



# THE ISG NEWSLETTER

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## LIVES AT RISK

### BELGIUM

Since the shooting outside of the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, in which three people were killed, Jews in Belgium have faced growing public anti-Semitism. Jewish children have been forced out of public schools by rampant bullying, and assaults and vandalism against Jewish people and Jewish institutions have increased.

### BURMA/MYANMAR

Despite political reforms of the past half decade, Burma's civilian and military authorities' abuse of ethnic and religious minorities, mass rape of women, forced labor, and extrajudicial killings have not abated. The estimated 1.3 million Muslim Rohingyas have been denied citizenship and basic rights and persecuted by government forces, and tens of thousands have been forced into concentration camps, leading many observers to fear possible genocide.

Greg Constantine, *Exiled to Nowhere: Burma's Rohingya* (online photo exhibition), 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/pv86gg8>

### CANADA

Young women from Inuit, First Nation and Métis backgrounds face a murder rate four times higher than other women in Canada, but their murders

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continue to be largely ignored.

“Red River Woman,” BBC Magazine immersive report, 9 April 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/npvehlb>

### CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Fighting between Christian anti-balaka militias and Muslim Seleka rebels, which began in December 2013, has taken the lives of thousands of people. While both sides have committed crimes against humanity, Christian militias engaged in widespread ethnic cleansing of Muslims characterized by genocidal atrocities. African Union peacekeepers, French troops, and a UN peacekeeping mission have helped to stem the violence. Their work has resulted in two peace deals, one signed between anti-balaka and Seleka rebel groups on April 8, 2015 and one signed between the two ex-Presidents on April 14, 2015. Nevertheless, there are concerns about the abilities of these leaders to enforce the peace deals on the ground.

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Despite the recent signing of a landmark declaration by military commanders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in which they pledged to combat rampant sexualized violence in the country, women and children, including infants, still face the threat of rape on a daily basis. Furthermore, the Ugandan-led Islamist rebel group called the Allied Democratic Forces has been committing massacres of civilians in eastern DRC since 2014.

United Kingdom: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Human Rights and Democracy Report — Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 12 March 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/DRChumanrights>

Human Rights Watch, “DR Congo: Scores Killed in Rebel Attacks,

Army, UN Should Protect Civilians in Beni,” 16 December 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/UNshouldprotect>

### FRANCE

In separate incidents, Islamists specifically targeted and killed four Jewish patrons at the Hyper Cache Supermarket in Paris and four Jewish schoolchildren in Toulouse. Ring-wing parties, such as the National Front, fan the flames of both anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism. Hate crimes against French Muslims have also increased in 2015.

### HUNGARY

Gains by the right-wing and avowedly Anti-Roma and anti-Semitic Jobbik Party has raised anew concerns about the security of the Roma and Jewish populations in Hungary.

### ISRAEL/WEST BANK/GAZA

The most recent war in Gaza led to an upswing in genocidal language within Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza and has provided a rallying point for anti-Semitic rhetoric and hate crimes in the rest of the world, particularly in Western Europe.

### KENYA

Since the terrorist attack against the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2013, in which 67 people were killed, Somali Al-Shabaab militants have begun specifically to target Kenyan Christians in terrorist attacks. Most recently Al-Shabaab attacked students at Garissa University College, killing 147 young people, most of them Christians. In December 2014, the same group killed 36 mainly Christian quarry workers and before that, in

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November 2104, it killed 28 non-Muslims on a bus in Kenya's north.

### LATIN AMERICA

According to a recent Small Arms Survey report, half of the 25 countries with very high femicide rates are located in Latin America. El Salvador has the highest murder rate of women in the world. Gender-based hate crimes against women in the Edomex state of Mexico has skyrocketed in the past years, with over 1000 women reported missing from 2011 to 2012, 53 percent of whom are under age 17. Women have been killed in Edomex at ten times the rate of Ciudad Juarez, another region in Mexico with a very high femicide rate, and the bodies of those killed are often mutilated and left out in public, a pattern suggestive of hate crime. El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras are also facing an astronomical rise in violence directed specifically at children, leading to massive refugee flows, particularly to Mexico and the United States.

