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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

June 7, 2012

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The President
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Enclosed is *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof's piece from this past Sunday in which he paints a grim picture of the unfolding humanitarian disaster in Sudan.

Kristof, to his credit, again travelled to Sudan's beleaguered Nuba Mountains and saw firsthand the starvation and suffering of the people of that region. He spoke with a woman who recently lost her 2-year old daughter to starvation and who grimly wondered whether the same fate would befall her remaining four children.

Khartoum's intransigence is not merely a diplomatic challenge. President Omar Hassan Bashir and his government are once again callously exterminating their own people. The world, including the U.S., seems unable to muster much of a response.

Kristof closed his column with the following: "President Obama, you harshly criticized President Bush for failing to stand up to Sudan's slaughter in Darfur. So now what are you going to do as Sudan kills again — on your watch?" A haunting question—one which I hope will prompt this administration to act before it's too late.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

THE SITUATION IS CRITICAL

The New York Times

June 2, 2012

Starving Its Own Children

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

IN THE NUBA MOUNTAINS, Sudan

PERHAPS hundreds of thousands of people here have no food and are reduced to eating leaves and insects, as Sudan's government starves and bombs its own people in the Nuba Mountains. Children are beginning to die.

"Yes, my children may die," Katum Tutu, a 28-year-old mother, told me. She recently lost her 2-year-old daughter, Maris, to starvation and has nothing to feed her four remaining children. "I think about it every day, but there's nothing I can do," she said.

This week will mark a year since Sudan began its brutal counterinsurgency campaign in the Nuba Mountains, intended to crush a rebel force that is popular here and controls much of the region. Sudan has expelled aid workers, blocked food shipments and humanitarian aid, and dropped bombs haphazardly — and almost daily — on its own citizens.

Sudan bars outsiders, but I sneaked in from South Sudan on a dirt track controlled by rebels. Since my last visit, in February, the situation in these areas has deteriorated sharply: a large share of families have run completely out of food, with no prospect of more until the next harvest in November.

Ryan Boyette, an American aid worker who stayed behind when foreigners were ordered to evacuate, estimates that 800,000 Nuba have run out of food in South Kordofan, the state encompassing the Nuba Mountains. Boyette has created a local reporting network called Eyes and Ears Nuba, and the Sudanese government showed what it thinks of him when it tried to drop six bombs on his house last month. The notoriously inaccurate bombs missed, and he escaped unhurt in his foxhole.

Katum, the woman who lost her daughter, was typical of the dozens of Nuba I spoke to. Like many here, the family has been living in caves for most of the last year to escape bombs, and it ran out of the local food staple, sorghum, a few months ago.

She was blunt about the reason her daughter died: "We had no food to give her."

Her husband and surviving children showed me how they use bows and arrows to try to shoot birds, and how they try to catch mice. "We eat them whole," Katum told me. "Even the head and the tail."

Families are also eating beetles and wild roots, but their diet today is mostly the newest leaves of three kinds of wild tree. New leaves are stripped bare from trees near villages, and you see children climbing high on thin branches to try to find new leaves that remain.

I also came across small children, sometimes just 2 or 3 years old, digging in the ground for edible roots or seeds that they popped in their mouths.

Some 50,000 people have fled their homes and are trekking to Yida, a refugee camp just across the border in South Sudan. But many I spoke to, Katum included, say they just don't have the strength to walk for days to get there.

"There's no way we can get there," Katum told me. "So it is much better to stay and die here."

At that point, our interview was interrupted by a humming overhead: an Antonov bomber, flying unusually low.

Katum scrambled off, seeking a cave in case a bomb fell. Antonov and MIG warplanes regularly fly over these rebel areas, dropping bombs without any apparent purpose other than sowing terror. Fear of them has kept people from farming and is a main reason for the food shortages.

Some farmers are now planting their fields as the rainy season begins. They can harvest in November and will have to get by on leaves until then.

Many other families, including Katum's, ate their seed stockpile in hopes of keeping their children alive. So for them, the only hope is humanitarian aid.

Considering how many people are subsisting on leaves, perhaps the surprise is that the death toll isn't higher. In Katum's village, Famma, elders told me that about 40 people had starved to death in the last month, out of a population of thousands. Among children arriving at the Yida refugee camp, about 10 percent are acutely malnourished, according to Samaritan's Purse, an aid group assisting the refugees.

World leaders are mostly turning a blind eye. There isn't even serious talk about damaging the military airstrips that Sudan's warplanes take off from before dropping bombs on civilians, or about forcing a humanitarian corridor, or about arranging airdrops of food. As a result, the only certainty is that many Nuba will starve to death in the coming months.

President Obama, you harshly criticized President Bush for failing to stand up to Sudan's slaughter in Darfur. So now what are you going to do as Sudan kills again — on your watch?

I invite you to comment on this column on my blog, On the Ground. Please also join me on Facebook and Google+, watch my YouTube videos and follow me on Twitter.