ABANDONED
THE PLIGHT OF SUDANESE TRAPPED ON THE BORDER

A SPECIAL REPORT FROM
THE END NUBA GENOCIDE COALITION

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Introduction

Since June 2011, the government of Sudan has embarked on a campaign of aerial bombings, forced denial of humanitarian aid to areas under control of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), and ground attacks against the people groups of the Nuba Mountains. The catastrophe that has unfolded for over three years in this geographic area of Sudan — which resides in South Kordofan state just north of the Sudan and South Sudan border — has severely impacted hundreds of thousands of people and sent tens of thousands more fleeing to South Sudan.

On the evening of December 15, 2013, a chaotic and separate crisis in South Sudan erupted in the capital city of Juba following months of gridlock within the ruling political party, growing divisions amongst a handful of power-hungry party leaders, and years of rampant corruption. Fighting has quickly expanded along ethnic lines across broad areas of the country. This split sections of the national army and led to a rapid resurgence of armed militias, and fighters loyal to both sides commit atrocities.

While this new crisis in South Sudan has received deserved attention and involvement from the international community, the ongoing crises in Sudan remain in a state of near abandonment. The recent violence paralyzing much of South Sudan has placed additional stress on refugees who have fled out of the Nuba Mountains and nearby Blue Nile, another Sudanese state that is under siege by the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and their associated militias.

Many of these refugees are now facing an impossible decision: remain in conflict-torn South Sudan and risk being caught in the crossfire or flee back into the war in Sudan, where targeted aerial bombings and man-made humanitarian relief shortages continue.

Since September of 2012, the End Nuba Genocide Coalition (ENG) has made four emergency missions to the Nuba Mountains to further assess the humanitarian situation, document eyewitness testimony and community needs, and deliver direly needed food, seed stock, medicines, and school supplies. Some information including individual’s names and partner organizations have been excluded from this report for security purposes. All photos used in this report were taken in March 2014 unless noted otherwise.
Executive Summary

- Over 3,000 refugees from the Kao-Nyaro region of Sudan’s Nuba Mountains who have fled to Kodok, South Sudan over the past three years remain unreached by humanitarian relief.
- The refugee camp at Kodok will continue growing as food insecurity deteriorates in Kao-Nyaro, Sudan and as violence in South Sudan threatens the local population.
- Sudanese refugees at Kodok have not had sustainable food resources for some time and are eating grass and roots to survive.
- A lack of access to clean water, latrines, basic vaccinations, and other health services raises the risks of preventable disease outbreaks.
- A lack of education services is threatening to leave an entire generation behind.
- Due to the international community’s failure to address the humanitarian situation in the Nuba Mountains, independent NGOs operating in the area are overwhelmed by growing needs and a lack of resources.
A Brief History of the Nuba Mountains

The people of Sudan’s Nuba Mountains live in one of the most remote parts of modern Sudan. Geographically located on the political, religious, and ethnic fault line that is now the border of Sudan and South Sudan, the Nuba people groups have struggled over the last several decades to retain their culture, and now fight to simply survive.

Although much more complex than defined in this report, the history of the Nuba peoples may stretch back as far as the 3rd millennium B.C., during the time of the Egyptian Old Kingdom. The historical links between the people of the Nuba Mountains and the people of Nubia, an area in north-central Sudan cited frequently throughout ancient Egyptian history, remains cloudy at best. It is believed that there was some interaction between Nuba and Nubia.

During colonization, the British divide-and-conquer strategy saw Sudan’s northern and southern provinces governed essentially as two separate entities. The Muslim and Arab-dominated north and the African-dominated south were further isolated from one another until independence in 1956. This British strategy placed the Nuba Mountains directly on the widening fault line between north and south.

After Sudan’s independence, the Nuba peoples began to witness growing oppression from Arab-dominated governments and a distinct threat to their identities. Following the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War and in the 1990s-early 2000s, the Nuba Mountains would become the scene of some of the most horrific atrocities of that conflict, with Sudanese government crimes amounting to genocide (1). Due to the isolation of the area, it would be several years before news of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Nuba Mountains would reach the world.

