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HRW.org

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Dear Ambassador,

We are writing to urge the UN Security Council to impose an arms embargo on both parties to the conflict in South Sudan, and to set up a panel of experts to monitor and report on the implementation of the embargo. The UN Security Council should also impose a travel ban and asset freeze against individuals credibly implicated in serious human rights violations or violations of the arms embargo.

The period between mid-December 2013 and mid-April 2014 was arguably the most abusive in a long history of conflict in Upper Nile, Jonglei and Unity states, with gruesome attacks on civilians and massive destruction and pillage of civilian property that amount to war crimes and potential crimes against humanity. Abuses by government and opposition forces as well as other armed actors allied with them, and not just the conflict itself, have pushed much of the country into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. An estimated 1.9 million people have been forced from their homes, and the affected areas remain vulnerable to famine.

Forces from both sides have ignored a cessation-of-hostilities agreement signed by the belligerents in January, to which they renewed their commitment later in the year. The UN Mission in South Sudan and international human rights groups have continued to document unlawful killings, rapes and the use of child soldiers in this war.

Despite repeated condemnation by the UN Security Council and special representatives of the secretary-general, neither the government nor the opposition has provided any meaningful accountability for horrific abuses. These include widespread and systematic killings of civilians and targeting of individuals based on their ethnicity or tribe affiliation, often in their homes, in churches, and hospitals. Some 100,000 people are still seeking sanctuary on UN bases but even these have not been safe from attacks.

Rearmament – at least by government forces – has already taken place and time has already been lost. Even if a peace deal is reached, further violence and abuse against civilians are likely.

More than condemnation is needed.

On November 5, more than 50 South Sudanese and international humanitarian, development, human rights and other activist organizations petitioned the region's leaders to call on the UN Security Council to put an arms embargo on South Sudan. An arms embargo would help to halt the supply of weapons to individuals and groups that have committed gross

violations of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and to protect civilians at grave risk.

An embargo should be put in place immediately and should last until effective mechanisms can ensure that weapons, munitions and other military equipment and technology sent to South Sudan will not be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. It also should not be lifted until credible efforts are made to end abuses against civilians, including through providing justice for war crimes and potential crimes against humanity.

Sanctions on individuals responsible for grave abuses would send a strong message to South Sudan's leaders that further crimes against civilians will come at a price. The Security Council has issued many threats of such sanctions, but as time goes by and abuses go on, they lose their potency.

The region has shown support for both these measures. Leaders from countries represented in the Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD) regional body issued a statement on November 7 with a two week deadline, threatening the belligerents with asset freezes, travel bans within the region and "denial of the supply of arms and ammunition, and any other material that could be used in war" if the parties to the conflict continue to violate the cessation-of-hostilities agreement.

The Security Council should not allow the parties to play for time any further. With civilians at grave risk and further humanitarian crisis looming, it should deliver on the long-threatened sanctions before it is too late, and make clear to leaders on both sides that they will not be allowed to continue to target civilians with impunity.

Yours sincerely,



Kenneth Roth
Executive Director



Philippe Bolojian
United Nations Director