“Femicide: A Global Problem,” Small Arms Survey No. 14 (2012), available at: <http://tinyurl.com/femicideGlobalProblem>

Nina Lakhani, “The ‘Invisible’ Victims of Edomex, Mexico’s Most Dangerous Place to Be Female,” The Guardian, 15 April 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mexicomissinggirls>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Children on the Run, 11 March 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/childrenontherun>

### NIGERIA

The Muslim fundamentalist insurgency Boko Haram has been attacking targets in Nigeria's northern territory, frequently following a genocidal patterns of killing men and boys and kidnapping,

raping and sexually enslaving women and girls. The well-known kidnapping of over 200 schoolgirls in April 2013 from the northeastern town of Chibok followed on the heels of a massacre of over 40 schoolboys in February of the same year. Amnesty International estimates that Boko Haram has killed 6,800 people since 2013. The government of Nigeria has been accused of indiscriminate attacks against Muslim civilian populations as part of its counter-insurgency efforts.

Amnesty International, “Our job is to shoot, slaughter and kill’: Boko Haram’s reign of terror in northeast Nigeria,” 13 April 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/k9dqft>

### NORTH KOREA

The North Korean dictatorship, which suppresses all political, civil, religious and labor rights and operates a vast network of political prisons and forced labor camps across the country, was accused of being responsible for massive crimes against humanity by Human Rights Watch in January 2015. Human Rights Watch further argued that the international community should finally hold its leadership accountable by referring it to the ICC.

### PERU

According to Survival International, the government of Peru has leased over 70% of its Amazon territory to oil companies. Oil exploitation, alongside illegal logging, threatens the existence of an estimated fifteen remaining ‘uncontacted’ tribes. Without intervention on their behalf, Survival International estimates that these tribes will disappear completely.

### RUSSIA

The adoption of the federal anti-gay “propaganda” law in June 2013 has resulted in official toleration

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of hate crimes directed at the LGBTQI community.

Human Rights Watch, License to Harm: Violence and Harassment against LGBT People and Activists in Russia, 15 December 2014, available at: <http://www.hrw.org/node/130557>

### **SUDAN (DARFUR)**

The Government of Sudan under President Omar al-Bashir, indicted by the ICC for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, continues its systematic genocidal campaign against the Muslim populations of Darfur, including the mass rape of over 200 women and girls in the Darfur town of Tabit in October 2014.

Human Rights Watch, “Mass Rape in Darfur: Sudanese Army Attacks against Civilians in Tabit,” 11 February 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/massrapeinDarfur>

### **SUDAN (NUBA MOUNTAINS/BLUE NILE)**

The Government of Sudan has been targeting civilian populations in the southern Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile regions with aerial bombardment, ground attacks, and widespread sexual violence since conflict erupted in 2011. It has recently stepped up its bombing and starvation campaign in the Nuba Mountain region, resulting in continuous refugee flows into South Sudan.

Samuel Totten, “Nuba crisis deepens: Refugees fleeing death, destruction,” Arkansas Online, 10 April 2015, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/NubaCrisisDeepens>

Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: Soldiers, Militias Killing, Raping Civilians: Urgent Need for UN, AU Investigation in Blue Nile, Southern Kordofan,” 15 December 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lt7efxo>

### **SYRIA**

The Assad government continues its attacks against the Sunni civilian population, including the use of barrel bombs and chemical weapons. It is currently estimated that 220,000 people have died since 2011.

### **SYRIA/IRAQ**

ISIS militants continue to commit genocide and crimes against humanity, including widespread sexualized violence, against religious, national and sexual minority groups, including the Yazidi religious minority, minority Christian populations, persons suspected of belonging to the LGBTQI community, and resistant Sunni Arabs such as the Al-Shaitat tribe in Syria.

### **UGANDA**

The sponsor of Uganda’s “Kill the Gays” bill (the Anti-Homosexuality Act) announced in March 2015 that he plans to reintroduce the bill in Parliament. The original bill made gay sex a crime punishable by death; a court overturned the law in August 2014 on a technicality. Human Rights groups documented a tenfold increase in violence against suspected LGBTQI Ugandans after passage of the first bill.

Sexual Minorities Uganda, From Torment to Tyranny: Enhanced Persecution in Uganda Following the Passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 9 May 2014, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/sexualminoritiesuganda>

### **UNITED STATES**

The United States is facing an upswing in hate speech, hate groups, discriminatory legislation and hate crimes. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the number of hate groups has increased by 30 percent since 2000. Discriminatory laws

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targeting especially LGBTQI people, massacres inspired by misogynist and right-wing ideologies, hate crimes against Jews, Muslims, and people of color, growing anti-Semitism on college campuses, and widespread police brutality against people of color challenge the security of these groups. Furthermore, discriminatory child removal policies affecting black and Native populations continue with little public attention. According to Amnesty International, Native American and Alaska Native women are more than 2.5 times as likely to be raped than other groups of women. Refugee children and families arriving from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras continue to be treated in ways violating international law.

