



HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH

## “Men With No Mercy”

Rapid Support Forces Attacks against Civilians in Darfur, Sudan



# SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Civilians displaced by attacks of the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces seeking safety in caves in Jebel Marra, Darfur, March 2, 2015.

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***“[The government soldiers] confiscated our belongings. They took our livestock. They beat the men. And then they raped us. They raped us in a group. Some women were raped by 8 or 10 men. Seventeen women were raped together. All of us were raped. Even the underage girls were raped.”***

– MAHASSAN , 38, RESIDENT OF THE GOLO AREA,  
JULY 2015

***“I am deeply sorry. But you must understand that this was not my endeavor, I was under the command of men with no mercy. I wish I could turn back the time.”***

– IBRAHIM, 19, SUDANESE MILITARY DEFECTOR  
WHO ADMITTED KILLING A YOUNG WOMAN,  
JULY 2015

**The Rapid Support Forces (al-Quwat al-Da'm al-Sari' in Arabic, or RSF) is a Sudanese government force under the command of the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). The RSF was created in mid-2013 to militarily defeat rebel armed groups throughout Sudan.**

The RSF led two counterinsurgency campaigns in the long embattled region of Darfur in 2014 and 2015 in which its forces repeatedly attacked villages, burned and looted homes, beating, raping and executing villagers. The RSF received support in the air and on the ground from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and other government-



backed militia groups, including a variety of proxy militias, commonly known as Janjaweed.

The first campaign named “Operation Decisive Summer” took place primarily in South Darfur and North Darfur between late February and early May 2014. The second, “Operation Decisive Summer II,” took place primarily in and around Jebel Marra, the mountainous region located



primarily in Central Darfur, between early January 2015 and the onset of the rainy season in June 2015.

Based on research conducted between May 2014 and July 2015, this report describes serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law perpetrated by the RSF and other Sudanese government forces during the two RSF-led counterinsurgency campaigns in Darfur.

**Women and children displaced by attacks of the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces in Golo, Central Darfur, sitting under a tree in rebel-controlled territory, February 28, 2015.**

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**A small village near the town of Golo, Central Darfur, burning in the distance after an attack by Sudanese security forces, March 2, 2015.**

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Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 151 survivors and witnesses of abuses in Darfur who fled Sudan to Chad and South Sudan, 16 who were interviewed inside Darfur, and an additional 45 victims and witnesses in Darfur by telephone.

Human Rights Watch found that the RSF committed a wide range of horrific abuses, including the forced displacement of entire communities; the destruction of wells, food stores and other infrastructure necessary for sustaining life in a harsh desert environment; and the plunder of the collective wealth of families, such as livestock. Among the most egregious abuses against civilians were torture, extrajudicial killings and mass rapes.

Many civilians were killed by the RSF when they refused to leave their homes or give up their livestock, or when they tried to stop RSF fighters from raping them or members of their family.

The RSF violations of international humanitarian law amount to war crimes. The mass rape and killings and other abuses appear part of widespread and systematic attacks on civilian populations that may constitute crimes against humanity. Crimes against humanity are serious offenses, including murder, torture and rape, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population. As Human Rights Watch research has found, the RSF committed rape in numerous towns and villages over an extended period of time, making them widespread. First-hand accounts of orders from commanders to commit crimes and the RSF's repeated use of abusive practices indicate that they were systematic.

The attack on the town of Golo, in central Jebel Marra, was emblematic of RSF atrocities. The Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) rebel faction had contested control of Golo at various times since the Darfur conflict began in 2003, but during the past year the town had been firmly under government control.

On January 24 and 25, the RSF took over the town, burning buildings and looting. Human Rights Watch interviewed 21 people who had been in Golo and neighboring villages at the time. Nearly everyone interviewed said that they



witnessed killings, rape, and widespread beating and looting.

Nur al-Huda, a young woman from Golo, told Human Rights Watch that she was in her compound with her father and sisters when the RSF attacked: “They killed my father. My father was defending us so that we would not be raped and he was beaten to death. ... After they killed my father they raped the three of us. Me and my two sisters. ... After they raped us they stole everything.”

