



**PERPETUATING  
CONFLICT AND  
SUSTAINING  
REPRESSION:**

**NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S  
AID  
AND THE  
MILITARISATION  
OF AID  
IN SUDAN**

THE EUROPEAN-SUDANESE  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
COUNCIL

1 Northumberland Avenue,  
London WC2N 5BW

Telephone: 020 7872 5434

Telefax: 020 7753 2824

December 1999

WORKING FOR PEACE IN SUDAN

**Perpetuating Conflict and Sustaining Repression: Norwegian  
People's Aid and the Militarisation of Aid in Sudan**

A November 1999 Norwegian television documentary, entitled 'Weapons Smuggling in Sudan', has highlighted the role played by some aid agencies in logistically and politically perpetuating the Sudanese civil war. The documentary clearly outlined the actions of Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)

in supplying the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with weapons in the course of the Sudanese civil war in the 1990s.

Norwegian People's Aid had become involved in Sudan in 1986, and almost immediately began providing support to the SPLA, and its 'humanitarian' wing, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association. There had always been speculation as to whether Norwegian People's Aid was involved in the supply of war material to the southern rebels, and this documentary confirmed that NPA had for several years organised an air-bridge for the supply of weapons to battle zones within Sudan under the supervision of its Nairobi office. One of the NPA pilots involved in the gun running, Svein Kristiansen, stated, that his plane had landed at SPLA bases with some 2.5 tonnes of weapons.

It was stated that between 80-100 tonnes of arms were carried to the Nuba mountains and elsewhere in NPA-controlled airplanes supposedly carrying humanitarian assistance.

Another Norwegian People's Aid pilot, interviewed by the documentary makers, related how when he began working for NPA he believed that he would be flying NPA humanitarian assistance into the Nuba mountains. He then realised that NPA was also transporting weapons, including land-mines, into Sudan:

The purpose was to fly aid, blankets, medicine, food, clothing etc. from Lokichokio up to the Nuba mountains to the people there that didn't have anything. That was the main purpose that we served there. That was also my understanding of what we would be doing when I arrived in Lokichokio. And to my surprise we ended up flying more than just aid. We did some other trips where we took off from Lokichokio empty, and we picked up crates, boxes, and so forth, of ammunition, weapons, and other things, and flew it up to the Nuba mountains so that they could fight the war they had going up there. They were mostly ammunitions, and arms, also some anti-aircraft weapons. And I found out later that there was also land-mines in quite a few of the boxes.<sup>1</sup>

Pressed by the interviewer on how he could be sure the cargo contained land-mines, the pilot stated that there would be papers stating what was in the cargo and how much everything weighed. The crew would check the manifest as well as the cargo to make sure it was the same weight in order to know how heavy the plane would be when it left the ground. The pilot also stated that out of curiosity he had opened up several of the boxes and had "looked in them and saw what was there".

The callousness shown by Norwegian People's Aid in cold-bloodedly supplying land-mines to war zones in Sudan must be measured against NPA's official position with regard to land-mines and their use, stating that they are a "deadly legacy killing and maiming innocents everyday".<sup>2</sup> NPA is also ostensibly committed to advocacy work with regard to land-mines, and, for example, is a member of the Coordinating Committee of the International Campaign to ban Landmines.

The above-mentioned Norwegian documentary also provided evidence that Norwegian People's Aid's involvement in actively assisting and facilitating the SPLA's military activities dated back to the 1980s. In September 1989, for example, the Norwegian Red Cross offered the International Committee of the Red Cross a large barge funded by the Norwegian government. The barge, with a cargo capacity of up to 60 tons, arrived in July 1990 and was soon in place on the Nile. It had been intended to use this barge for the delivery of food aid by river. NPA was allowed to take responsibility for the operation of the barge.<sup>3</sup> The documentary also showed that the SPLA had clearly used the river barge for military purposes, including the transport of hundreds of SPLA soldiers in order for them to engage in fighting elsewhere - all this with the active assistance of NPA.

Norwegian People's Aid's activities in Sudan had led to the Norwegian government commissioning COWI, an independent consultancy, to investigate NPA's use of the considerable funds it had received from the Norwegian government. The report, entitled **Evaluation of Norwegian Humanitarian Assistance to the Sudan**, documented that Norwegian and similar relief funds were being used to support SPLA soldiers, and thus prolonging the conflict. The report stated, for example, that by the early 1990s Norwegian People's Aid:

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<sup>1</sup> **Vapensmuglerne I Sudan**, 'Brennpunkt', NRK Television, Norway, 17 November 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian People's Aid website, <http://www.npaid.org/mines/main.html>

<sup>3</sup> **Evaluation of Norwegian Humanitarian Assistance to the Sudan**, A report submitted to the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, COWI, Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, November 1997, p.18.

[B]egan to adopt more closely the aims of the SPLA and developed from 1992 a growing field presence.<sup>4</sup>

The report went on to state:

NPA's intervention is that of a solidarity group. It has taken a clear side in the war. It supports the causes of SPLA/M and its humanitarian wing SRRA. NPA's solidarity approach means that in practice the activities of NPA are closely related to the political and military strategies of the rebel movement.<sup>5</sup>

The report placed on record that Norwegian People's Aid's humanitarian activities were said to "support the political and military struggle of the SPLA/M".<sup>6</sup> With regard to whether the NPA was directly supplying the SPLA with food, the report stated that:

Many sources, including some within the NPA... confirm that food relief has also been used to feed SPLA troops. A 1995 USAID audit, for example, revealed that in early 1995 some 200 metric tonnes of sorghum, valued at about US \$100,000, and under NPA control, was diverted to feed SPLA soldiers.<sup>7</sup>

Documentation in this example relating to the diversion of aid had been "fraudulently stamped" by SRRA officials. The report spoke of "other cases showing insufficient control".<sup>8</sup> The report stated that:

[T]he food relief supplied by NPA has been extremely important to... the SPLA which managed to sustain its position as a strong rebel movement.<sup>9</sup>

The Danish media further reported that Norwegian People's Aid had allowed the SPLA to sell emergency aid in order to purchase weapons of war. Norwegian aid funds were also diverted to buy the SPLA food, houses and cars, and to pay for the schooling of the children of SPLA officers.<sup>10</sup>

The report also made it clear that Norwegian People's Aid may have increased the level of tension in parts of southern Sudan.