Following a time of relative peace at the end of that conflict, the fast-approaching independence of South Sudan left the Nuba peoples, many of whom had sided with South Sudan during the war due to government crimes against them, on what is often described as “the wrong side of the border.” The government of Sudan blocked a popular consultation vote in June of 2011 to determine the status South Kordofan state, the politically-defined area in which the Nuba Mountains resides. A major government military offensive soon began that has been highlighted by war crimes.

Marginalized and under siege, the Nuba peoples find themselves pitted against the same government that failed to complete its campaign of extermination during the 1990s. Blocked from political incorporation into Sudan because of their cultural heritage, the Nuba peoples once again face two options: fight for survival or willfully bear witness to their own annihilation.
The Story of Kao-Nyaro

The area commonly known as Kao-Nyaro, Sudan is the southeastern, most isolated sector of the Nuba Mountains where the government-orchestrated humanitarian crisis has hit hardest. It is geographically cut off from much of the rest of the Nuba Mountains and difficult to reach due to rugged terrain. The area is insecure and lacks infrastructure. ENG estimates that some 23,000 people in this area are living in emergency or near-emergency conditions due to the government-orchestrated famine.

In 2013, a local partner organization notified ENG that Kao-Nyaro had been virtually unreached by relief since the beginning of the war in June of 2011. During an emergency relief mission in May of 2013, ENG representatives found that “visual indicators in areas...point to households living on the border of ‘crisis’ and ‘emergency’ classifications as defined by Famine Early Warning Systems Network... (2)”

Today, aid operations into Kao-Nyaro remain virtually non-existent. The ongoing crisis in South Sudan has placed additional stress on refugees currently residing in Kodok, South Sudan and made it even more difficult for NGOs to reach internally-displaced persons (IDPs) across the border in Kao-Nyaro.
Security Conditions In Kao-Nyaro And Kodok Camp

The security situation in Kao-Nyaro, Sudan is similar to that of much of the rest of the Nuba Mountains. Government warplanes and militias associated with SAF threaten communities and the route leading to the border. The deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Kao-Nyaro remain the greatest security threat.

A majority of the few refugees who have escaped from Kao-Nyaro over the last three years have congregated at a self-governing refugee camp outside of Kodok, South Sudan. The camp is currently home to approximately 3,000 refugees, most of whom are women and children. The security situation in the area is precarious due to the current crisis in South Sudan, which has decimated Upper Nile’s capital of Malakal and sent thousands of South Sudanese flooding into Melut and other smaller towns (3). The Kao-Nyaro refugees at Kodok find themselves in a fast-shrinking oasis as fighting continues to spread in Upper Nile.
Refugees Abandoned at Kodok

From all appearances, there is no ongoing relief effort to reach the refugees at Kodok camp, much less to the Sudanese who remain trapped in Kao-Nyaro, Sudan.

The only sign of international presence in Kodok camp are United Nations (UN) shelter tarps and an empty medical tent. As reported by the refugees in Kodok, the UN once attempted to relocate the refugees downriver to Malakal so they could then be transported west to Yida refugee camp. This move would have put the refugees even further away from their homes and families, leading the refugees from Kao-Nyaro to request to remain in Kodok.

Shortly afterwards, food relief from the UN and World Food Programme stopped arriving. It is unclear how long ago or why this incident occurred.

Photo: ENG relief team driving into Kodok refugee camp.
Humanitarian Conditions in Kodok Camp

Women stated to ENG representatives that since relief stopped arriving, they had been reduced to eating grass and roots. There are visual signs of malnutrition amongst children in the camp and most families are not sure when their next meal will be and where it will come from. Nearby unused fields offer the opportunity for small-scale farming to help with food security, but a lack of seeds and farming equipment prevents the refugees from becoming more self-sustainable.

