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Human Rights and Democracy Report 2015 - Sudan

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Overall there was no significant improvement in the human rights situation in Sudan during 2015. Ceasefires later in the year led to less fighting compared to previous years. However, ongoing conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile continued, with human rights violations/ abuses and international humanitarian law violations by all parties – the majority by the government of Sudan. Humanitarian access continued to be severely restricted, and aerial bombardments by government forces continued. By the end of 2015, there were over 100,000 newly displaced people in Darfur and 3.2 million long-term displaced nationwide. Whilst freedom of expression increased slightly around the launch of Sudan's National Dialogue, this followed earlier detentions of opposition politicians and record levels of newspaper seizures. Sudan ranks 174th out of 180 on the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index. Freedom of religion or belief, sexual violence, and the powers and immunity granted to the security services all remain concerning. The government remains unwilling to acknowledge many of these challenges and has demonstrated little commitment to reform.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a major concern in Sudan, with 87% of women aged 15-49 reporting having undergone some form of FGM in a recent study. However, the national strategy to abandon FGM in a generation (2008-2018) is a positive step.

The UK's key human rights objectives for 2015 focused on conflict resolution, preventing sexual violence in conflict, humanitarian access, the widening of political space and upholding freedom of religion or belief. We continued to support the African Union-led peace talks, and regularly lobbied all sides to allow full access in Darfur for the peacekeeping mission UNAMID and for humanitarian actors across Sudan.

On 1 June, FCO Minister for Africa, James Duddridge, highlighted our concern over the situation in Blue Nile calling for an end to forced relocations and for humanitarian access. With our Troika partners (the United States and Norway), we also spoke out in April regretting the lack of a conducive environment for elections and calling for the National Dialogue to be comprehensive and inclusive. To help combat sexual violence in Darfur, UK-funded projects provided legal, medical and psycho-social support for over 150 survivors of rape, and contributed to successful prosecutions of members of the police and armed forces. Sudan is also the biggest recipient of UK aid targeting the abandonment of FGM. In support of strengthened civil and political freedoms, we attended four trials and raised cases of concern with the government. Internationally, we supported the

renewed mandate of the UN Independent Expert at the UN Human Rights Council. We continued to urge the government to facilitate his work, especially by granting access to Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

In 2016, our human rights priorities will remain conflict resolution and humanitarian access, pressing for greater civil and political freedoms, and tackling sexual and gender-based violence. We will also seek to use the opportunity of Sudan's forthcoming national strategy on ending child marriage to support improvements on the rights of the child, and continue to work on ending the harmful practice of FGM.