I am from Sudan. I live between Nuba Mountains in Sudan and Nairobi, Kenya, but I have always stayed abreast of events in Sudan—the mass atrocities, the civil war—and wanted to make sense out of it all. Initially, I wished that a Sudanese person I trusted would actually relate what’s happening there. But Sudanese media is just not covering these events well, and there are always rumors that the news out of the West is fabricated. Indeed, a lot of the clips I saw coming out of the area seemed very shallow. They portrayed people simply as victims. I wanted to give my people a voice. I’m a filmmaker and I have the energy, so I decided to go to Sudan myself.

Initially, my goal was to make a film focused on the atrocities taking place since the country separated into Sudan and South Sudan in 2011. Because of my previous campaign work, in the Sudanese elections of 2010, I had access to the camps where new Sudanese refugees arrive every day. But when I went there, I discovered that this story was more nuanced than even I had expected. These people are so much more than just victims. They have a strong identity and they really know who they are and why they’re fighting and why all these things are happening to them. They have a surprising amount of hope, and they believe their lives are actually going to become better. They’re celebrating life.

This film took shape as I was listening to music from the refugee camps. The music, as seen in the footage I shot, was made with instruments created from found objects. The instruments used a radio as an amplifier to create an electronic Sudanese sound that was unique. The sound was new and very hip and I loved it! The music moved me so much that I knew it and the story behind it were key. To me, the heart of the whole film is one particular scene where the audience is listening to this electronic music.

To make sure I was on the right track, I brought some recordings to Sudanese-American singer/songwriter Alsarah, and I said, “Listen to this song and tell me—am I crazy or is this new music that nobody else in the world has heard?” She agreed that the music was very exciting and she ended up being a big part of the project.

There were a lot of challenges in making this film. The biggest was travel. Getting to these areas is very hard and it requires a lot of logistics and a lot of flying. Getting to Nuba Mountains requires flying first to Nairobi, Kenya, then from Nairobi to Juba in South Sudan. In Juba, I had to find a World Food Program or U.N. flight going to one of the refugee camps. Then from the refugee camps I had to find a way to travel into the rebel-controlled areas and the war zones.

And that was very hard, not least of all because fuel costs 100 dollars per gallon. The second biggest challenge was not being able to take a professional crew with me. There wasn’t enough funding, plus there was the challenge of traveling to a war zone. To solve this, I helped train local folks. We had some frightening moments—when fighter jets flew directly overhead—but I always felt the project was worthwhile, and the people I trained were glad their voices were being heard.

The one thing I want to do for you, the viewers, with this film is to change your mindset about Sudanese identity. Watch this film with an open heart, and you cannot help but be struck by the images of Sudanese people dancing and singing. Base your idea of Sudanese identity on that. Despite years of adversity, the Sudanese people have retained—and even developed further—a signature strength and resilience and even joy. That is who we are, and that’s the main message of my film.

hajooj kuka
Director/Producer, Beats of the Antonov
2 Letter from the Filmmaker
4 Introduction
5 Potential Partners
5 Key Issues
5 Using This Guide
6 Background Information
6 Historical Context
8 Sudan's Civil War(s)
10 Cultural Identity and Preservation
12 Selected People Featured in Beats of the Antonov
13 General Discussion Questions
14 Discussion Prompts
21 Taking Action
22 Resources
23 How to Buy the Film

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Sudan has been in an almost constant state of civil war since it achieved independence in 1956. It split into a pair of sovereign states in 2011, leaving in limbo people in the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains regions, who fought with the South Sudanese but ended up within the borders of the north. Unwilling to give up their indigenous culture, these Sudanese continue to resist Sudan’s Arab/Islam-identified government. As a result, Sudanese armed forces use Antonov planes to drop aerial bombs indiscriminately on their villages.