Amnesty International, *Maze of Injustice: The Failure to Protect Indigenous Women from Sexual Violence in the USA*, 2007, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/mazeofinjustice>

# A CENTURY OF DENIAL: TURKEY AND THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

## BY ROGER W. SMITH

*Roger W. Smith is professor emeritus of government, the College of William and Mary. He is a co-founder and past president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.*

April 24 is the day the Armenian Genocide of 1915 is commemorated around the world. It is now recognized as the first large-scale genocide of the twentieth century, and is often described as the first modern genocide, in that the full power of the state, its fury and calculation, was used to destroy an integral part of the society over which the state ruled. Scholars describe this in terms of domestic and external genocide, and, of course, the two can take place at the same time, as they did with attacks on Armenians in both Turkey and what is now the territory of the Republic of Armenia, then lying within the Russian Empire. But the Young Turk government that unleashed the slaughter of the Armenians never publicly acknowledged the genocide and its successors have continued to deny it over the course of one hundred years.

The term *genocide* refers to the destruction of a group, in whole or in substantial part: an ethnic, religious, racial, or national one. The destruction is of the group, not of individuals (genocide involves murder but it is not the same as killing an individual). For most of us, it is the greatest crime that can be committed, a crime against the body of a particular people, but also against humanity: it destroys life, culture, and biological possibilities and reduces the very idea of humanity. It is also a crime against humankind

in that when any group declares it has a right to kill other groups, it is a threat to us all: who knows who will be next?

Denial of well-documented genocides and crimes against humanity is deeply offensive to survivors, their descendents, and all those who care about fellow humans without regard to ethnic, racial, or religious identity. There are also other consequences of

denial: would-be perpetrators will be encouraged to commit atrocities if it suits them: with denial comes silence, and if individuals, groups, and states do not remember and do not resist denial, their inaction sends a signal that genocide and crimes against humanity can be committed with impunity. The lesson can be drawn: commit genocide and deny it. In due time, the world will forget it ever happened or set it aside out of expediency. Put differently, perceptions of interest will trump history. Genocides that are denied tend also to be forgotten, cutting us off from knowledge about why genocide takes place, who is responsible, and how such crimes can be prevented. Such forgotten genocides can lead us away from a sense that genocide is a recurrent phenomenon and that means must be found to prevent and mitigate it, and in so doing, denial erodes or obfuscates the sense that prevention of genocide is part of national interest. While genocide causes immense human misery to the intended victims, it also leads to local and regional wars (for example, the Congo and its devastation as a result to a large extent of the Rwandan genocide), vast outflows of refugees, years of humanitarian assistance, and disruption of international commerce, contributing to further impoverishment of populations in the region. And further on the international plane, with regard to the Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide, there have been threats by Turkey to leave NATO, recall diplomats, and cancel contracts amounting to billions of dollars, should a government affirm the historical reality of the Genocide.

George Orwell said that those who control the past control the future. Thus, it is not surprising that genocide and denial are twins and that denial is a common strategy of those who destroy whole groups. This was not always so: the ancients boasted of the elimination of whole peoples and erected monuments to their “victories.” But in the modern era, we deny committing genocide while pursuing it nonetheless. What is striking, perhaps unique, about denial of the Armenian case is that it has now gone on for a century (from 1915 to 2015) and shows no signs of abating,

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that it has been practiced by all of the Turkish regimes since 1915, that it is state sponsored and enacted (unlike the Holocaust), and that the Turkish state has spent millions of dollars in the United States and other Western countries to hire lobbyists and public relations firms to assist in defeating any legislative resolutions or presidential statements that would recognize it.

In many ways those who deny the Genocide have an advantage: they don't have to prove anything, just sow doubt and confusion. Nevertheless, they have used several arguments which have changed little over time. First they claim that the events described as genocide did not take place, that few Armenians "died" during the period of 1915-17, and most of those that did, died due to war or disease. All of the evidence to the contrary is hearsay, wartime propaganda, the result of personal bias, or sheer fabrication.

Having rejected the factual basis for genocide, Turkey goes on to deny that it bears any responsibility for the death of Armenians. Most deaths were due to the breakdown of authority, not its intensification directed against the Armenians. Wartime conditions led

to chaos; the few atrocities and massacres that did occur were done by overzealous officials, common criminals [who had in fact been released for that very purpose] and

Kurds and other tribal groups. In none of these cases, it is claimed, was the violence against Armenians the result of a deliberate act by the Turkish state; responsibility for such acts must rest with others. Finally, there is the claim of self-defense against a group that was viewed as engaged in a civil war against the Turks. The Turkish argument, in other words, denies responsibility for genocide on three grounds: circumstances were beyond Turkey's control; the infrequent acts of violence against Armenians were done by others; and the Turkish government and people acted in self-defense – the "victims" were in reality, the perpetrators.

