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January 8, 2015

President Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Arms embargo for South Sudan to protect human rights

Dear President Obama:

We, the undersigned South Sudanese and international organizations, write to urge your support for a United Nations Security Council arms embargo on both parties to the conflict in South Sudan.

The conflict that erupted in Juba thirteen months ago has been characterized by a complete disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law. South Sudan's capital Juba as well as Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity states have seen gruesome attacks on civilians and massive destruction and pillage that amount to war crimes and in some cases acts that should be investigated as crimes against humanity.

Serious human rights abuses by government and opposition forces as well as other armed actors allied to them have also pushed much of the country into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. An estimated 1.9 million people have already been forced from their homes and large areas remain vulnerable to famine.

We are aware that the US government has provided very significant amounts of aid as well as support to the peace process. Meanwhile, the South Sudanese government has reportedly been using its oil revenue to purchase weapons.

We were encouraged by the US' suspension of military assistance to South Sudan's army and your April 4, 2014, executive order with its strong message that the US will not tolerate human rights abuses. But despite repeated condemnation of ongoing fighting in South Sudan by the UN Security Council, the US still has not tabled a resolution calling for an arms embargo, even in the face of the high likelihood of further abuses at the hands of armed actors.

The provision of additional weapons to the warring parties and associated armed groups,

in a country already awash with small arms and where a wide range of conventional weapons are in circulation, will almost certainly fuel further attacks on civilians. Despite criticism by the international community and many threats of sanctions, neither the government nor the opposition has provided any meaningful accountability for horrific abuses including widespread and systematic killings of civilians and targeting of individuals based on their ethnicity, often in their homes, in churches, and hospitals.

Much of the brutality against civilians in this conflict has taken the form of reprisal attacks for earlier violence and history suggests, because these crimes have been unaddressed, ethnic killings will continue and could drastically intensify.

An arms embargo would help to halt the supply of weapons to individuals and groups who have committed serious violations of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and protect civilians at grave risk. Such an embargo should last until there is no substantial risk that weapons, munitions and other military equipment and technology sent to South Sudan will be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

South Sudan's neighbors have shown support for an arms embargo. Leaders from countries represented in the Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD) regional body issued a statement on November 7, 2014, threatening the belligerents with "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. IGAD reported further violations of this agreement in late 2014 and has since condemned further fighting. The African Union on December 4, 2014, noted the IGAD statement and also threatened "stern action including recourse to the UN Security Council for action".

The US should immediately table a draft resolution imposing a comprehensive arms embargo on South Sudan and do all it can to ensure its passage.

This is the only way to deny the parties further opportunities to arm themselves and continue to commit serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law while they pursue their political ends.

Yours sincerely,

1. Action Support Centre (South Africa)
2. Amnesty International (United Kingdom)
3. Assistance Missions for Africa (South Sudan)
4. Carl Wilkens Fellowship (United States)
5. Citizens for Peace and Justice (South Sudan)
6. Charity Aid Foundation (South Sudan)
7. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (South Sudan)
8. East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (Uganda)

9. End Impunity Organization (South Sudan)
10. Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (Uganda)
11. Global Witness (United Kingdom)
12. Human Rights Watch (United States)
13. Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (United Kingdom)
14. Humanity United (United States)
15. International Centre for Policy and Conflict (Kenya)
16. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) (France)
17. Organization for Nonviolence and Development (South Sudan)
18. PAX (The Netherlands)
19. Rally for Peace and Democracy (South Sudan)
20. Seed for Democracy (South Sudan)
21. South Sudan Action Network on Small Arms (South Sudan)
22. South Sudanese Network on Democracy and Elections (South Sudan)
23. South Sudan Law Society (South Sudan)
24. Standard Action Liaison Focus (South Sudan)
25. Support Peace Initiative Development Organization-South Sudan (South Sudan)
26. The Strategic Initiative for women in The Horn of Africa (SIHA) (Uganda)
27. United to End Genocide (United States)
28. Waging Peace (United Kingdom)
29. Women Development Group (South Sudan)