During the three weeks after they attacked Golo, the RSF continued to rape scores of women and girls in the town and many more in the neighboring village of Bardani. Many of the women were gang raped, often in front of community members who were forced to watch. Those who resisted were killed. The naked bodies of many dead women were later discovered in the streets; other women were burned alive. The survivors of the Golo mass rape have not had access to medical or psychosocial services.

Many survivors of RSF attacks fled to camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in government-controlled territory or the hills and mountains outside of government-controlled areas. Those who fled to IDP camps are almost entirely dependent on the international community for a

**Fighters from the rebel Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid faction near Sarong, Central Darfur, March 4, 2015.**

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modicum of protection and subsistence; survivors who fled to the hills, primarily in Jebel Marra and East Jebel Marra, are often unable to return to their farms with no access to desperately needed humanitarian assistance. Both groups remain vulnerable to further abuse.

The United Nations Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has received reports that as many as 130,000 people remain displaced in areas out of the reach of humanitarian agencies. Lacking adequate food, shelter, and medical care, and unable to return to their homes or their farms, there is a risk that they could face death from starvation, illness, or exposure to the elements. RSF attacks were often carried out in areas that had been controlled or contested by two of the most significant rebel factions, including the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi (SLA/MM) in 2014 and the SLA/AW faction in 2015. However, the overwhelming majority of the abuses reported to Human Rights Watch were committed by RSF or other government forces in villages and towns where



Fighters of the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces in captured vehicles celebrate a victory against the rebel Justice and Equality Movement, Goz Dango, South Darfur, April 28, 2015.

© 2015 Reuters



rebels were reportedly never present or had left prior to the attacks. Some RSF attacks even occurred in towns or villages that were entirely under government control.

Human Rights Watch also spoke with five defectors from Sudanese government forces: two RSF members, two SAF soldiers, and one Border Guard. Four of the defectors participated in attacks in Jebel Marra or East Jebel Marra. All five defected to the rebels after having participated in RSF-led counterinsurgency campaigns, during which time they witnessed serious abuses by soldiers. Four of the five said commanding officers ordered their units to carry out atrocities against civilians. One admitted to committing serious crimes himself.

The numerous abuses documented in this report demonstrate the continuing need for an effective and rapidly responsive international force that can help protect civilian populations in Darfur from attack. The abuses also demonstrate that the current African-Union-United-Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, UNAMID, has been hamstrung in its performance and in the implementation of its core mandate to protect civilians.