In addition to armed rebellion, one powerful response to the ongoing conflict has been to make music—singing and dancing as an entire community—not only to celebrate survival, but as a central survival strategy. **Beats of the Antonov** (52 min.) explores how music binds a community together, offering hope and a common identity for refugees engaged in a fierce battle to protect cultural traditions and heritage from those trying to obliterate them. It is an excellent springboard for discussions of the ways in which political events and institutionalized racism can influence, complicate and confuse identity formation.
Beats of the Antonov is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed previous PBS and POV films relating to Sudan, music, resistance or cultural preservation, including Lost Boys of Sudan, The Reckoning: The Battle for the International Criminal Court, Lomax the Songhunter and Return to Homs.
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries

Beats of the Antonov is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- African identity
- Arab identity
- armed conflict
- Blue Nile
- civil war
- community building
- conflict resolution/ transformation
- cultural preservation
- dance
- Darfur
- education
- ethnicity
- ethnomusicology
- identity/identity formation
- institutionalized racism
- internalized oppression
- Islam
- music
- Nuba Mountains/Southern Kordofan
- peace studies
- pluralism
- pop culture
- psychology
- race and racism
- rebellion
- refugees and/or internally displaced people
- resilience
- resistance
- South Sudan
- Sudan

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use Beats of the Antonov to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/engage
**Historical Context**

As we see in *Beats of the Antonov*, the people of Sudan have a complex relationship with their roots. Although the official languages of the state are Arabic and English, the people of Sudan speak more than 100 different languages, including the dialects of the Nubian, Beja, Fur and Fallata people. The state religion of the north is Islam, and 97 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. However, there has been a Christian presence in Sudan since the sixth century, and many attribute the current civil war to religious tensions between Muslim northerners and (mostly) Christian southerners. In *Beats of the Antonov*, Albaqir Elafeef, of the Sudanese Civil Society, states his belief that the war is a result of what he calls the “northerners’ identity crisis,” expressed in their attempt to rid Sudan of its African elements.

In present day Sudan, more than 70 percent of the population is of Arab descent. These Arab roots can be traced back to the seventh century, when Arab-Muslim armies attempted to invade Sudan, to no avail. Over time, rather than conquering the territory by force, the Arabs established a relationship with the Nubian people of Sudan through trade. By the 15th century, Arab-Muslim merchants and missionaries began to settle in Sudan. During this time, Arabs intermarried with Nubian people, introducing Arab Muslim culture to Sudanese Christians and Animists. Muslims from Baghdad and Arabia taught the Arabized Nubian people lessons from the Quran, and built schools in the Sufi Muslim tradition.
In July 1820, lured by the gold and slave trade in Sudan, Muhammad Ali, viceroy of Egypt under the Ottoman Empire, sent his army to conquer Sudan. By 1821, Sudanese leadership had surrendered and Sudan was absorbed into Muhammad Ali’s empire. By the mid-1800s, however, the Ottoman Empire had begun to wane and the British were able to gain a foothold in Sudanese politics. The British persuaded the governor-general to begin the process of abolishing slavery in the Sudan—leading to tensions between the government and the Sudanese people, who depended on the slave trade economically. By 1882, Sudan was under joint British-Egyptian rule.

New British leadership was daunted by the diverse cultural traditions in the north and south of Sudan and chose to rule the two separately. During the late 19th century, Christian missionaries were sent to the south, where they focused all of their conversion efforts on the “black southerners.” Meanwhile, Sudanese nationalism was spreading throughout the north, prompting a series of rebellions against the British. In 1956, as the British dismantled their empire following World War II, Sudan was granted independence. Although Sudan had been ruled as two separate territories for decades, the British chose to treat it as one state when granting independence, and they handed power exclusively to the northern leadership in Khartoum. By the time of independence in 1956, tensions were already brewing, and within months civil war broke out.