There are no clean water sources in the camp. Refugees must walk 4 kilometers into Kodok to find treated water or they can take water directly from the Nile River. Drinking untreated water from the river risks the spread of preventable waterborne diseases. Younger children are especially vulnerable as their immune systems are not strong enough to fight dysentery, diarrhea, and other illnesses. Additionally, those who leave the camp to get treated water in Kodok risk their safety due to the insecurity currently affecting large parts of South Sudan.

The camp does not have a sanitation system that includes handwashing stations and latrines. This further raises the risks of preventable disease outbreaks and leaves children especially vulnerable to illnesses.

*Photo: Children are most at-risk from the lack of humanitarian services in Kodok camp.*
Humanitarian Conditions in Kodok Camp (Continued)

A lack of basic health services in the refugee camp poses severe short and long-term health risks. As the camp continues to grow in size, preventable disease outbreaks will become more likely. Easily-treatable diseases can become lethal when left unchecked by basic medications. Targeted therapeutic and supplementary feeding programs, which require some health services infrastructure, to address acute malnutrition may be needed in the coming months.

Additionally, due to the remoteness of Kao-Nyaro and Kodok, a blanket vaccination program is needed to ensure 100% coverage against major diseases such as polio and measles. Isolated cases of polio and small outbreaks of measles have already been reported in the Nuba Mountains (4).

The humanitarian situation in Kao-Nyaro and Kodok is reversible, but it requires steadfast support from ENG and the international community.
Educational Needs in Kao-Nyaro And Kodok Camp

Both the refugee camp at Kodok and the Kao-Nyaro region of Sudan’s Nuba Mountains are off the beaten path of current relief efforts.

While the humanitarian issues are the most pressing concerns for the people of Kao-Nyaro at the moment, the long-term impacts of ongoing conflict are becoming increasingly clear. The few schools servicing Kao-Nyaro have been shut down for the past three years and there are no educational programs in Kodok camp. With much of the Nuba Mountains currently suffering from a lack of access to educational services, there is a growing risk that the next generation will be left behind.

Beginning educational programs in Kao-Nyaro will be difficult at best. The Sudan Air Force has targeted schools across the Nuba Mountains, making the gathering of large numbers of children dangerous. An improvement in humanitarian conditions can pave the way for basic education programs in less formal settings that are safer from aerial attacks. Establishing a strong educational program and base in Kodok is a needed first step.

Photo: Children from Kao-Nyaro have no school to attend in Kodok.
The Future of Kao-Nyaro and Kodok

The outlook for the people of Kao-Nyaro, both in the Nuba Mountains and in the refugee camp at Kodok, remains grim. Coupled with daily government attacks and the humanitarian blockade in SPLM-N controlled areas of South Kordofan, the crisis in South Sudan has further reduced accessibility to border areas and the Nuba Mountains. The international community’s lack of willpower in pursuing real solutions for the victims of Sudan’s multiple crises allows Sudanese war criminals to continue pursuing the annihilation of the Nuba peoples with absolute impunity.

Despite this sense of abandonment, local organizations continue working hard to serve those most in need. Further partnership and support of these entities through ENG can play a positive role in surging their capacity and blunting the worst of these man-made humanitarian issues. By providing more direct support to the Nuba peoples, sustainable change from within Sudan can be created over time as people have to worry less about their immediate future and focus more on long-term solutions.

*Photo: Local partners exhibit deworming medication provided by ENG at Kodok.*
Conflict Drivers In Sudan Not Being Addressed

There remains a growing disparity between how the separate conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan are being addressed by the international community. While the newer crisis in South Sudan has received deserved attention and involvement from the international community, the ongoing, man-made crises in Sudan remain in a state of near abandonment.