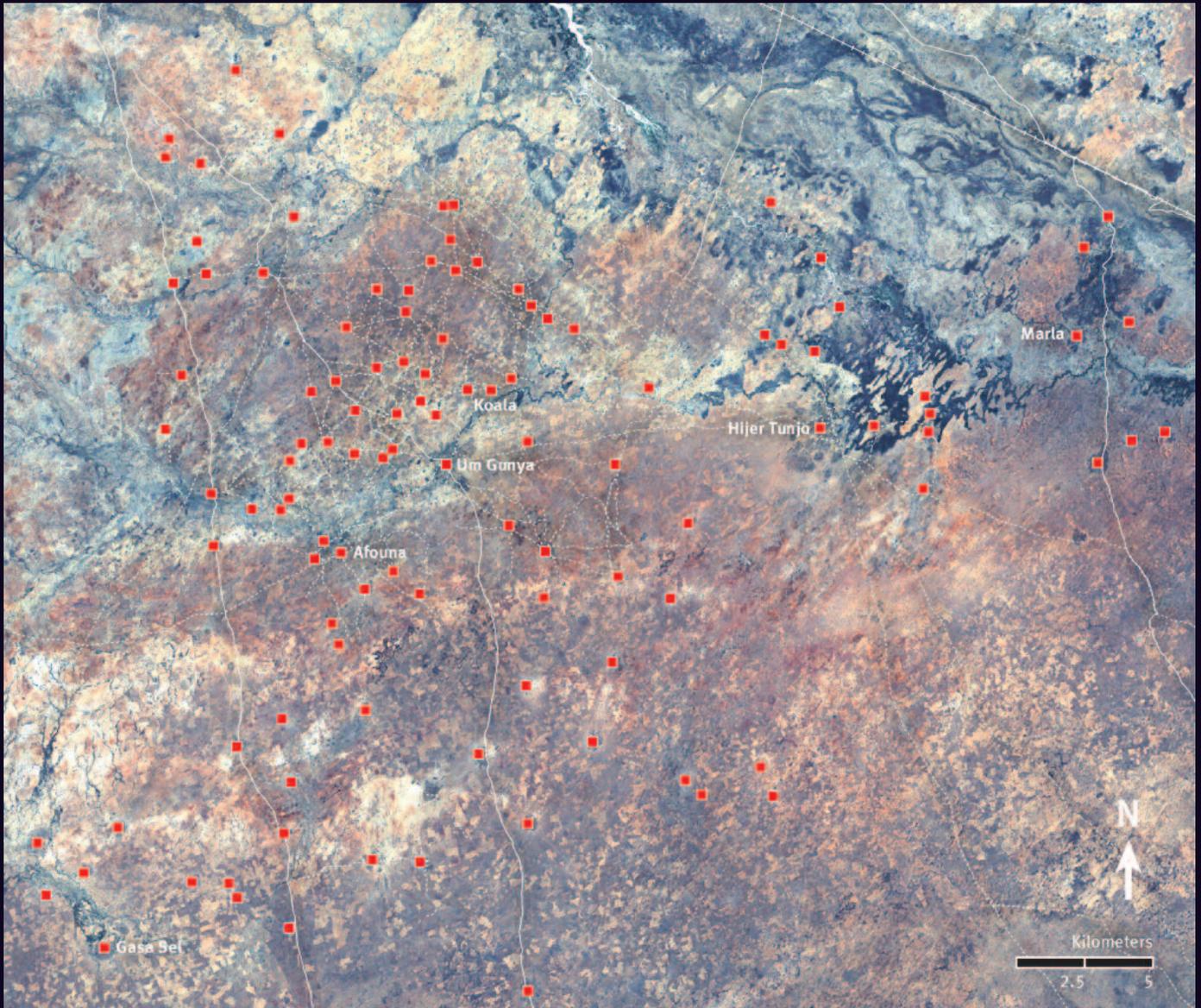
The UN and AU should focus on how to urgently improve and bolster UNAMID's ability to protect civilians from attacks, including the kinds of attacks they have suffered during the RSF-led campaigns, and to effectively investigate and expose abuses without endangering victims and witnesses.

Although UNAMID's mandate includes reporting on human rights abuses, the mission has failed to release any detailed documentation about abuses against civilians during either of the RSF-led counterinsurgency campaigns. Several reports of the UN Secretary General to the UN Security Council have referred to attacks by the RSF causing civilian displacement; however, there has been no indication of magnitude of the other serious abuses, such as sexual violence, extrajudicial killings, and burning of villages.

Human Rights Watch calls on the UN Security Council, the AU Peace and Security Council, and UNAMID to take concrete steps to protect civilians in Darfur from further abuse, including sanctioning individuals responsible for attacks on civilians, to expand and ensure access to humanitarian assistance for victims, including medical and psychosocial care for victims of sexual violence and other forms of trauma, and to press for cooperation with the International Criminal Court's investigation and prosecution of grave international crimes in Darfur.

# SATELLITE IMAGERY ANALYSIS

## PROBABLE ARSON DAMAGE SOUTH OF NYALA, SOUTH DARFUR



Human Rights Watch identified over 110 villages south of Nyala with housing destruction consistent with arson. Affected villages marked in red.  
Human Rights Watch damage assessment based on time series of satellite images recorded on February 12, 2014; June 11, 2014; and January 29, 2015

## Hijer Tunjo



Satellite image of the village of Hijer Tunjo recorded before the government offensive in late February 2014.



Satellite image of the village of Hijer Tunjo recorded after the government offensive in late February 2014, shows extensive areas of housing destruction and evidence of burnt vegetation consistent with an arson attack.

## Um Gunya



Satellite image of the village of Um Gunya recorded before the government offensive in late February 2014.