**Sources:**


Sudanese women gather in a refugee camp community center. Photo courtesy of hajooj kuka
Sudan’s Civil War(s)

Sudan has been in an almost constant state of civil war since independence, and in 2011 it split into a pair of sovereign states. Its first civil war broke out in 1955, before independence even officially began, and lasted until 1972. The most recent war in Sudan, which formally ended in 2005, has its roots in the events of June 1989, when Colonel Omar al-Bashir led a military coup, overthrowing the government and introducing sharia law on a national level. He appointed himself president and remains so today. The Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), which began as a guerilla movement in the southern part of Sudan, rose up against the government’s oppression of marginalized Sudanese people, and a civil war began that would last for decades. With these extended periods of conflict, Sudan has experienced one of the longest periods of violence in Africa’s post-colonial history.

In 2002, peace talks in Kenya led to an agreement between the Sudanese government and the SPLA geared to ending the 19-year civil war. As part of the agreement, the south was given the power to seek self-determination after a period of six years. The Sudanese government and the SPLA signed a formal peace deal in 2005, officially ending the civil war. However, the north continues to conduct bombing raids in southern states.

On January 9, 2011, in a referendum on secession from the north, the southern citizens of Sudan overwhelmingly voted in favor of separation from Sudan, and the country was divided into Sudan, an Arab republic in the north with approximately 36 million citizens, and South Sudan, an ethnically diverse nation with approximately 12 million citizens. But when the borders were drawn, many people living in Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains—who had fought for freedom from Sudan—found themselves on the wrong side of the line. When they refused to disarm, the Sudanese government began waging a new war on the people in the border regions.
The bombings of civilian areas of the Nuba Mountains within the Southern Kordofan state began in June 2011. A state of emergency was declared in Blue Nile in September 2011, and 100,000 civilians fled the state. The bombing tactics are used by the north to terrorize civilians; because of the air raids, farmers in the area have been unable to plant crops and Blue Nile is running out of food. Since 2011, more than 170,000 Sudanese have fled the border states to find refuge in South Sudan.

All told, more than 1.5 million people have died in the decades-long conflict in Sudan, and, more than 3,500 bombs have been dropped on civilian targets in Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile since 2012.

Sources:
Nuba Reports. “There is No Such Thing as an Election in Sudan.” http://nubareports.org/there-is-no-such-thing-as-an-election-in-sudan-2/
Cultural Identity and Preservation

Today, cultural tensions remain between northerners and southerners, between Muslims and Christians, and between those who consider themselves Arab and those who consider themselves African. These tensions have a deep impact on the cultural life of Sudan. In *Beats of the Antonov*, Seif Al-islam, a refugee in Blue Nile, says that he never sees people like himself on TV “because my people’s music is categorized as pagan, where the two sexes mix and the girls are immodest.” This absence of traditional African culture in the media, on the radio and in the national arts scene in Sudan is one of many observations that leads Albaqir Elafeef to say, “The war is against all the African elements in Sudan.”

Throughout ongoing war, the people of Sudan have maintained a rich musical culture. As Islamic law became stricter and more widely enforced in the 1980s, Sudan’s middle-class intellectuals and artists left the country. Some artists were exiled. That was the fate of popular musician Mohammad Wardi, also known as “the Pharaoh,” whose music was banned at universities throughout the 1990s. After Bashir’s 1989 coup, religious music dominated radio and television stations. Propaganda music was particularly popular as a means of glorifying the army and praising military action in the south.

However, a traditional musical culture has survived, particularly in the Blue Nile state, where half of *Beats of the Antonov* was filmed. Despite the cultural restrictions on women throughout Sudan—women can be arrested and
beaten for wearing pants—women in Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains express themselves through “girls’ music,” a genre traditionally associated with weddings. However, in *Beats of the Antonov* we see that it is much more than wedding music. The musical artist Alsarah explains the popularity of the genre, which tells stories of women’s everyday lives, saying, “Everyone is allowed to sing. Anyone has the right to drum. You can use a bucket to drum. In the end, everyone sings together.”

