

December 10, 2013

The Honorable Barack
Obama President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am Zeinab Blandia, Executive Director and Founder, of Ru'ya (Vision) Association and a human rights defender from the Nuba Mountains in Sudan. I am one of thousands of victims of continued civil war in Nuba Mountains. I am writing this letter from my heart as a mother, sister, and victim of war and violation for your consideration.

I want to take this opportunity to deliver this message to you, President Obama, on behalf of the powerless of Nuba's Women.

There is no improvement in the situation of human rights violations in Sudan, and in particular, in the Nuba Mountains in the last 29 months. I definitely fear for my life in Sudan as well as those of my fellow people and family members in the Nuba Mountains. There is an active systematic genocide currently being conducted against the people of the Nuba Mountains; civilians are bombed from the air daily.

Women in Sudan are living with double trauma. First is from the consequence of war and impunity—their abnormal life and the gloomy future of their children exposed to crime in the camp, without education, and with no hope of jobs. The second is from injustice. They see the perpetrators moving freely even after the ICC issued warrants for their arrest, while women, elders and children are dying from starvation and hunger, lack of health care, education, shelter, and lack of protection from increasing insecurity and continued violence. From my heart as a mother, after what I have seen after the bombing attacks and in the camps, I have to ask for justice.

Please consider the protection of Sudanese women and children in war zones, which includes the IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) and refugee camps due to insecurity, as part of your legacy on Sudan. Many women in Sudan and I are ready to work for lasting peace if you only hear and follow the words of your mothers.

For over three decades the civil war tore apart my home region of Nuba Mountains, where I have suffered much personal loss of family—men and women of my region, friends, and parents of future children. This war against the indigenous black people of Sudan, many of whom are Muslim, Christian and other believers, extended to Blue Nile, Darfur and eastern Sudan. Our whole country was and continues to be ravaged by this campaign of genocide, subjugation, and the enslavement of black people carried out by the current regime in Sudan.

My husband, Ahmed Omer, was arrested on December 11, 1990 with other 300 influential people from the Nuba Mountains by the NCP (National Congress Party). A few days after my husband was arrested I was arrested in Kadugli and held for a few days with my 20 months old daughter, Eman. After I was released I fled to Khartoum. We became a displaced family west of Omdurman for 14 years (1990- 2004). I received an unofficial report that Ahmed was killed by

the NCP security services. Today, 23 years later, I do not know whether he is alive, and nobody knows where the others are.

In 2001, I founded Ru'ya Association, a national women's organization of educated Nuba women in Omdurman to support IDP women in the shanty area around Omdurman city. (Please see www.ruyaassociation.blogspot.com). I have a Masters degree in Gender and Development and a Bachelors degree in Family Science. In 2009, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice named me "Woman Peacemaker of the Year."

Immediately following the 2002 ceasefire, Ru'ya established a presence in the Nuba Mountains. In 2003, we established a women's center there. Our program focused on enabling women to contribute to the rebuilding of their communities and on helping women to adjust and rehabilitate after returning home from IDP camps. Ru'ya also established a Vocational Training Center for war-affected children and formed Women's Solidarity Fund Group for peace and development.

In June 2011, a new war started in South Kordofan State/Nuba Mountains, ending almost six years of peace between the GoS (Government of Sudan) and the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army). On June 6, 2011, Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) commenced aerial bombardments and intensified ground assaults on civilian populated areas in Kadugli. In Kadugli town, residents in the largely SPLM-inhabited areas were warned by both the SAF and the SPLA to evacuate the area. I fled Kadugli the next day, June 7, 2011, and walked for more than 20 kilometers, carrying my aunt (over 100 years old) in a wheelbarrow. We were at high risk when arriving at check points set up to control the movement of people and arrest them. NCP security services were searching for intellectual (educated) Nuba women and men and those who held positions in NGOs in South Kordofan State.

On June 7, 2011, Ru'ya's main office, neighboring the SPLM office in Kadugli, was looted. All office equipment, vehicles, generators, computers, and all valuable things were taken or destroyed. All staff had to flee to Khartoum and neighboring country. Ru'ya's programs and projects were suspended as we also lost our partners and jobs. The military and PDF (Popular Defense Forces) entered my house and took everything inside (cupboards, beds, laptops, books, etc.). To this day, the PDF occupy the former Ru'ya office. It pains me to remember many of the young girls, mothers and young men in my town who were killed in cold blood in the same dark week.

From that moment, I and my family scattered as displaced in many states or as refugees in more than three countries. My name was (and remains) on a black list with NCP security services as one of the Nuba women chairing Ru'ya Association and an active woman in defending women/human rights in the region. I proceeded to Khartoum. After the news of arrival of IDPs in Khartoum, the security men came searching for me. I then traveled to River Nile State in north Sudan to secure myself. As a human rights activist for over 25 years, I have been detained and arrested many times in both Sudan and South Sudan.

I knew I was not safe in Sudan and consulted Africa Human Rights Defender Project to rescue my life. Arrest always means torture and often death. They responded, and I was temporarily relocated in Kampala, Uganda on July 19, 2011. After a month, my daughter joined me in Kampala, but the rest of the family could not. I left six family members behind in real need. Since that time I am out of my country seeking safety, and now I am in the US.

In 2012, I crossed the border to South Sudan to assess the situation of Nuba people in Yida refugee camp where I spent bad terrifying days witnessing the status of 78,000 refugees from Nuba Mountains; 80% were women, children and elderly. They told me their stories of how rape was used as a weapon of war against women and girls and is not reported. Five hundred women and children were abducted from one village in January 2012, and no one knows what happened to them up to now because of the absence of NGOs to track the widespread human rights violations.

Security was the biggest concern for women as the humanitarian situation was very severe. The journey from Nuba Mountains can take 7-16 days to reach Yida camp. More than 6000 unaccompanied children between the ages of 3 to 17 years were living in miserable conditions in the camp with very little access to food, education and water.

Since my last visit to Yida I carry a heavy burden on my shoulders from a venerable mother and some of the unaccompanied children when they gathered around me at very dark night and asked, "Is there really some one hearing us telling our problems?"

"I am here for you," I replied.

"Please be truly honest, tell the world that we want to be free from slavery, we hope to smell freedom and be human beings," a 12 year old girl said.

President Bashir started a new campaign. He said he will end all of the rebels in Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur by 2014. Abduction, disappearances, arrests and imprisonment continue. In the last two weeks more refugees are running across the border to Yida Camp in South Sudan. More than 15,000 bombardment survivors from west Dilling cannot cross the border; they are now in the caves of western Jabels suffering from insecurity and hunger.

It is enough. Is it difficult for you to raise your hand and say "enough" and stop the killing of children? Is it fair that Sudanese continue to die and the US gives money to the GoS? If the political situation is not addressed and aid is not delivered to the people remaining in the Nuba Mountains/South Kordofan and to the Yida camp residents immediately, the situation will reach the climax level. And, it will be too late and shame on the international community.

President Obama, I will never forget the day you stood strongly and spoke about the Darfur crisis. This gave me hope that I never dreamed of. Still your mothers, sisters and victims of Sudan wars are waiting for many years to make sure that what you said you will do. If not, tell those who are waiting, "Don't wait for me, I changed my principles, policy and mind as President of the USA."

I will never give up fighting for human rights and peace. Have you?

With hands raised in hope and prayer,

Most respectfully,

Zeinab Blandia