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**Fifth periodic report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human  
Rights on the situation of human rights in the Sudan**

**Killings of civilians by militia in Buram locality, South Darfur**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. From 28 August until the beginning of September 2006, militia groups from the Habbania tribe<sup>1</sup> embarked on a brutal campaign in the Buram locality of South Darfur. The campaign, marked by widespread targeting of civilians from tribes that are locally referred to as being of African origin, wholesale burning of villages, looting and forced displacement, appears to have been conducted with the knowledge and material support of Government authorities. The attacks resulted in a death toll that could amount to several hundred civilians.
2. Furthermore, the large-scale attacks resulted in an extremely chaotic displacement, causing widespread separation of families and scores of missing children. Subsequent attacks on IDPs fleeing the fighting, carried out by militia from the government-allied Fallata tribe, caused the displaced population to scatter even further, hampering efforts to deliver aid to those affected. According to a witness from Amoodh Al-Akhdar, *“Most of our people are hiding in the bushes. The only routes connecting inhabited villages pass through Janjaweed held areas, while other roads have been submersed by water because of the rain. There are injured and sick who were caught in the fighting. Many people have gone missing. People cannot leave the area without protection. We call for the international community to intervene immediately to help the civilians in the area”*.
3. The information included in this report was obtained through interviews with tribal leaders, AMIS and IDPs in Sesseban, in Ed al Fursan locality, and in Nyala after the attacks took place. Gathering of information on the events in Buram is on-going. However, human rights officers have obtained names of the attacked villages, information about the attackers and some of their alleged leaders, and

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<sup>1</sup> Habbania is one of the main Arab tribes of Darfur. They are mainly found in Buram locality in the South-West of South Darfur. Tensions had been building in the area since the beginning of the conflict and many villages were attacked by militias in April and May 2006.

details about the number of casualties in several of the villages with clear patterns emerging from witnesses' accounts.

4. Much of the violence took place in an area of the Buram locality, 120 kilometers south/southwest of Nyala. Many of the targeted villages were previously attacked in April 2006 reportedly by members from Habbania tribe, who according to witnesses, also participated in the recent attacks. Civilians mainly from Zaghawa, Massalit, and Misseriya Jebel tribes fled the area following the April offensive, but some had returned to their villages for cultivation purposes after the beginning of the rainy season. Witnesses reported that the recent attacks were far more brutal towards civilians than previous attacks. Furthermore, if in April the SLA presence was significant in the area, all witnesses interviewed claimed that, during the recent attacks, armed resistance was either non-existent or minimal. Most of the villages attacked were under government control<sup>2</sup>.
  
5. Reportedly, the area is currently deserted as the majority of the population has fled. Displacement of inhabitants from these villages may have been the ultimate objective of the recent attacks. According to several people from the area, the motive behind the attacks was to change the demography of the region before the arrival of international troops. This area was not the traditional homeland for tribes of African origin. The present conflict seems to be an attempt to remove the tribes of African origin and make it an entirely Arab tribe area. This was reportedly done with the assumption that any international troops would focus on maintaining the status quo in the area.

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<sup>2</sup> During April and May 2006, government forces embarked on a road "clearing" offensive in an attempt to curb the rebel presence in the area. After the signing of the DPA, the SLA presence in the area mainly of support to Mini Minnawi further fractionalized and divided into different locations. In May 2006, representatives of the SLA Minnawi's faction opened an office in Joaghena, in Buram locality. According to several sources, this SLA group was still present in the area during the attacks on 28 August but did not engage in fighting. Reportedly, they fled Joaghena together with the civilian population.

## II. OVERVIEW OF MAIN ATTACKS

6. Between 28 and 30 August 2006, 300 to 1000 armed militia from the Habbania tribe attacked approximately 47 villages in the locality of Buram, forcing the civilian population to flee. Al Amodal Akhdar was attacked twice. The attackers, reportedly from Shorab and Wad Hijjam villages, traveled on camel and horseback and wore uniforms. The population of the villages which were attacked is estimated to be about 10,000, and mainly of the Zaghawa, Massalit and Misserya Jebel tribes. The attacks began on 28 August in Tabaldiyah, Ligedeiba, Geweghina, Tirtish, Kuria, Bagaga, Um-Dremeh and Hillat Tama villages. Hundreds of people were reported to have been killed and injured; cattle and property were extensively looted. On 29 August, two more villages - Arada and Bir Sigir - were attacked and many houses were burned by the same group of militia. On 30 August, the village of Amorodh Al-Akdhar, which was used as a refuge by some of those fleeing the previous offensives, was also attacked. The displaced population was targeted while fleeing during the following days, mainly by members of Fallata tribe.
  