**Sources:**

Selected People Featured in *Beats of the Antonov*

**Sarah Mohamed**  
Sudanese ethnomusicologist

**Albaqir Elafeef**  
Director, KACE (Al Khatim Adlan Center for Enlightenment and Human Development), a Sudanese NGO that works to build civil society practices and institutions

**Ibrahim Khatir**  
Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) officer
Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?
- Compare your own experience with the experiences of people in the film. Which parts of their experiences “spoke truth” to you and which were very different from your life?
- Was there anything in the film that was surprising or made you pause and say, “I need to think more about that?”
- What is one thing you learned from the film that you wish everyone in your family or community knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?
Music and Dance

Ethnomusicologist Sarah Mohamed explains that for Blue Nile people, music “is really part of the society, like water, food and air.” How does this compare to the role of music in your life or community?

Musician Jodah Bujud says, “When you play the Rababa people forget their hardships for a moment. They enter a state of happiness.” Sarah Mohamed adds, “When people are anxious and disturbed, dancing helps them get over it.” Why do you think this is so? Have you ever experienced or observed healing effects from music or dance? What were the circumstances?

Ethnomusicologist Sarah Mohamed explains that in traditional Sudanese music, “There is no separation between musicians and their audience. The audience is part of the music and the musicians are part of the audience. They merge to the point where there is no stage separating the musicians from their audience. No differences, no barriers.” Later she says that in the Blue Nile, “Everyone feels they own the music. Everyone has the right to pick up a drum, play, write lyrics to any melody.” What does this tell you about Sudanese culture? What does the typical structure of music performance in the West tell you about Western culture?

Musician Jodah Bujud observes, “The Rababa is played here more than back home. Nobody cares for it back home.” Why would a traditional instrument be more popular in this rural community of refugees than elsewhere in Sudan? Why would traditional music be absent from TV and national media and reserved only for ceremonial purposes?

How do the song lyrics you hear in the film compare to the topics in the music you typically listen to?

A young women who sings for Sarah Mohamed says she doesn’t know any songs in the local language and doesn’t want to know them, but she and the others are happy to share the songs they have composed (which Sarah calls “girls’ music”). Some of the adults don’t want to hear the songs that the young women are singing, but Sarah points out, “This is your youth and this [rather than cultural songs in their tribal language] is what they want to sing. We have to ask, ‘Why is that?’” How would you explain the young women’s choice?

Mohamed also notes that the young women choose to sing “girls’ music” and not pop songs from Khartoum. Why do you suppose that is the case? Do you identify with the young people featured in the film?
**Culture and Identity**

Sudanese refugee Insaf Awad says, “War is good and bad. It makes people attached to their culture.” When does dedication to culture benefit people, and when does it become a problem?

What did you learn from the film about the ways in which Sudan’s war has disrupted the transmission of culture from one generation to the next? In what ways is culture passed on to future generations where you live?

What did you learn from the film about the distinctions between being Arab and being Muslim? How does the conflation of Arab ethnicity with Islam create problems in Sudan?

How would you describe Sudanese in terms of ethnicity, race and religion after seeing this film? What are examples of identity formation that you saw in the film? Describe the negative and positive effects of each example.

NGO worker Albaqir Elafeef argues that Sudan’s war “is caused by the northerners’ identity crisis. The war is against all the African elements in Sudan. Be it in Darfur, Nuba Mountain or Blue Nile. That is the external aspect for a war actually waged in the subconscious of northerners against its own black element. That is manifested in our denial of our African self and our attachment to being Arabs...And because we have insecure, divided and fake identities, we are not living in peace with ourselves and it follows that we can’t live in peace with others.” How do “insecurities” and “fake identities” lead to or contribute to war? If the enemy is internalized racism, then what would you suggest are the most promising strategies for peace?
Tactics of Oppression

What did you learn from the film about how an oppressive government manages to stay in power?

Nuba Mountains resident Awadia Tulma describes her experience: “The Antonov came and bombed us and now we have nothing to eat here. It destroyed our house and burned all of our food, clothes and everything…So much lost over the two years living with daily threats from the plane. It killed one of my kids and killed my goats. It hit me again twice. What for?” How would you answer that question? How do you think the government in Khartoum would answer?

