

Sudan government, rebels block vaccination drive, UN says

November 12 2013

The Sudan government and a key rebel group are refusing to let UN workers vaccinate 160,000 children against polio in conflict-stricken states despite agreeing to a ceasefire, the UN said Monday.

UN humanitarian operations director John Ging said he had appealed to the UN Security Council for pressure to end what he called a "filibuster" by the Sudan government and opposition Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) on humanitarian access.

Polio has reappeared in East Africa, and the United Nations is worried that the conflict in Sudan's South Kordofan and Blue Nile states could help it spread again.

The separatist rebels have been battling government forces in the two states since mid-2011.

The UN brokered a ceasefire between the government forces and SPLM-N for November 5-November 12, but the two sides would still not let aid workers in, Ging told reporters, expressing frustration at obstacles to getting humanitarian access.

He said the two sides had agreed how the vaccination would be carried out, but the SPLM-N asked for a "final meeting" and the [government](#) refused the talks.

"Sadly and typically" the UN was not given access, he said, adding that

UN workers could be ready to enter the rebel-controlled [conflict zones](#) in one day and the vaccinations could be finished in four days.

The 15-member Security Council passed a resolution in April last year demanding more access to the two states, and Ging said the body must now use its "significant authority" to put pressure on the two sides.

He said the resolution had kickstarted talks between the two sides, but "unfortunately we have been filibustered with process and discussions and disputes which have amounted to no access."

The UN has already cut back its larger-scale plans—to send food and other relief supplies into the South Kordofan and Blue Nile—to focus on just the vaccination drive. "And as of today that has also failed," Ging said.

"They have their excuses, they point the finger at each other of course, but the bottom line is they don't pay the price," he said, highlighting how 800,000 people have been in the conflict zones for 18 months with no outside assistance.

China's UN ambassador Liu Jieyi, Security Council president for November, said it was "disturbing" that the polio campaign had been blocked and the council was considering how it could act.

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