Finally, there is the argument that the concept of

"genocide" is not applicable to the events that took place with regard to the Armenians in 1915-17. Armenians were not killed systematically in pursuit of a plan; there was no intent to eliminate a people. Rather, it is argued, there was the wartime necessity of relocating the Armenians for the sake of military security. A few Armenians were murdered and some died during the process of relocation, but neither in the case of murders committed by common criminals nor acts of military necessity can one speak of genocide.

There are then three main elements of denial: the facts, the responsibility, and the applicability of the crime of "genocide" to whatever happened. Lately a new theme, offering yet another logical possibility in the denial of genocide, has gained traction: trivialization and rationalization. This creates many new opportunities for denial arguments. There could be a moral equivalency argument: both sides engaged in genocide. Hence, it is concluded there were no victims or perpetrators. But Turkey has not pursued this stance: it wants to blame Armenians for provoking violence, and exonerate itself. What it has done, however, is to convert the equivalency into equal pain: both Turks and Armenians shared the pain inflicted by the "Great Catastrophe," of World War 1. Each group should sympathize with the loss of the other. The unstated premise is: don't ask about the source of the pain, and the difference between genocide and the hardships of a war that the country had entered voluntarily.

Other arguments along these lines could be made: similar events have been recurrent throughout history and there are far worse cases that could be cited. Indeed, apologists frequently claim that Turks suffered far more, and many more died, than Armenians. Then there is the argument that genocide, though tragic, is just a part of development: through genocide Turkey emerged with a largely homogeneous population and a strengthened and more unified nation. Talk of "development" is the discourse of professors; the man in the street might say it more bluntly: "We are better off without 'them'".

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Denial involves both arguments and tactics. The arguments are finite in number and have changed relatively little over the years. Tactics of denial, on the other hand, have been flexible, calculated, and closely attuned to circumstances, and I shall turn to them in a moment. But sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between the tactics and the arguments. For example, the American scholar Marc Mamigonian suggests that Turkey has launched a new front in its campaign of denial: it is based on making the historical narratives of those who say there was a genocide and those who say there was not into a controversy, with equal places on the historical and public stage. The goal is to create a new reality (denial as construction) with both “sides” engaged in an unending debate in which a consensus will never arrive and for which there will be a need for unending research to establish the facts. Public relations firms perfected this technique with regard to the harmfulness of tobacco. Some of these firms were later hired by the Turkish government to further denial of the Armenian Genocide.

The arguments have remained more or less the same, but the tactics have changed with circumstances. In the period immediately after World War 1 the tactic was to find scapegoats to blame for what was said to be a security measure that had gone awry due to out of control officials, Kurds, common criminals. This was followed by an attempt to avoid the whole issue, with silence, diplomatic efforts, and political pressure used where possible. In the 1930s, for example, Turkey pressured the U.S. State Department into preventing MGM Studios from producing a film based on Franz Werfel’s *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, a book that depicted aspects of the genocide in a district located west of Antioch on the Mediterranean Sea, far from the Russian front.

In the 1960s, prompted by the worldwide commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the genocide, efforts were made to influence journalists, teachers, and public officials by telling “the other side of the story.” Foreign scholars were encouraged to revise the record of genocide, presenting an account largely blaming the Armenians or, in another version,

wartime conditions which claimed the lives of more Turks than Armenians. Thereafter, Turkey succeeded in prohibiting any mention of the genocide in a United Nations report and was successful in its pressure of the Reagan and Bush administrations, and all others since, in defeating Congressional resolutions that would have designated April 24 as a national day of remembrance of the Armenian Genocide. The Turkish government has also attempted to exclude any mention of the genocide from American textbooks, and from having the discussion of the genocide being formally included in social studies as part of Holocaust and genocide studies. In Ontario, it succeeded in having an asterisk placed after the Armenian Genocide in a high school course that was to consider the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust and Rwanda. The reference was that many [?] historians did not agree that the Armenian case was a matter of genocide.

There have also been attempts by the Turkish government to disrupt academic conferences and public discussions of the genocide. A notable example was the attempt by Turkish officials to force cancellation of a conference in Tel Aviv in 1982 if the Armenian Genocide were to be discussed, demands backed up with threats to the safety of Jews in Turkey.

