Aid for displaced Sudanese refugees, disappeared while under SPLA control, near Gulu in Uganda. The food was said to have been sold in Gulu and other towns in the area. It was one more example of corruption in the rebel movement.⁴⁰

An additional aspect of food aid diversion was documented in May 1998. An independent consultancy commissioned by the Norwegian government to investigate Norwegian People's Aid, a channel for vast amounts of Norwegian government aid funds, concluded that Norwegian relief funds were being used to support SPLA soldiers, and thus prolonging the conflict. Norwegian People's Aid, which worked outside of the Operation Lifeline Sudan programme, was said to allowed the SPLA to sell emergency aid destined for hungry and sick southern Sudanese in order to purchase weapons of war. Norwegian aid funds were also diverted to buy the SPLA food, houses and cars, and was also used to organise schooling for the children of SPLA officers.⁴¹

In June 1998 the British Secretary of State for International Development, Ms Clare Short, stated that her officials, who had returned from a visit to affected areas in southern Sudan, had informed her that SPLA gunmen were closely involved in controlling food aid even at the height of the acute humanitarian crisis in Bahr al-Ghazal. She stated that food aid was clearly "feeding the fighters".⁴²

CONCLUSION

Despite the confusing and contradictory claims of several of the international aid agencies about the situation in Sudan, several important aspects of the 1998 humanitarian crisis are now emerging.

Firstly, it is now clear that the partial safety restrictions on flights into the Bahr al-Ghazal war zone imposed by the government in February were relaxed in March. By the end of March all 22 sites in Bahr al-Ghazal were open. By 2 April, OLS confirmed that it was given access to 50 locations in Bahr al-Ghazal. The United Nations then requested additional flights to additional locations. The government agreed, and additionally offered the use of additional airports within Sudan itself, an offer belatedly taken up by the UN.

³⁸ *The Financial Times*, May 9/10 1998.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Africa Analysis*, 21 October 1997.

⁴¹ 'Aid money supported rebellion in Sudan', *Aktuelt*, Denmark, 20 May 1998.

⁴² Ms Short was speaking during the *Dimpleby* interview, on ITV, London, 7 June 1998.

It is also clear from the relief organisations themselves that the government of Sudan has opened up access to all of the affected areas from March onwards. Flights to over 180 locations have been authorised for some time. Both the World Food Programme and Christian Aid have stated that access is not the problem facing the aid agencies. It is additionally a matter of record that the WFP and UNICEF were unable to use the access they had been given in February and April. Relief flights had been authorised but not used by Operation Lifeline Sudan.

It is also clear that the United Nations food and emergency relief programme for Bahr al-Ghazal had in fact been significantly hindered by serious funding problems. The crisis began to unfold in February, and the World Food Programme's southern Sudan co-ordinator has placed on record that the famine situation in Bahr al-Ghazal was the "culminative" effect of the international community's lack of response to WFP appeals. Both the UN Secretary-General and Lord Deedes have placed the United Nations' funding difficulties to meet the crisis on record.

These facts somewhat contradict the statements by Clare Short, the British International Development Secretary, that "the problem is not lack of food supplies or money, but delay caused by the government of Sudan in permitting access".⁴³ That access has been there for weeks.

Despite the difficulties associated with the running of an operation involving the government, several United Nations agencies, and 35 other non-governmental organisations, the Sudanese government's commitment to Operation Lifeline Sudan is clear. The task of OLS was to provide food aid and humanitarian assistance to war and drought affected communities in southern Sudan.

Ms Short's claim that despite the Sudanese government's obvious commitment to Operation Lifeline Sudan over the past several years the government then chose to attract international criticism upon itself by arbitrarily deciding to use food aid as a weapon at precisely the time of critical peace negotiations, at the time of the unveiling of a new constitution, and as a southern government is established in Juba as part of its internal peace process, simply does not ring true.

It is also obvious perhaps that the media has had a role to play in exacerbating how the situation was seen outside of Sudan itself. In the first instance the first images of the Sudanese men, women and children affected the food shortages were filmed by journalists who arrived in on relief flights that had been authorised by the government following the government's lifting of security restrictions.

The somewhat simplistic media spin put on Sudan's humanitarian crisis, that the problem was caused by the government's refusal to allow relief flights has taken hold, despite clear and obvious evidence to the contrary as seen by the lifting of restrictions, authorised flights in February, March and April (most not taken up aid agencies who had requested them) and the fact that agencies such as the World Food Programme appear simply not to have had the funding and food available to assist fully at the time.

It is a matter of record that even a reputable news agency such as Associated Press was still reporting as late as 2 May that "Khartoum is severely restricting relief flights into the southwestern Bahr el Ghazal region, where the threat of famine is greatest".⁴⁴ This report, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary is irresponsible and sensationalist journalism at its worst. It is also perhaps in microcosm a reflection of the international community's misjudgement of Sudan and the Sudanese government's response to the Bahr al-Ghazal crisis.

⁴³ 'EU calls for ceasefire in Sudan to let aid through', News Article by Reuters on April 29, 1998 at 13:42:29.

⁴⁴ 'Secretary General warns of famine in southern Sudan', News Article by AP on May 02, 1998 at 11:46:24.

