Mr. President, as an

original cosponsor of the sense-of-the-

Senate on providing humanitarian relief

to the Sudan, I believe it is important

that we focus on the tragedy that

is unfolding before our eyes. The people

of southern Sudan are starving. Khartoum

is using the denial of food as a

weapon in its war against the rebels in

the south—and we are letting the government

of Sudan get away with this

odious practice by allowing Khartoum

to have a veto over aid deliveries.

Sudan has been torn by a devastating

civil war between the Muslim north

and the predominantly Christian and

animist south for most of history since

independence. The current phase of the

war started in 1983 when the then-

President embarked on an Islamization

program. Recurring famine is just one

of the tragic outcomes of Khartoum’s

brutal method of warfare where

women, children, and livestock are

taken as prizes of war. It has also resulted

in institutionalized slavery,

more than 4 million internally displaced

people, and more than 1.5 million

casualties in the past 14 years.

Our State Department lists Sudan as

a terrorist state. We have sanctions on

Sudan which prohibit American investment.

But we respect the right of the

National Islamic Front regime in Khartoum

to veto the delivery of humanitarian

relief to the south. That just

doesn’t make sense.

Most of the aid flowing to southern

Sudan is through non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) participating in a

United Nations relief program, Operation

Lifeline Sudan (OLS). While traveling

through east Africa in December,

I had the opportunity to visit the OLS

Southern Sector headquarters and see

firsthand the efforts of the NGOs.

These NGOs are on the ground, along

with UNICEF, mounting a heroic effort

to distribute aid to these starving people.

And I know that many of them

share my frustration with the UN’s political

agreement with the government

of Sudan which allows Khartoum to

have the final say in the distribution of

aid to the south. This has resulted in

the starvation of citizens and soldiers

alike when Khartoum decides it is advantageous

to halt the delivering of

aid.

For the past few years, Khartoum has

restricted flights during the planting

season so that aid organizations cannot

deliver the seeds and tools necessary to

help the people of southern Sudan feed

themselves. This year Khartoum went

a step further. Khartoum didn’t just restrict

flights. It banned relief flights in

the Bahr el Ghazal region. It should be

no surprise that another poor harvest

is predicted in the Fall. According to

the UN World Food Program, 2.6 million

people in Southern Sudan are in

imminent peril of starvation. Quite

frankly, until we can find a way to deliver

seeds and tools to southern Sudan

during planting season, I see this cycle

of famine continuing indefinitely. This

is a warfare tactic of cowards.

The flight ban wasn’t the only problem

that OLS had in delivering aid effectively.

When the flight ban was lifted

and aid could once again be provided,

OLS faced another barrier put in

its way by Khartoum. OLS was forced

to wait for Khartoum’s permission to

add four Ilyushin cargo planes to the

handful of C–130s that deliver relief

supplies to southern Sudan. Any agreement

by the United Nations which permits

Khartoum a veto over the number

of relief planes as well as when and

where they can fly is fatally flawed.

The President should aggressively seek

to change the terms of this agreement

which restricts the ability of Operation

Lifeline Sudan to distribute aid effectively

to southern Sudan.

As chairman of the International Operations

subcommittee, I have to say I

hold little hope that the United Nations

will take any significant steps in

this direction. That leaves, of course,

the option of unilateral action by the

United States to bypass Khartoum’s

veto. Currently, U.S. AID funnels aid

to Sudan almost exclusively through

OLS-affiliated groups. That must

change if we are to have any chance to

effectively combat the use of starvation

as a tactic of war. The United

States government shouldn’t just cooperate

with these non-OLS groups

when Khartoum institutes restrictions

on the delivery of aid—as we did during

the Bahr El Ghazal flight ban. The

United States should actively assist

and develop relief distribution networks

outside of Operation Lifeline Sudan’s

umbrella which are not subject to

the whims of Khartoum. If we don’t,

yet another planting season will pass

without seeds being sown, and hundreds

of thousands of more people will

starve.