7. Detailed eyewitness accounts were received on the attacks on five villages: Geweghina, Amoodh Al-Akhdar, Tabaldiyah, Ligedeiba and Tirtish (the latter four are within approximately 30 kilometers from Geweghina). In addition, information on attacks on other villages in the area was also received<sup>3</sup>. Reports by witnesses indicate that about 45 villages were targeted during the campaign. However, some of them might represent smaller clusters normally referred to under a single village name.

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<sup>3</sup> List of villages alleged to have been attacked: Amood Al Akhdar, Tabaldiyah, Tirtish, Harubai, Geweghina, Bir, Sigir, Habok, Arada, Um-Dremeh, Aradeba, Bagaga, Ghoz, Ujba, Sook, Hila Jadeed, Ligedeiba, Hillat Tama, Kuria and Ujba Tabaya.

### ***Tabaldiyah***

8. Tabaldiyah, south-east of Geweghina, was inhabited primarily by the Misseriya Jebel, a tribe considered African in South Darfur. Witnesses reported that on 28 August, at 6:30 a.m., the village was attacked by hundreds of Habbania militiamen. The attackers, who wore *khaki* uniforms similar to those worn by government forces, stopped their animals at the edge of the village, and entered by foot. As they approached houses, the attackers fired indiscriminately into civilian dwellings, shooting those inside, and systematically setting fire to houses. Possessions, including all livestock, were extensively looted. Civilians attempting to flee the village were caught and fired at. Reportedly, many women and children were killed in this manner. We received reports that about 40 civilians were killed in Tabaldiyah, in addition to 35 in the nearby Harubai village. These figures are in the process of being confirmed. According to eyewitnesses, civilians attempted to defend the village using light weapons, but were quickly overwhelmed.

### ***Geweghina***

9. On 28 August, Geweghina (about 20 kilometers south of Tulus locality) was attacked by Habbania militia. The village was inhabited primarily by members of Zaghawa and Mobi tribes. Witnesses describe two prongs of attackers coming from the east and from the north; those from the north were equipped with vehicle-mounted machine guns, with which they opened heavy fire into the village. The attackers wore *khaki* uniforms. The population fled eastward and apparently ran into the other prong of attackers, who killed those who they could catch. The attackers then moved into the village, systematically setting fire to civilian dwellings and looting property. Civilians who were too weak to flee, mostly children and elderly, reportedly burnt to death in the burning houses. Reportedly, 27 people were killed and about the same number wounded. The village is reportedly empty. Geweghina was among those villages previously attacked by Habbania militia in April 2006.

### ***Tirtish***

10. Tirtish, about 40 kilometers southwest of Geweghina, was inhabited by a variety of tribes of African origin, namely Massalit, Misseriya Jebel, Tama, Birgit, Dajo, Abdarak, among others. Witnesses reported that the village was attacked on 28 August by hundreds of Habbania militiamen. At around 11.30 am, the perpetrators, many wearing *khaki* uniforms similar to those worn by government forces, arrived at the village on horse and camelback and were accompanied by several vehicles. The attackers possessed heavy weaponry, including machine guns; one witness also reported the use of rocket-propelled grenades. A witness reported that the militia stormed into town, shooting at civilians and setting fire to dwellings and shops. Reportedly, women and children were thrown into burning dwellings as they attempted to flee. Children as young as three years old, including the daughter of an interviewee, were killed in this manner. A witness reported that he personally participated in the burial of 62 people killed in Tirtish that day (he himself later fled), and estimates the total civilian death toll in the village at between 80 and 90. He reports that at least 40 people in the village, including many children, are unaccounted for.

