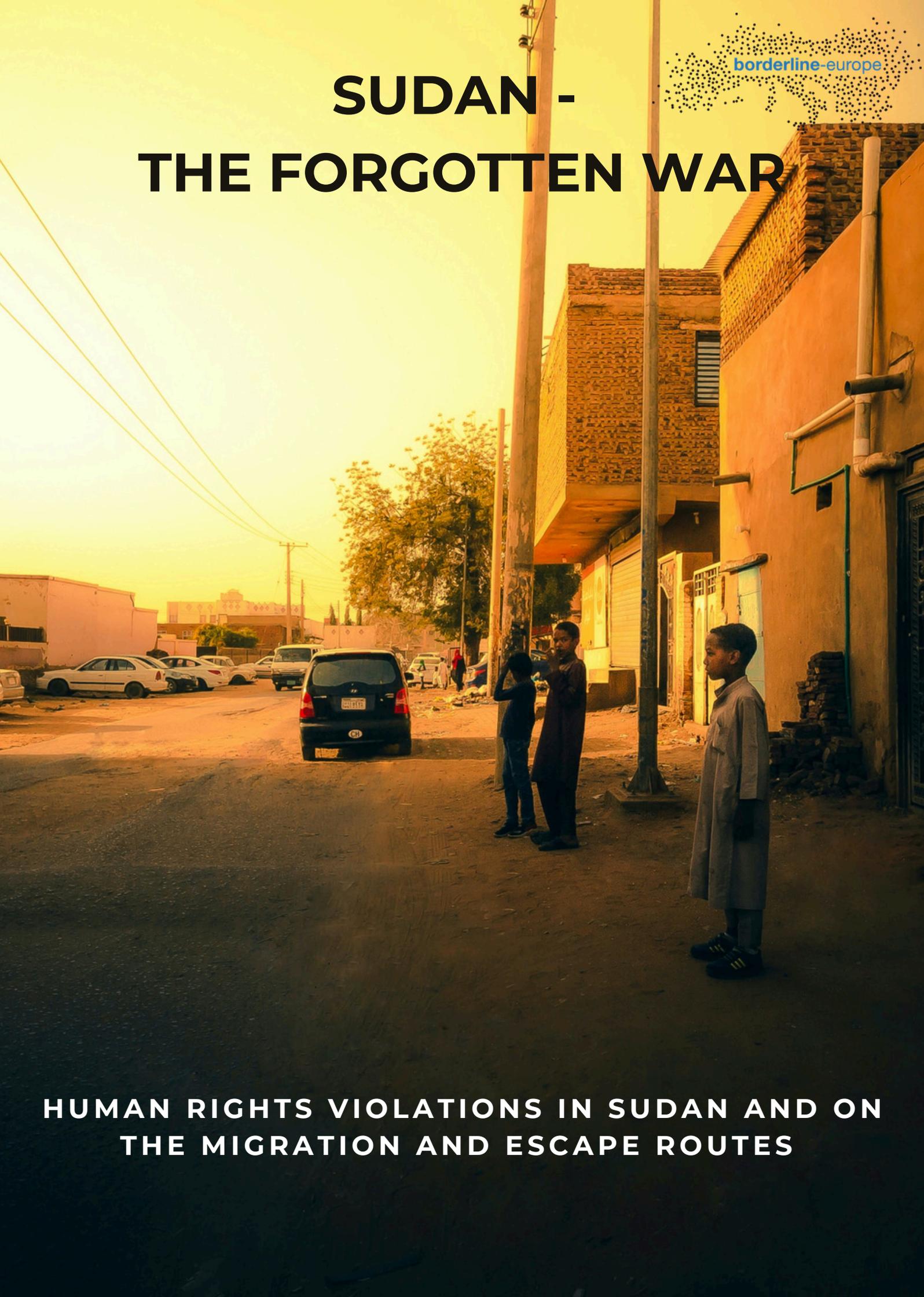


# SUDAN - THE FORGOTTEN WAR



**HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SUDAN AND ON  
THE MIGRATION AND ESCAPE ROUTES**



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# CONTENT

## **PAGE 3**

INTRODUCTION

---

## **PAGE 4**

FACT FINDING MISSIONS

---

## **PAGE 5**

SUDAN: FROM AL-BASHIR UP UNTIL THE WAR

---

## **PAGE 7**

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN SUDAN 2023 - 2025

---

## **PAGE 12**

INVISIBLE BATTLES: SUDANESE REFUGEE WOMEN IN EGYPT

---

## **PAGE 14**

DOUBLE VICTIMS: MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

## **PAGE 16**

FROM WAR TO PRISON-SUDANESE YOUTH IN GREECE

---

## **PAGE 19**

SUDANESE WOMEN IN THE FACE OF WAR

---

## **PAGE 22**

SUDAN'S WOMEN EMERGENCY RESPONSE ROOMS (WERR)