Rabha Awad objects to President Omar al-Bashir’s military conscription of Sudanese boys, saying, “We want him to send his own kids if he wants war. But he doesn’t. He only pushes the black people to die.” What message does Bashir’s policy send about the value of black lives?

Ibrahim Khatir explains that the ruling party in Khartoum “utilizes a ‘divide and rule’ policy. It categorizes Sudanese citizens along racial and ethnic lines, breaking them into Arabs and blacks.” How does this contribute to dehumanization and the capacity to see the “other” as slaves (as Tutu Agabna says) or see killing the “other” as simple and normal (as Sarah Mohamed says)?

SPLA leader Ibrahim Khatir says that the government only represents one ethnicity (Islamic Arabic culture) and that it has, “established its culture on the whole country and tried to make it the national culture. Anyone who adopts this culture is deemed patriotic.” What specific sorts of things does the government do to privilege Arab culture and undermine Sudanese allegiance to African cultural practices? Why do you suppose education, language and music are favorite targets?

Sudanese musician Musa Kusafa says, “We were asking for our equal rights. But they made it complicated for us politically. If you ask for your rights, they accuse you of being Westernized, a spy for America and Israel.” Why would these particular accusations be used to undermine a person’s credibility?
Racism

In what ways has the government in Khartoum institutionalized racism in government policy and practice? What did you learn from the film about the impact of systemic racism?

Sarah Mohamed notes, “The idea that ‘black is beautiful’ has not reached us, although we are all black.” Then she asks, “Why did it not reach us? It is baffling, right? The whole country are Africans, and everyone wants to paint themselves white. Who do we blame for this?” Who or what do you think is to blame?

Albaqir Elafeef says, “Inside every Northerner there’s a tiny Arab. He sees the world and himself through these Arab eyes. That is why we see ourselves as ugly and our color dreadful. We want to alter our skin to get Arabic features. Having fake identities we want to transmit our fakeness to others...We went on [a] quest to transform all these people into what they should be, not what they are. We want to transform them into what we want them to be like.” What do you think motivates people to make over others in their own image and then reject those who don’t conform? Where do you see this process occurring in your own community? What strategies might be effective in disrupting this process?

Sarah Mohamed observes, “Despite this racist war being waged and these people fighting to keep their culture alive knowing that others fight them because their color and roots are different,” women (like Nisreen Nasir) use skin lightening creams. What explains the apparent contradiction?
When Mohamed points out to Nasir that her daughter will want to copy her practice of using skin-lightening cream, Nasir replies, “No, she will not do it.” What do you think Nasir’s daughter will do and why? What does this practice tell you about life and culture in Sudan? How is this use of cosmetics similar to and different from women’s use of make-up in Western or other nations? How would you respond (or have you responded) to women’s use of make-up or skin-lightening practices in Western or other nations?

Sarah Mohamed asserts, “Everywhere in Sudan, if you are red, yellow, orange, blue or green no one is satisfied with their color. This is a form of self-hatred. And we all hate ourselves, not only the people of the Blue Nile.” SPLA soldier Yunis Elahaimar explains, “This is one result of the oppression against the Sudanese people. To control you, I oppress you for a while, then hand you the tools of your own oppression so you start oppressing yourself.” What “tools of oppression” have you been handed, and what have you done with them?
Transforming the Conflicts

Toward the end of the film, we see a conflict between two community members resolved amicably. What did you notice about the conflict resolution process? What lessons might this situation offer to others in Sudan (and beyond)? Sudanese refugee Seif Alislam says, "If we don’t answer the question of the Sudanese identity, war will continue." He goes on to say that it will depend on the youth, because only they can see themselves in a new way. What actions would the current generation have to take in order to produce a generation whose members see themselves primarily as Sudanese, rather than as African or Arab (or Muslim, Christian or tribal)?

How does Alislam’s observation square with the following assertion from Sarah Mohamed: “People should protect their culture, pass it on to future generations. Culture matters. As the saying goes, ‘He who changes his habits, lessens his happiness.’ Culture protects us.” Can you think of ways to preserve one’s culture and also to come to a place of peaceful co-existence with people who don’t share your heritage?