### ***Ligedeiba***

11. Ligedeiba, about 20 kilometers southwest of Geweghina, was inhabited by Zaghawa and Habbania. The two populations were physically separated by the town market. Ligedeiba was the site of a Habbania militia attack in March 2006, which caused much of the population of African origin to flee. As of August 2006, however, there was a sizable Zaghawa population living in Ligedeiba. On 28 August, at 11 a.m., Habbania militiamen in *khaki* uniforms similar to those worn by government forces attacked the village. In addition to camels and horses, a vehicle with a mounted machine gun was observed among the attackers. Witnesses, who were in hiding during the time of the attack, were unable to provide information on the number of casualties, but confirmed that only the Zaghawa part of Ligedeiba was subjected to attack, burned and looted. As a result, the Zaghawa population which survived the attack fled the village.

### ***Amoodh Al-Akhdar***

12. Amoodh Al-Akhdar, south of Geweghina, is a primarily Zaghawa and Massalit village under the Habbania administration. Eyewitnesses reported that on 30 August, at 6 a.m., hundreds of Habbania militia men approached the village from the north (from the direction of Amoodh Al-Sahab). The militiamen traveled on horse and camelback and were accompanied by two vehicles with mounted machine guns. The militiamen wore *khaki* uniforms, some with red or white insignia. The residents attempted to flee when it became clear that the village was about to be attacked. But from the outskirts, the assailants fired extensively and indiscriminately, using heavy weapons. The attackers then proceeded into the village, firing at civilians located inside and outside their residences. The villagers reported that during the attack perpetrators shouted “Kill the slaves!”<sup>4</sup> Attackers also systematically burned civilian dwellings, in some instances using hand grenades, and looted possessions. A witness reported having observed a government Antonov plane flying over Amoodh Al-Akhdar village and hearing bombing in a nearby village, but this account was not corroborated by other sources. Reportedly, between 24 and 43 civilians were killed, including women and children. These figures cannot be independently confirmed.

### ***Subsequent attacks by militia***

13. Several sources reported that after fleeing the violence, civilians were attacked again while en route to Sessaban. These attacks were mainly perpetrated by militia members from the Fallata tribe. While attempting to escape, civilians scattered more widely in the bush, resulting in family separations. Several civilians, particularly the elderly and children, went missing after these attacks and their whereabouts are still unknown. There seems to have been coordination between the main tribes involved in the attacks. A witness reported that during one of these attacks a Fallata militiaman told him “We received a phone call from

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<sup>4</sup> In previous attacks on villages in South Darfur, attackers have often used the word “slaves” to refer to civilians from tribes of African origin.



the Habbania saying that they attacked you, and we were ordered to attack and loot those who were fleeing, so that people will not be able to reach Sesseban.”

14. Immediately after the attack on Amoodh-al-Akhdar, a group of Zaghawa SLA fighters with family ties to the area went to the village in an attempt to find survivors. After several days of collecting people scattered in the bush, they were notified that an AMIS mission would be arriving to meet them. They emerged from the bush on 9 September, near Amoodh Al-Akhdar village. While waiting for AMIS (which meanwhile cancelled the mission due to heavy rains), the villagers were once again attacked by Habbania militia (reportedly the same group which attacked the village on 30 August). Several civilians were injured. Some of the villagers fled to Sesseban, but the whereabouts of hundreds of people from Amoodh Al-Akhdar village, including children, is still unknown.
  
15. Multiple interviewees claimed that the Fallata militiamen came from a nearby location, in Al Tomat. During a brief mission to Al Tomat, the presence of several armed men in the village was observed. Fallata leadership in Al Tomat claimed that any violence carried out was in self defense against *Tora Bora* [rebels] and that the Fallata had a duty to protect the displaced population and would not harm them.
  
16. While Human Rights Officers were visiting Al Tomat, the Fallata leaders showed them two Misseriya Jebel tribesmen, one of them a 12 year-old child, in an attempt to illustrate that their actions were aimed at protecting the local population. However, it is believed that the two tribesmen were captured. When in Sesseban, the delegation was able to identify the father of the child. Efforts to reunite the family did not succeed because by the time the delegation returned to Al Tomat the two individuals had already been moved to Tulus. The Fallata leadership claimed that they were moved at their own request.