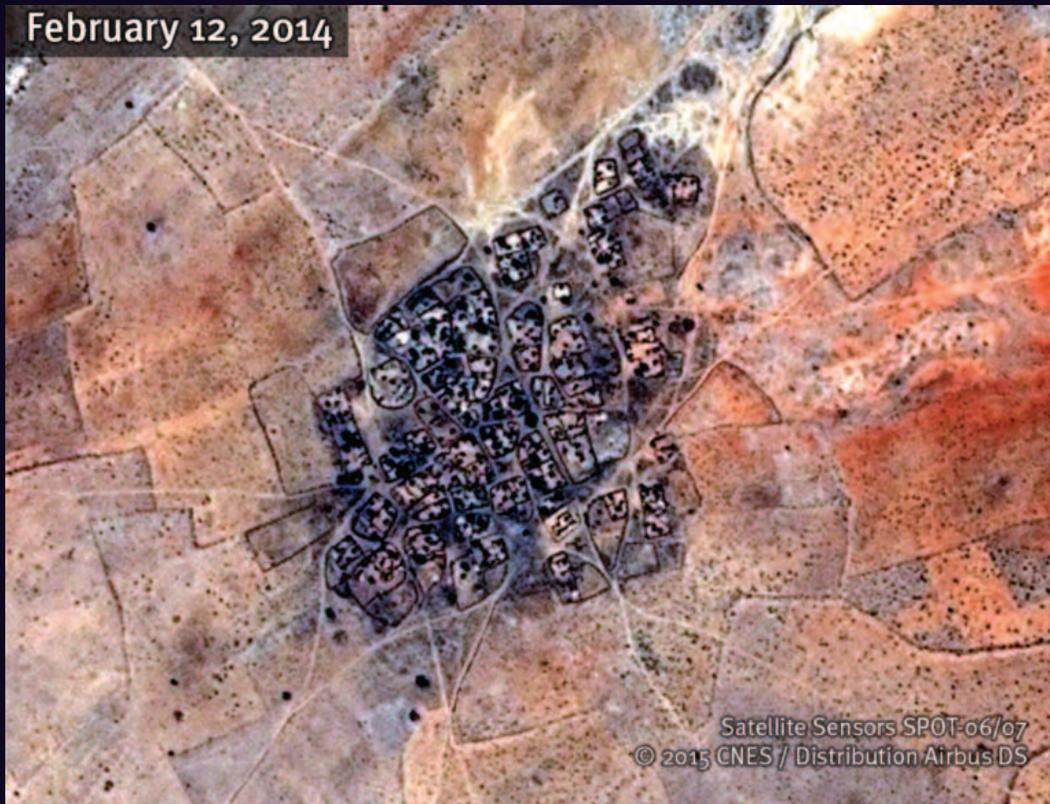


Satellite image of the village of Um Gunya recorded after the government offensive in late February 2014, shows extensive areas of housing destruction and evidence of burnt vegetation consistent with an arson attack.



False-color infrared satellite image of the village of Um Gunya recorded after the government offensive in late February 2014, shows extensive areas of housing destruction and evidence of burnt vegetation consistent with an arson attack. Areas of fire-related damages appear dark purple in this image.

## Afouna



Satellite image of the village of Afouna recorded before the government offensive in late February 2014.



Satellite image of the village of Afouna recorded after the government offensive in late February 2014, shows extensive areas of housing destruction and evidence of burnt vegetation consistent with an arson attack.