The support of NPA to the higher levels of the SPLA has reinforced the tendency of SPLA to rely on its own external diplomacy to obtain critical resources, such as food, rather than seeking the support of the indigenous populations of the areas where it operates. There has been a marked lack of interface between the SPLA's higher ranks and the "traditional" chiefs and governance structures of the tribes, particularly the Equatorial tribes.<sup>11</sup>

The report also examined the NPA's position with regard to working towards a peaceful solution to the Sudanese civil war. It was stated that the NPA did not see:

the reduction of violence in the Sudan as [its] main objective. It was not considered appropriate for a "solidarity"... organisation like NPA... The cause of the SPLA, as expressed by John Garang and his leadership group, is just according to the NPA. The prevention of conflict, in this context, is entirely subordinated to the pursuit of partisan advantages.<sup>12</sup>

The report stated that:

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<sup>4</sup> **Evaluation of Norwegian Humanitarian Assistance to the Sudan**, A report submitted to the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, COWI, Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, November 1997, p.18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.39. The American reference is **USAID Evaluation of Title 3 Food Aid to South Sudan**, The Office of the Inspector General, USAID, Washington-DC, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> 'Aid Money Supported Rebellion in Sudan', **Aktuelt**, Denmark, 20 May 1998.

<sup>11</sup> **Evaluation of Norwegian Humanitarian Assistance to the Sudan**, op. cit., p.49.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.44-45.

The position of NPA in supplying resources to one party in the conflict has been quite exceptional. The agency has repeatedly stepped beyond the boundaries of what is generally considered humanitarian practice in its support to the rebel movement.<sup>13</sup>

Norwegian People's Aid has also served as propagandists for the SPLA. The Norwegian government report stated that:

The publicity, which NPA has been able to supply in favour of the Movement, has... been significant. NPA briefed journalists and guided them in the field.

This was said to have been "decisive" on several occasions.<sup>14</sup> One clear example of NPA echoing SPLA propaganda was its July 1999 claim that Sudanese government forces had used chemical weapons in southern Sudan.<sup>15</sup> On 17 October the United Nations revealed that tests conducted by the laboratories of the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta on medical samples taken by Operation Lifeline Sudan members in the areas cited by Norwegian People's Aid "indicated no evidence of exposure to chemicals".<sup>16</sup> NPA staffers have also been involved in providing what can only be described as similarly questionable briefings to visiting United States legislators in 1998.

Norwegian People's Aid is supporting the SPLA, an organisation described by the **New York Times**, no friend of the Sudanese government, as "brutal and predatory" and "an occupying army, killing, raping and pillaging". SPLA leader John Garang was described by the same newspaper as a "pre-eminent war criminal".<sup>17</sup> In December 1999, Human Rights Watch stated that:

The SPLA has a history of gross abuses of human rights and has not made any effort to establish accountability. Its abuses today remain serious.

Human Rights Watch has pointed to summary executions, arbitrary arrests and food aid theft from civilians in famine areas by the SPLA.<sup>18</sup> Established and respected humanitarian organisations such as CARE, Save the Children, World Vision, Church World Service and the American Refugee Committee have jointly stated that the SPLA is guilty of "the most serious human rights abuses".<sup>19</sup> The BBC has reported growing friction in SPLA-controlled areas of southern Sudan, specifically within Didinga areas: "The Didinga have accused the SPLA of becoming an army of occupation in the area."<sup>20</sup>

These are the very areas in which Norwegian People's Aid is active. It is obvious that NPA and the money which supports it, is helping to artificially sustain the SPLA in these and other areas of "occupation". Without the support of external forces such as Norwegian People's Aid, the SPLA would have had to negotiate an end to a stalemated conflict.

It is clear that Norwegian People's Aid serves not merely as a propaganda adjunct to the SPLA, but also as an organisation willingly involved in the supply of weapons and war material to southern rebels. It nurtures a deeply unpleasant organisation, and helps perpetuate Sudan's civil war.

The activities of NPA have done a great disservice to all genuine humanitarian organisations active in Sudan. Their activities have highlighted the need for aid agencies to operate within the United Nations-managed Operation Lifeline Sudan. NPA's military aid to the SPLA has made the Sudanese government all the more suspicious of those groups that do not.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, 'Confirmed Chemical Bombing in Southern Sudan', Norwegian People's Aid, 2 August 1999, ReliefWeb, <http://www.reliefweb.int>.

<sup>16</sup> Note by the Spokesman of the United Nations Secretary-General handed to the Sudanese Ministry of External Relations by the UN Resident Coordinator in Sudan, Philippe Borel.

<sup>17</sup> 'Misguided Relief to Sudan', Editorial, **The New York Times**, 6 December 1999.

<sup>18</sup> 'Rights Group Warns US Against Feeding Sudan Rebels', News Article by Reuters on December 14, 1999 at 11:34:40.

<sup>19</sup> 'Humanitarian Organizations Oppose Plan Providing Food to Sudanese Rebels', Press Release, InterAction, American Council for Voluntary International Action, Washington-DC, 30 November, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> 'Growing Friction in Rebel-Held Southern Sudan', News Article by BBC Online, 9 June, 1999 Published at 16:36 GMT.