### III. BACKGROUND ON THE ATTACKS

17. The root cause of the current events can be traced back to 2003. When the conflict started in 2003, in most parts of Darfur and in Buram in particular, rebels attracted the support and sympathy of non-Arab tribes. In 2003, when the rebel movements were formed, most people of African origin were suspected to have some links with the rebels, while the Habbania were believed to have strong ties with the government and other government-affiliated militias. Describing the way people of African origin were perceived in the area when the conflict started, one local Habbania leader, said; *“They had Thuraya phones and when Buram was attacked the migrant groups<sup>5</sup> were very happy and welcomed the presence of the rebels. They were also suspected to be rebels’ informants”*.
18. In the 1970s, the area had received many groups of migrants mostly of non-Arab origin, who were fleeing drought from the North. These were Zaghawa, Massalit, Misseriya Jebel, Mobi, Tama and a small number of Fur. The number of immigrants reached a high level in 1984 due to famine in other parts of the region. New arrivals occupied “empty” land and started cultivating on what was believed to be land that belongs to the Habbania. While these groups kept practicing their own culture and having their own Sheikhs, they administratively were under Habbania.
19. When from February to May 2006 the security in the area deteriorated, the majority of the displaced population, mainly from Zaghawa, Massalit and Berno tribes, moved to Nyala and a few to El Radom. In April, following clashes between SLA fighters and People’s Defence Forces (PDF)<sup>6</sup> members in Buram locality, which resulted in the death of four PDF combatants, Habbania leaders from Buram arrived in Geweghina. The latter, who were accompanied by armed

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<sup>5</sup> People of African origin are considered as migrants as they are not the indigenous inhabitants of Buram area.

<sup>6</sup> PDF are paramilitary groups associated with the Government of Sudan.

- men, closed the village's water source, forcing the villagers to move to Ligedeiba. Geweghina was subsequently attacked and the remaining population fled.
20. On 24 August 2006, a village called Songu near El Radom in the Buram area was attacked by the National Redemption Front (NRF). It was alleged that over 30 Government military vehicles were seized by the NRF. Reportedly, about seven people were killed and many others wounded. Information received indicates that many of the casualties were military and that some were evacuated to the Nyala military hospital. This attack might have provoked the attacks by the Habbania during the following days.
21. A Habbania leader and member of the Habbania Consultant Council in Nyala, confirmed that Habbania militia attacked the villages between the 28 and 30 August 2006. According to the interviewee, since June 2006, inhabitants of the Buram locality observed the presence of people whom they believed were from the SLA: *"They came during market days on bicycles. This phenomenon started increasing every market day"*. The leader added that government authorities had told them not to worry; that the people they were spotting in the area belonged to the SLA Mini Minnawi's faction and that their presence was related to the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). However, according to the Habbania leader, *"The Habbania were not convinced but accepted. However, last week, the same people attacked Buram, occupied Geweghina and kidnapped three girls and two boys from Habbania tribe"*.
22. No independent reports about this alleged attack in Buram by the SLA were received. According to the Habbania leader, during the attacks, the SLA killed the brother of Agid<sup>7</sup> Ayadi and physically assaulted his wife. The Habbania leader further added that another reason for the attacks related to the fact that *"these people"* [the rebels] were controlling 11 markets in the area. He also did not deny the involvement of Fallata militia fighting alongside with Habbania as both tribes

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<sup>7</sup> Agid is the Arabic word designating a leader of a group of traditional fighters called Faris.

share common border land and some of the 11 markets belonged to the Fallata. According to the Habbania leader, “*We attacked after we reported the incidents many times to the Government and after we were provoked and attacked. These attacks were mainly organized by groups of Agids in self defense; they had received a list with names of 100 Agids who were going to be killed by the NRF/SLA. They were planning to kill Agid Ayadi but by mistake they killed his brother*”. The Habbania leader rejected, however, allegations that women and children were among the people affected during the attacks as “*women and children were long ago evacuated from Geweghina and only strong men from SLA who can carry weapons remained in the area*”.