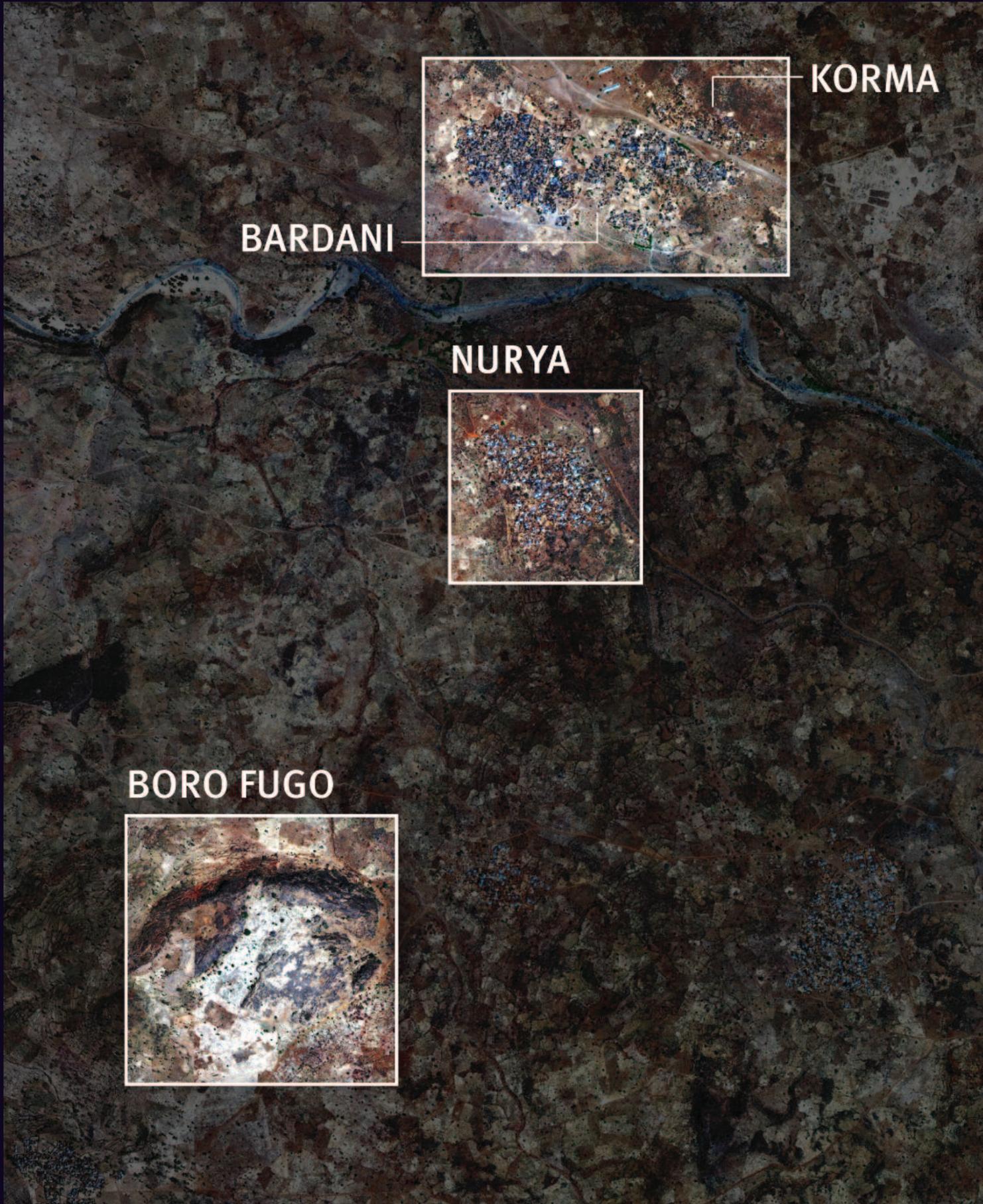
## Gasa Sel



Satellite image of the village of Gasa Sel recorded before the government offensive in late February 2014.



Satellite image of the village of Gasa Sel recorded after the government offensive in late February 2014, shows extensive areas of housing destruction and evidence of burnt vegetation consistent with an arson attack.



BARDANI

KORMA

NURYA

BORO FUGO

Meters

250 500

## CENTRAL DARFUR

Human Rights Watch identified a total of over 340 destroyed buildings and evidence of burnt vegetation in the villages of Bardani and Korma, and a total of over 35 destroyed buildings and evidence of burnt vegetation in the village of Nurya consistent with arson attacks.