While the Nuba peoples continue to cope with government warplanes bombing communities on a daily basis by hiding in caves, the government’s forced denial of humanitarian aid to areas underneath the control of the SPLM-N has impacted virtually every community in the Nuba Mountains. Coupled with this denial of humanitarian relief, government bombings, troop movements, and mining of roads has further exacerbated the situation by preventing people from gaining access to resources and needed security to cultivate their land. Because of these reasons, trade is severely limited in most areas and independent humanitarian operations, which exist despite the blockade, are threatened.

In Kao-Nyaro alone, for over three years communities and surging numbers of IDPs have struggled to survive. People have resorted to coping mechanisms such as hunting, foraging, reducing meals, and selling livestock. This has resulted in a lack of needed nutrients, additional time and energy wasted on excessive movement in search of food, and a dwindling of natural resources. Leaves and roots have become primary sources of food. Death from opportunistic diseases is a major risk especially among infants, youth and seniors. Many are without access to clean water.

While it is clear that war crimes and crimes against humanity are being committed by forces loyal to the government of Sudan, the ongoing pattern of man-made famine, destruction of communities by air and ground forces, and a blockage of humanitarian groups to SPLM-N held territory raises warning signs that key leaders within the Sudanese government may be orchestrating a genocide against the people groups in the Nuba Mountains. The actions unfolding for the past three years underneath Sudan’s military operations in the region sharply mirror tactics used throughout the 1990s against the same peoples. Leading experts on Sudan have stated that the crimes of the past constituted genocide (1).

The main driver of conflict and suffering in Sudan continues to be the central government in Khartoum. Until the international community pursues true justice for known war criminals, unfettered humanitarian access to victims, and an inclusive political process for all of the people of Sudan, there will be no sustainable change.
ENG Coalition Contributions in March 2014

Since September of 2012, the End Nuba Genocide Coalition (ENG) has made four emergency missions to the Nuba Mountains to further assess the humanitarian situation, document eyewitness testimony and community needs, and deliver direly needed food, seed stock, medicines, and school supplies. ENG operations to Kodok refugee camp in March of 2014 led to the blanket and targeted distribution of:

- 35,640lbs. of regional sorghum seed (for immediate use and planting)
- 600 packets of Plumpynut, a nutrient-rich paste that treats severe malnutrition
- 200 doses of deworming medication
- Limited amount of school supplies including paper, pens, books, and crayons

This relief mission was funded with a private grant from the Shining Hope Foundation.

ENG will continue working with local partners and building relationships on the ground for future aid missions that compliment indigenous efforts and focus on empowerment of households and communities.

Photo: ENG representatives and local partners prepare to deliver sorghum seed to refugees at Kodok.
Recommendations

The following recommendations have been provided by local partner organizations and ENG representatives.

To concerned citizens:

• Support ongoing relief operations to the people of Kao-Nyaro by making tax-deductible contributions to ENG efforts and becoming a fundraiser for the campaign.

• Sign up for email updates concerning relief efforts in the Nuba Mountains to learn how you can further help.

• For U.S. citizens: Contact your Representative and urge them to co-sponsor H.R. 1692.

To NGOs and Foundations:

• Contact our fiscal sponsor for partnership opportunities and to learn how to support our efforts in Kao-Nyaro and Kodok.

To Representatives of the United States Congress:

• For Representatives, join the House Sudan Caucus if not already a member.

• For Representatives, become a cosponsor of H.R. 1692.

• For Representatives, call upon the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Committee Chair to expedite H.R. 1692 through the committee.
Additional Resources

See more photos from the March 2014 aid distribution.

Watch Land of the Hungry, a short documentary film by our fiscal sponsor.

Endnotes


3. Melut was one of several areas visited by ENG representatives in March of 2014. South Sudanese reported that Malakal and Balliet were largely destroyed during fighting between South Sudanese government and rebel forces.

About the Coalition

The End Nuba Genocide Coalition is an international network of organizations, faith-based institutions, genocide scholars, and individuals who have come together to raise funds for the purchasing and delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid for the victims of conflict in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan. Our operations are funded by private donors and fundraisers.

Learn more at endnubagenocide.org.