Then in the 1980s the Turkish government supported the establishment of “institutes,” whose apparent purpose was to further research on Turkish history and culture. But at least one of these was used to further denial of the Genocide, with the director writing letters for the Turkish ambassador in Washington to discredit, and inhibit, scholarship on the Armenian Genocide. More recently still, there have been a series of lawsuits against various professors and institutions, alleging discrimination and violation of freedom of speech of those who questioned the reality of “Armenian claims.”

Perhaps they are within the letter of the law to make should claims (they were all dismissed), but the effect, perhaps the intent, was to create an atmosphere of self-censorship. What is odd about all this, though, is to base one’s case on freedom of speech in America,



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when in Turkey it is a criminal offense under Article 301 of the criminal code to publicly acknowledge the reality of the Armenian Genocide. The crime was “insulting Turkishness;” this has now been changed to read “Turkish nation.”

With Article 301 there is judicial punishment, to be sure. Nobel Prize winner, Orhan Pamuk, and many others have now been tried under this law. But in the current climate of denial, also extra-judicial punishment: Hank Dink was assassinated not long after having been charged under the criminal code for affirmation of the Armenian Genocide.

Finally, there is the attempt by denialists to gain a foothold in universities to further their goals. Part of it is to create Turkish chairs in major American universities (and perhaps in other countries): one can have no objection to that provided that the usual academic standards for appointment are met. But they often are not (proposed professorships at UCLA and Berkeley were both turned down precisely because of such issues), and in some cases it is also a question of academic procedures altogether: in the Berkeley proposal, the Turkish consul general was to be on the appointment committee and would have a continuing role in the activities associated with the professorship.

In some other cases, Turkish government money and that of Turkish associations in the US have sponsored conferences that promote denial, and Ph.D programs in which graduate students regularly complete dissertations that indicate there was no genocide, or that it is too early to tell, that much more research must be done before one can conclude either way. The power of doubt is always in evidence. To my knowledge no university press has yet to publish a denialist account that flatly rejects the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide, but at least one university press has certainly bought into the argument that we just don't know what the facts are and whether genocide was committed or not. There is also a major British publisher, not affiliated with a university, that has recently published denialist works on first the Armenian and then the Rwandan genocide. What is

going on?

Though it may be unusual, I would be remiss if I did not end this discussion on a personal note. It is not, however, really a matter of “ending the discussion” –more of an opening it up to further consideration, of turning it into a dialogue. We all come to an awareness of the crime of crimes in different ways; and while it is sometimes difficult to get such a crime into focus and to think about its implications, the Czech writer Milan Kundera got it right when he said that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” By “memory” Kundera does not mean remembrance alone, but remembrance that is accompanied by understanding, and understanding that leads to commitment and action.

Genocide is an abstract thing to most of us; scholars sometimes reduce it to a set of definitions and statistics that eliminate the human elements, the pain, the loss of community, the long-term consequences. But, for survivors and their descendents, genocide has concrete meaning, and the pain is encountered in daily living, even many years after the decimation of their people took place.

The study of genocide is about what happened, why it happened, who is responsible, and how it can be prevented in the future. But it is also, or should be, about human beings, about communities, about long-term consequences. And it should also be about building bridges between victim groups in order that they might work together in an attempt to end, to use the language of the UN convention, the “odious scourge” of genocide. And in the end, it is a question, a very ancient one, of who is my neighbor?

For many years, I thought of my “neighbor” as anyone who was in need, who was persecuted, who needed help: it was not a matter of my tribe or theirs, my religion or theirs. But it was only in 1985, when I attended a conference in Boston on the Armenian Genocide and its lessons, that I met Armenian survivors, their children, and their grandchildren, all

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of whom shared their stories with me, bearing witness to a proud and tragic history. And it was there, that first evening of the conference, that I sat at a banquet table with a group of Armenians who began to sing in Armenian, a language I had never heard before, songs of home and long ago, songs sad yet sweet, coming from the heart, and accompanied with tears. Little did I know that a few years later on April 24th, I would stand before the Martyrs' Memorial in Yerevan, Armenia, and that I too would weep. But in the end, tears of sadness and anger are not enough; they must also become tears of resolution and action. And because of that commitment much progress in expanding recognition of the Genocide has taken place and denial exposed for the hurtful sham that it is. But as long as there is denial of the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide, resolution and action will be, not only in order, but necessary.