Yunis Elahaimar says, “For you to be part of these people you have to be fluent in Arabic. Your failure in the Arabic language means your failure in the education system as a whole. That’s why you find that most of the educational gaps are among those for whom Arabic is not their mother tongue. The real crisis in Sudan is school curriculums. When we’ll be able to put together a proper curriculum that respects the Sudanese culture and identity then we’ll be able to create non-racist generations. But the current generation will stay as is.” In your view, what distinguishes education that preserves the status quo from education that sparks social change? Using that spectrum, where would you place the schools in your community? Can you think of any schools that might be useful models for Sudan’s schools or teachers who might be useful models for teachers there?

Some have suggested that the best way to resolve ethnic or racial conflicts is to give each group control of its own territory. Sarah Mohamed notes that fracturing the country doesn’t change the way people think, nor does it provide space for people whose identities cross current boundaries. What would a solution look like that accounted for people in whom multiple ethnicities and racial identities are merged?

SPLA leader Ibrahim Khatir says that SPLA’s goal is to create “a new Sudan that doesn’t have discrimination based on race, color, and ethnicity.” He also acknowledges, “The military realm is just a tool not an aim. The aim is to achieve the humanity mission for the Sudanese citizen. And we are working on spreading awareness among the citizens about
their rights, the reasons for the war and how can they emerge from war to a state of peace, tolerance and acceptance of others. We are aware of the danger of becoming tyrants ourselves if we reached power if the citizens are not aware of their rights; this can turn into a catastrophe.” Do you believe that SPLA’s civilian aims can ever be achieved using military means? Given current circumstances, can they ever be achieved without military force?

Clay toys made by children in a refugee camp.
Photo courtesy of hajooj kuka

Additional media literacy questions are available at: www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
Taking Action

• Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has been indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court. Learn about the case against him (using a website such as www.bashirwatch.org) and check on the status of the prosecution.

• Create a community music event that mirrors the approach in the film, where roles are flexible and changing, and anyone can play, sing, dance and/or listen. Alternatively, produce a concert by Sudanese musicians who perform traditional or Sudanese “folk” music.

• To ensure that the people who are suffering aren’t forgotten, track current events in the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains regions of Sudan and regularly share what you learn with your community and with news outlets.
**Conflict in Sudan**

**BBC NEWS: “SOUTH SUDAN PROFILE - OVERVIEW”**

The film focuses on the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountain regions’ conflict with Sudan (the north); this article outlines conflicts with South Sudan.

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: “WORLD REPORT 2014: SUDAN”**
www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/sudan

This report provides an overview of the status of conflicts and human rights in Sudan.

**INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP: “SUDAN’S SPREADING CONFLICT (II): WAR IN BLUE NILE”**

This NGO offers a useful summary of the clashes in Blue Nile, along with specific humanitarian recommendations to all sides in the conflict.

**NUBA REPORTS**
http://nubareports.org

Nuba Reports was founded by residents of Southern Kordofan after the government cut off humanitarian and media access. Its goal is to provide Sudan and the international community with credible and compelling dispatches from the front lines of this conflict and to illuminate the war’s impact on civilians.

**SUDAN TRIBUNE**
www.sudantribune.com

Based in Paris, this online news site provides current reporting from Sudanese journalists and independent journalists from other countries dedicated to promoting free debate on Sudan.

**SUDAN UPDATE**
www.sudanupdate.org

Click on “Reports” and then “Music & (Censorship)” for information on the role of music in Sudan’s conflicts.

**UNITED TO END GENOCIDE:**
“WHAT’S HAPPENING IN SUDAN?”
http://endgenocide.org/conflict-areas/sudan

An overview of the history and current status of conflicts in Sudan.
For information on how to purchase Beats of the Antonov, visit https://www.facebook.com/beatsofantonov, or email info@bigworld.co.za.