23. In nearly all of the attacks documented, victims and witnesses made reference to the presence of two Habbania leaders with ties to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF): *Agid Ayadi* and *Umda Mohammed Musa*. These two men were also believed to have been personally involved in directing the April Habbania militia attacks in the area. Several sources reported that on 25-26 August 2006, in Wad Hajum, *Agid Ayadi* and *Umda Mohammed Musa* organized a recruitment meeting for the upcoming attacks, for which the stated purpose was “*removing Zurga [African tribes] from the area*”. Two witnesses recognized government officials (some in higher-ranking military uniforms) at the meeting, but could not identify any of them by name or state definitively to which branches of government they belonged. Reportedly, during the meeting, *Agid Ayadi* and *Umda Mohammed Musa* spoke openly of government blessing and tangible support for the mission in the form of weapons and vehicles, and invited anyone who wished to participate to join.

#### **IV. RESPONSE BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

24. On 3 September 2006, a press conference on the humanitarian and security situation in South Darfur, with a particular focus on the situation in Buram locality was organized by the Governor of South Darfur and Minawi’s faction of

the SLA. However, no representatives of the SLA actually attended the conference. The Commissioner of Buram and the South Darfur Minister of Health also participated in the meeting. The Deputy Governor, who chaired the meeting, reported that the security situation in Buram was stable with the exception of some tribal incidents in a few localized areas. He further stated that “We have succeeded in resolving the problem” and that the Government had gathered supplies to assist the affected population. According to the Commissioner of Buram, the attacks in Buram between 27 and 31 August 2006 occurred “because of earlier attacks by the rebels in April 2006” and were conducted by militia groups.

25. Since 3 September, UNMIS and OCHA have held several meetings with local government authorities in Nyala at the most senior levels. Local authorities have stated that the recent attacks were a reaction to previous actions undertaken by the SLA in the Buram locality. Reportedly, previous to the attacks on 28-30 August 2006, SLA fighters physically assaulted and abducted a number of civilians residing in areas under their control, looted property and killed 15 members from the Habbania and other tribes in the area. The authorities stated that the SLA had been warned about a possible reaction by the Habbania if the abuses continued. The authorities further stated that there was no Sudanese military presence outside the Buram town area and particularly no presence at all in the West of the state, where most of the fighting is said to have taken place, and that no material or manpower support had been given to the tribes during the attacks. The authorities indicated that this was the usual tribal conflict and that the civilian population may have been targeted because they were perhaps perceived to be supporting the SLA.

## **V. CONCLUSIONS**

26. Based on information collected, the following conclusions can be drawn. The attacks, spearheaded by Habbania militia, were massive in scale, involving a large

number of villages, and were carried out over only a few days. Government knowledge, if not complicity, in the attacks is almost certain. In all the above cases, militia members wore *khaki* uniforms similar to those worn by government forces, carried heavy weaponry in most cases, and were accompanied by vehicles. Several interviewees noted that the Habbania militiamen themselves do not possess vehicles nor the kind of heavy weapons used during the attacks (such as RPGs and vehicle-mounted machine guns). Furthermore, reports regarding participation of government officials in the Habbania meeting in Wad Hajum on 25-26 August 2006 also indicate previous government knowledge about the attacks. The attacks appeared to have been directed at civilians as reports indicate that the rebel presence in the area was not significant. The attacks appeared to have targeted civilians from tribes of African origin in what appeared to be an attempt to drive them from the Habbania homeland and therefore completely change the ethnic balance in the area.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **27. To the Government of National Unity:**

- **Establish an independent national inquiry to investigate the events in the area of Buram, and bring to justice those responsible for conducting the attacks;**
- **Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance to the displaced population and support the reunification of families;**
- **Create conditions conducive to the return of the displaced population by ensuring better protection to populations in the area and more frequent police patrols.**

### **28. To the African Union Mission on the Sudan:**

- **Engage with the Government of National Unity in order to deploy as soon as possible protection forces to the area, mainly in Geweghina and in**

**Amoodh Al-Akhdar, and establish minimal security conditions for the return of civilians.**