ROGER W. SMITH is professor emeritus of government at the College of William and Mary. He is a co-founder and past president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

# POPE FRANCIS RECOGNIZES ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

BY HELEN FEIN

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The New York Times reported on April 13, 2015 that “Pope Francis on Sunday [April 12] described the World War I-era slaughter of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks as the first genocide of the 20th century igniting a diplomatic confrontation with Turkey...He also described his frustration with what he considers global indifference toward the persecution and killing of Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere, especially by militants with the Islamic state.

“Today, too, we are experiencing a sort of genocide created by general and collective indifference,” Francis said...It seems that humanity is incapable of putting a halt to the shedding of innocent blood,” Francis said. “It seems that the human family has

refused to learn from its mistakes caused by the law of terror, so that today, too, there are those who attempt to eliminate others with the help of a few, and with the complicit silence of others who simply stand by...

“Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it,” the pope added.

“Albert Melloni, a historian of the Vatican, said Francis’ remarks on Sunday were consistent with his blunt-spoken style and his sympathy for all victims.

‘He decided to use the words that Armenians use, to use the point of view of the victim,’ Mr. Melioni said. ‘This is very Francis.’

## DECEMBER 2014 MISSION TO NUBA MOUNTAINS: DELIVERY OF FOOD TO THOSE IN CRITICAL NEED BY SAMUEL TOTTEN

*Samuel Totten*  
*Professor Emeritus,*  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

1/15/2015

Since June 2011, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) and the Government of Sudan (GoS) have been at war. Among the most significant causes are: (a) The Nuba Mountains people were left out of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which set the terms for finalizing the peace following the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2003); (b) As a result of being left out of the CPA, the Nuba were not allowed to join the rest of the people of the south when they seceded and formed the new nation of The Republic of South Sudan; (c) The Nuba people were positive that their candidate, Abdel Aziz, had won the gubernatorial election in South Kordofan State (the home of the Nuba Mountains), and were infuriated when it was announced that Ahmed Haroun, a man wanted by the International Criminal Court on over forty charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes due to alleged atrocities perpetrated in Darfur, was their new governor; and (d) When the Nuba voiced their anger over both being forced to remain with Sudan and over what they considered to be a rigged election, tensions increased to the point of triggering a new war in Sudan.

Ever since the outbreak of war, the GoS has carried out daily bombing raids against the civilians of the Nuba Mountains. As a result, civilians have been forced out of their villages and off their farms. They have either fled up into the mountains, where they've sought sanctuary in caves, are living in

internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, or have headed to South Sudan in order to live in a refugee camp.

From the outset neither the United Nations nor any international humanitarian aid groups have been present in the Nuba Mountains in order to attempt to halt the fighting or provide aid such as food and medicine, respectively. This is due in large part to the fact that Sudanese President Omar al Bashir has asserted that any body that attempts to enter the region without the permission of the GoS will be cut down, period.

In light of this situation, in late 2012 I co-founded a small group for the express purpose of purchasing and inserting both food and medical supplies into the Nuba for those civilians in most critical need. The group was composed of six individuals, four of whom, including me, committed to travel into the war zone in the Nuba Mountains to deliver food. Ultimately, between 2012 and spring 2014, we made four missions into the Nuba Mountains during which we delivered approximately \$50,000 USD worth of food and medicine. By mid-2014, though, various members began to branch out and take on different projects in the Nuba Mountains (such projects have included, for example, (a) producing documentary films about the situation in the Nuba Mountains today, with a particular focus on the plight of the Christians in the region, and (b) recording songs and music that the Nuba use to celebrate Christmas). While some of the new projects may continue to provide medical aid and/or food, such efforts will likely be secondary, and thus in April 2014, I chose to resign from the group in order to solely focus my attention on inserting

## DECEMBER 2014 MISSION TO NUBA MOUNTAINS: DELIVERY OF FOOD TO THOSE IN CRITICAL NEED

food to those in most critical need in the Nuba Mountains. By “most critical need” I mean those individuals who are going *without a single* meal for a day or more per week on a regular basis. It is such individuals who are most likely to be suffering from malnutrition to severe malnutrition.

I undertook my latest mission in December 2014. On December 3, my interpreter, Alexander Ramadan Tarjan, and I flew on a World Food Programme plane from Juba to the Yida Refugee Camp, which is situated along the South Sudan/Sudan border. In Yida, we purchased four thousand dollars worth of food (primarily large 100 pound bags of sorghum, 100 pound bags of lentils, large jugs of cooking oil, and 100 pound bags of sugar). We wished to purchase salt as well, but none was to be found.