## GOLO

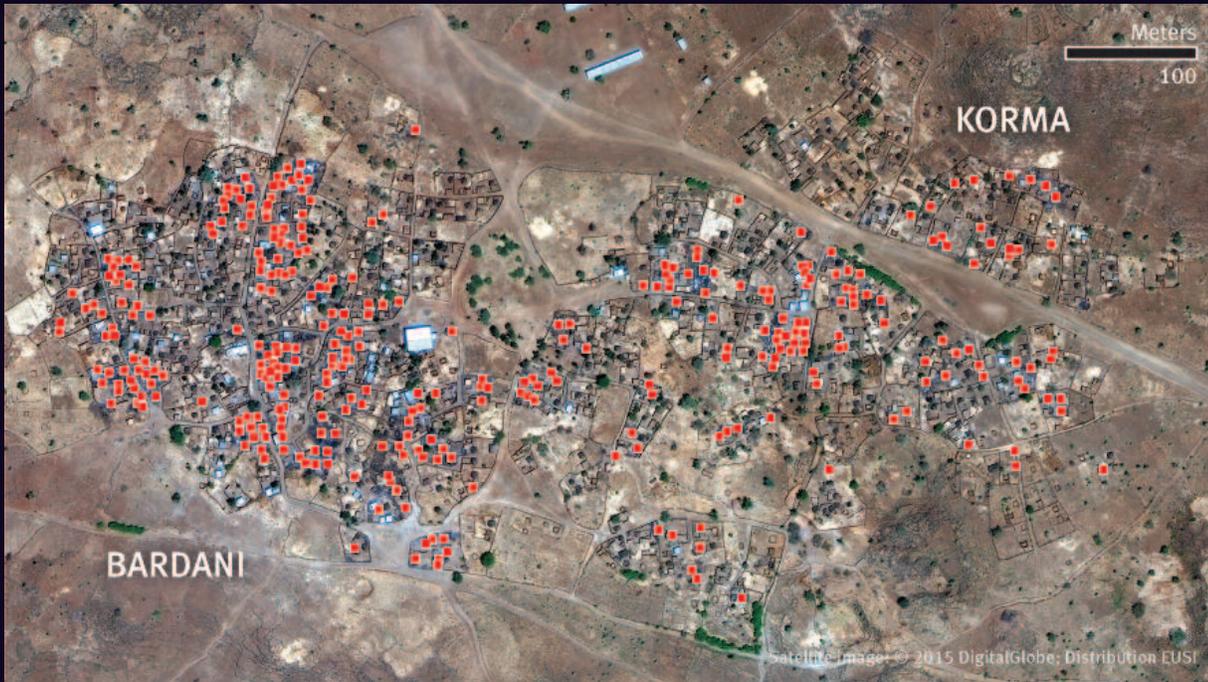


Military Garrison

Hospital

Satellite image: © 2015 DigitalGlobe; Distribution EUSI

## PROBABLE ARSON DAMAGE IN BARDANI AND KORMA, CENTRAL DARFUR



Human Rights Watch damage assessment based on time series of satellite images recorded on October 16, 2014; February 6, 17 2015; March 15, 2015; and April 22, 2015

## PROBABLE ARSON DAMAGE IN NURYA, CENTRAL DARFUR



Human Rights Watch damage assessment based on time series of satellite images recorded on October 16, 2014; February 6, 17 2015; March 15, 2015; and April 22, 2015

## *Bardani*



Satellite image of the villages of Bardani and Korma recorded during the government offensive in February 2014.



Satellite image of the of the villages of Bardani and Korma recorded after the government offensive, shows extensive areas of housing destruction and evidence of burnt vegetation consistent with an arson attack.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## To the Government of Sudan

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- Immediately disarm and disband the Rapid Support Forces and withdraw them from Darfur.
- Immediately issue clear, public orders to all government forces in Darfur to stop all attacks against civilians.
- Immediately allow UNAMID, independent and impartial humanitarian agencies, and human rights organizations unfettered access to all areas of Darfur.
- Conduct prompt, impartial and independent investigations of abuses by the Rapid Support Forces and other government forces in Darfur and prosecute alleged perpetrators in accordance with international fair trial standards.
- Promptly provide redress to the victims of abuses by government forces, including through compensation and recovering and returning all looted property.
- Ensure the urgent provision of comprehensive and non-discriminatory health services to women and girls who have experienced sexual violence. Ensure that male survivors of sexual violence also have access to these services.
- Cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court, including in the execution of arrest warrants.

## To the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)

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- Publicly demand access to Jebel Marra and other areas in Darfur where civilians are vulnerable to serious abuse and establish a permanent presence in these areas, such as an operating base, and implement proactive patrols to help protect civilians.
- Investigate and publicly report allegations of serious abuses by the Sudanese security forces, including the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces, pro-government militias and opposition armed groups. If access to the locations where the alleged abuses took place is not granted, UNAMID human rights officers should investigate through telecommunication and other remote research methods.

