**Sudan: Former UN official warns of Nuba Mts crisis**

**By Jason Straziuso**

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NAIROBI, Kenya—The former top U.N. humanitarian official in Sudan warned on Tuesday that Khartoum's military is carrying out crimes against humanity in the country's southern Nuba Mountains in acts that remind him of Darfur.Following a visit to the southern part of Sudan, Mukesh Kapila said he saw military planes striking villagers, the destruction of food stocks and "literally a scorched-earth policy."

Kapila said the attacks reminded him of what he witnessed in Sudan's Darfur region in 2003 and 2004, when the Arab government targeted black tribes. Kapila served as the U.N.'s top humanitarian official in Sudan at the time. He said that world governments must now act to prevent another Darfur-type situation in the Nuba Mountains.

"When we were there we heard an Antonov (plane) above us," he said. "Women and children started running and going into the nooks and caves of a mountain, a small hill rather. ... We saw a burned-out village. As we left the border there was burned place after burned place after burned place. There was hardly a person to be seen."

Kapila said the Nuba Mountains region is facing an oncoming hunger crisis because the region's residents haven't been working the fields for fear of overhead attack by military planes. Sudan has refused to let aid agencies into the region. The U.N., the U.S. and other world governments and groups have condemned the attacks that are taking place against civilians. Kapila said that hunger in the region would peak between May and October of this year.

"Because of the scorched-earth policy of the Khartoum bombing, farmers can't be out in the field. They spend more energy trying to hide. They can spend the good amount of their day in the caves," he said. "Probably no more than 10 to 15 percent of the normal harvest of the Nuba Mountains is expected to be brought in this year." He added: "We are at the threshold of considerable hunger."

An open letter to President Barack Obama printed earlier this month and co-written by a genocide scholar at the University of Arkansas -- Samuel Totten -- and signed by many others, said the Khartoum government has targeted the people of the Nuba Mountains before -- in the late 19802 and 1990s. Many there starved during the period, the letter said.

The government of Sudan has claimed it is targeting a military group in the region -- the Sudanese People's Liberation Army-North. But Totten's letter said that photographic evidence has proven that the bombings are indiscriminate. "We beseech you and your administration to place pressure on the United Nations to act now to open a humanitarian corridor in order to provide humanitarian aid to those in the Nuba Mountains," Totten's letter said.

Kapila noted that Sudan President Omar al-Bashir is wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court for killings and rapes committed in Darfur. He said war crimes are also taking place in Nuba."Darfur was the first genocide of the 21st century," he said. "And the second genocide of the 21st century may very well be taking place now, in the Nuba Mountains."

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