We ended up leaving Yida about three in the afternoon the same day, and reached Kauda, a main town in South Kordofan State/Nuba Mountains and a stronghold of the SPLA-N, late that night. We had heard that there had been steady and heavy bombings by Antonov bombers and thus we were on the lookout for such through the eight hour trip, but we didn't come across any. That was not entirely unusual, as most bomb in the morning.

After purchasing another two thousand dollars worth of food (primarily sorghum, dried beans, and cooking oil; again, no salt was available) in the souk in Kauda, we headed to Kwalib, a region, we were informed, where people were desperate for food. Some fifteen minutes outside of Heiban, on the narrow dirt road we were traveling, a large farm tractor was parked just off the road and totally

covered with the leafy branches of trees in an attempt to camouflage it. It foreshadowed what we were, ultimately, going to face.

As we proceeded to Kwalib — a seven hour trip of miserable bouncing and jolting along the worn and pot-holed dirt road — we continued to keep our eyes out for Antonovs and jets, but, again, we didn't spot any. Along with our driver, Daniel, Alexander and I were on edge because everything we had heard the past several days suggested that sooner or later we would be confronted with one or the other, if not both.

Upon our arrival in Kwalib, we sought out the local commissioner, who informed us that over the past several months there had been a lot of fighting, along with a lot of bombing. “In fact,” he said, “this morning, Antonovs attacked a village near here.”

I asked the commissioner if we could go out to the village that had just been bombed, and he said I would have to ask permission from the local leader of the SPLA-N. The commissioner said after we unloaded the food (in a warehouse nearby) he would be pleased to introduce us to the commander.

Ultimately, a colonel and six of his men, all carrying Kalashnikovs, took us out to the recently bombed village. The blackened area was entirely blackened as a result of a fire started by the bombing, and the ground was still warm and smoldering in places. Not a single person was in the nearest village.

Continuing, as we drove north, it was eerie to see village after village totally devoid of people. They were, in fact, veritable ghost towns.

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At one point, we got out and walked to the lip of a cliff, where the colonel pointed to the left and said that the town of Abri, which the Government of Sudan controlled, was only about 30 kilometers away (or some 18 miles). In the opposite direction, a wall of smoke rose over a range of mountains. The colonel said that early that morning two GoS jets had attacked a town where the smoke was billowing up, causing extensive damage and the death of some civilians.

On the way back to the rebels' camp, the colonel made a point stopping at a half dozen points where Antonovs had dropped bombs. While the desert sand was composed of distinct granules, the sand in the holes carved out by the bombs was powdery. At one hole near the village of Dhera, the colonel told us a woman who had been a representative of the local council had been killed two weeks earlier. Six or seven large pieces of shrapnel, their edges twisted and razor sharp, were scattered about.

Early the next morning, back on the road, a jeep-like truck mounted with a weapon with a huge barrel — known as a Bi-Camp — raced past us carrying four or five rebels. In the far distance, over a mountain range, huge billows of smoke rose in the sky. Another town had been hit by the GoS. (Later, we were informed that both attack jets and Antonovs had hit a town that morning.)

About fifteen minutes later, we came upon a large *suq* at a place called Andhulu, which was having its market day. We parked under a tree and while I remained with the truck, Daniel and Alexander went to search for food we might be able to purchase. While waiting there, a young man in

his late teens or early twenties approached me and asked where I was heading. I told him, "Yida." He, too, I discovered, was heading to Yida in order to complete his secondary education, as all of the schools in the area had shut down due to the constant bombings and fighting. I had noticed that the sleeve on his left arm was dangling loose, and thus I asked him, possibly too abruptly, how he had lost his arm. He simply replied, "Antonov."

About an hour later, Alexander and Daniel returned and said they had purchased six sacks of sorghum at a very good price. They said I should drive to the other side of the *suq* so that we could load the truck. As the shopkeeper and his guys began loading the bags of food (huge bags weighing between 150 and 200 pounds), someone in the crowd cried out "Antonov!"

People scattered in every direction possible, but the time I had sprinted up a small dirt incline leading to the road and began crossing the latter, someone yelled, "It's gone! It's going in a different direction."