## To the United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council

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- Demand that Sudan allow UNAMID immediate and unrestricted access to all of Darfur, including to establish a permanent presence, such as an operating base, in government-controlled, rebel-controlled, and contested areas where it now has little or no presence.
- Impose travel bans and asset freezes on individuals responsible for the attacks on civilians in Darfur, and for the continued obstruction of peacekeepers and UN investigators.
- Press for cooperation by the Sudanese government with the International Criminal Court's investigation and prosecution of serious international crimes committed in Darfur.

## To the European Union and Member States:

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- Send a clear message to the government of Sudan that continued crimes in violation of international law, impunity for such crimes, and repeated failure to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC), will result in the imposition of targeted punitive EU sanctions against individuals and entities deemed responsible, as ministers warned in their General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting conclusion on Sudan in June 2008. EU member states should task the EU High Representative with drawing up a list of individuals and entities who could be subject to such sanctions.
- If there is a lack of progress in ending the abuses and impunity, the EU Foreign Affairs Council should adopt targeted punitive sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes against individuals and entities, on all sides of the conflict, found to be responsible 1) for serious violations of the laws of war, 2) for continued impunity for grave international crimes, or 3) for Sudan's failure to meet its Chapter VII obligations under the UN Charter and cooperate with the ICC.

## To the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should rectify UNAMID's past failure to investigate mass rape by promptly dispatching a special investigative team with expertise in sexual and gender-based violence to conduct an investigation into alleged rape and other sexual violence in Darfur. If independent access to the affected areas is not granted, the team should investigate through interviews outside of Darfur and other remote research methods.

## To the UN Human Rights Council and the Independent Expert on Sudan

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- The Human Rights Council should request the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to urgently dispatch an investigative team with expertise in sexual and gender-based violence to conduct an investigation into alleged abuses in Darfur.
- The Independent Expert on the situation in Sudan should urgently request access to areas affected by serious abuses committed by the Rapid Support Forces and other government forces in Darfur and report the findings and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council.

## To Opposition Armed Groups

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- Reestablish humanitarian coordinators and develop a strategy to encourage humanitarian agencies back to rebel-controlled areas.
- Facilitate the full, safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel and the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance to all civilians living in and around rebel-controlled territory.

## To the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, the AU Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

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- Encourage UN bodies and humanitarian aid agencies to take steps to ensure victims of sexual abuse, Golo, and other areas of Darfur have access to comprehensive and non-discriminatory health services.

# “Men With No Mercy”

## Rapid Support Forces Attacks against Civilians in Darfur, Sudan

Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a government force under the command of the National Intelligence and Security Services, have led two counterinsurgency campaigns in the long-embattled region of Darfur in 2014 and 2015. The RSF and other Sudanese government forces have committed numerous serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law against civilians, including torture, extrajudicial killings and mass rapes.

“*Men With No Mercy*” is based on research conducted between October 2014 and July 2015. Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 151 survivors and witnesses of abuses in Darfur who fled Sudan to Chad and South Sudan, 16 who were interviewed inside Darfur, and an additional 45 victims and witnesses in Darfur by telephone.

RSF violations of international humanitarian law, including attacks on civilians, amount to war crimes. The mass rape and killings may constitute crimes against humanity. Crimes against humanity are serious offenses, including murder, torture and rape, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population.

Human Rights Watch calls on the United Nations Security Council, the African Union Peace and Security Council, and the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur, UN-AMID, to take concrete steps to protect civilians in Darfur from further abuse, including sanctioning individuals responsible for attacks on civilians, to expand and ensure access to humanitarian assistance for victims, and to press for cooperation with the International Criminal Court’s investigation and prosecution of grave international crimes in Darfur.



*(above) Fighters from the Sudanese Rapid Support Forces in the city of Nyala, South Darfur, displaying weapons and vehicles they claimed to have captured from Darfuri rebels, May 3, 2015.*

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*(front cover) Women and children displaced by attacks of the Sudanese government Rapid Support Forces outside caves in rebel-controlled territory in Jebel Marra, Darfur, March 2, 2014.*

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