Relieved, we hurriedly finished loading the truck, picked up the young man without the arm, plus some eighteen other people who wanted a ride, and headed towards a place called Tonguli, some 30 to 40 miles down the rutted, dirt road, where we planned to drop off the food. As we approached Tonguli, we noticed a fairly large encampment to the right and a water point/pump to the left where several men were sitting under some large trees. A little beyond the men was a tiny makeshift open-air teashop. After parking, I announced to everyone on the back of the truck that I had to meet with

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the local commissioner of Tonguli and that it might take fifteen to thirty minutes or more. Everyone got off the truck and headed over to the teashop where there was a bench and some rocks that people could sit on and rest. Before heading across the road to meet with the commissioner, I decided to sit down with a good number of our passengers and chat. As we were talking someone cried out, “Antonov!” Everyone jumped up and scrambled in search of something to hide behind or under. I raced straight ahead, almost tripping over a young woman and a young man as all three of us raced down a short incline that led to a large, dry *wadi*. Once we reached the *wadi*, all three of us dropped down on our stomachs as close to the riverbank as possible and then...waited.

Several minutes later, we heard people shouting that the plane had passed by. Incredibly relieved, the three of us got up and headed back up the dirt bank to the area where we had all been seated. As everyone came together again, the chatter focused on the close call we just had, the immense relief everyone felt, and how lucky we were that the Antonov didn't bomb us.

Minutes later, just as I was about to head over to see the commissioner, the group of men sitting under the trees yelled, “Antonov!” Again, everyone jumped up and headed in various directions. I, again, along with the same young man and woman, headed towards the dirt bank leading down to the *wadi*. But just as I reached the incline, one of the men near the trees yelled, “*Khawaja* [white man], quick get down! Get down now!” Against my better judgment, I hit the ground and covered by head and

neck with my hands the best I could.

I felt totally exposed and figured that our luck had run out and that the Antonov flying over this time might well be the one that had just flown overhead a short while ago and was coming back to bomb the area.

After what seemed an interminably long time, someone called out, “It's gone! It's OK.”

As I got to my knees, I saw Alexander starting to get up off the ground near the benches we had been sitting on. In the past — both during this trip and during an earlier trip in 2012-2013 — he had been cavalier about seeking safety when an Antonov approached and generally stood around as everyone else either made a run for it or, when we were in a compound, ran towards and jumped in one of the many eight foot deep holes that now pock the land around compounds, *suqs*, schools, single tukuls, etc. His cavalier attitude and his mocking me for seeking a spot of safety had grated on me back in 2012-2013 and we had had words about the matter.

“What happened to your stance that ‘if it's your time, it's your time’?” I called out to him as I stood up.

Smiling, he said, “This time it was too close,” and we both broke out in laughter.

After meeting with the local commissioner, he said he could store the food we were delivering in a civil building about a mile away. But, just as we were getting ready to leave for the civil building, someone on the back of the truck yelled, “Antonov! Antonov!” People leapt off the truck as fast as

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they could and made a run for it. I flung open the door and headed out into the desert trailing behind several other people. As I ran my I surveyed the area for something to hide behind (rocks, preferably) or hunker down into (a large fissure, crevice, or ravine), but I couldn't spot anything. Figuring I was already taking too long to find a spot for protection and well aware of the fact that most people in the Nuba Mountains who had been killed by shrapnel had remained upright, I hit the ground and yelled for the other two individuals to do the same. They went down almost as quickly as I did.

A few minutes went by and then I heard loud chatter in the distance behind me. Quickly craning my neck around, I noticed that a number of individuals were up and walking back towards the truck. I hopped up and headed back to the truck as well but as I made my way around scrub brush a loud roar of laughter broke out. Baffled by the laughter, I immediately wondered whether someone on board the truck had played what he thought was a funny prank. As I got closer to the truck I shouted out, not a little unhappy, "There wasn't an Antonov? This was just some..." Someone shouted back, "No, there was an Antonov!" Several others added in quick succession, "It was close!" "It came right over us!" Ultimately, I concluded that the laughter was nervous laughter — a physical action to the stress they had experienced and/or the tension or anxiety they were experiencing — and that it had been somewhat contagious. If not that then it was possibly laughter of absolute relief, a shared sense that they had all made it through yet another round of danger. No matter what, it was contagious and

by the time I reached the truck almost everyone surrounding the truck, as well as those who had already climbed aboard, was laughing.

"Well, whoever saw the plane, good eye!" I said.

A young man in his early twenties said, "Yeah, all eyes on the sky!"

I laughed appreciatively and said, "Exactly! And keep it up!"

Interestingly, a month later, on January 15, 2015, *Nuba Reports* issued a statement that in December 2014 the Nuba Mountains recorded more than 450 bombs, rockets and artillery dropped on civilian targets — the most in a single month since the war began in June 2011.

The rest of the trip, fortunately, was uneventful, and we reached Yida late that night.



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