---

## **PAGE 24**

INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS & THE WAR IN SUDAN

---

## **PAGE 26**

GOODWILL MESSAGE



# INTRODUCTION

The war in Sudan is entering its fourth year. In the local media, the stolen revolution, the suffering of the civilian population and humanitarian self-help are rarely mentioned in view of the lack of international aid. Donald Trump's rise to power and the resulting withdrawal of humanitarian aid, the reduced commitment to human rights and support for human rights defenders have increasingly exacerbated the situation.

borderline-europe - Human Rights Without Borders, has been working in collaboration with the Africa Center for Justice and Peace Studies on the documentation of Human Rights Violations and on Peace Dialogues .

To this extent, it is pivotal to us to investigate how perpetrators can be held accountable and how reconciliation can be initiated. However, in the meantime, the power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) causes many civilian casualties and the destruction of infrastructure and residential buildings.

Both factions attract smaller militias and gangs to their side and they target activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. The Emergency Response Rooms, which emerged from the revolutionary neighborhood committees, not only offer humanitarian care and psychological support, but are also core structures for a possible and necessary peace process.

borderline europe is working together with the Africa Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) on reconciliation, peace and justice. This brochure reflects part of our discussion on how transitional justice can be initiated.

*by Andrea Stäritz*



**Fact-Finding Missions of the UN and African Commission on Human and People’s Rights**

***Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (2023-)***

**Mandate:** Established by resolution A/HRC/RES/54/2 to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law in the context of the ongoing armed conflict between the SAF and the RSF since 15 April 2023.

**Renewal of mandate (latest):** Extended for one year by Resolution A/HRC/RES/60/3 adopted at the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council on 6 October 2025.

**Report(latest):** An oral update was delivered at the 59th session of the Human Rights Council on 17 June 2025; a comprehensive report was adopted by Resolution A/HRC/59/2 of the Human Rights Council at its 59<sup>th</sup> session on 2 September 2025.

***Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Sudan (2004)***

**Mandate:** Established pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1564 of 18 September 2004 to investigate human rights violations and genocide grounds in Sudan, particularly in Darfur.

**Report:** Report of 25 January 2005 to the United Nations Secretary-General that helped lead to the referral of Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

***Joint fact-finding mission of the ACHPR (2024-)***

**Mandate:** Established by Resolution ACHPR/Res.590 (LXXX) 2024 on 2 August 2024 to investigate human rights violations during the ongoing Sudan war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces.

**Renewal of mandate (latest):** Extended for six months by Resolution ACHPR/Res-642 (LXXXV) on 03 November 2025.

**Activities:** Missions to refugee-hosting countries (especially Chad) to interview survivors and witnesses; gathering of testimonies from Sudanese refugees, civil society, and humanitarian organizations; preparation reports and recommendations for African Union bodies.

**These missions document human rights violations in Sudan and make recommendations for measures to improve the human rights situation.**

# Sudan: From al-Bashir up until the war

1989-2019 - The rule of Omar al-Bashir

30 years of oppression, civil war (especially in Darfur), economic decline and international isolation.

## 30 June 1989: Military Coup by Omar al-Bashir

Brigadier General Omar al-Bashir overthrows the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi with the support of the Islamist National Islamic Front.

Beginning of an authoritarian, Islamist military dictatorship.

## 2003-2005: Conflict in Darfur

Massacres and expulsions. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issues arrest warrants for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity against Bashir in 2009 and 2010.

## 2011 - South Sudan becomes independent

After decades of civil war, South Sudan secedes. As a result, Sudan loses a large part of its oil revenues.

## 2018-2019 - Popular uprising and revolution

Dec 2018: Protests over rising bread prices turn into a nationwide revolt against al-Bashir's regime.

April 2019: Overthrow of al-Bashir

Civil society - especially young people, women and trade unions such as the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) had been calling for Bashir's overthrow since December 2018 with massive, nationwide protests, demanding the fall of Bashir. Despite harsh repression, the protests were persistent, organized and peaceful.

After the demonstrations reached a critical mass -especially around the military headquarters in Khartoum- the military decided to remove Bashir to appease the protests and secure their own power.

## 2019 - Transitional military government and violence

The military takes power. Protests against the military erupt.

3 June 2019: Khartoum massacre - security forces kill over 100 protesters.

August 2019: Transitional government made up of civilian and military forces is formed -known as Sovereign Council- to prepare for a democratic election by 2022. Prime Minister: Abdalla Hamdok.

## 25 October 2021 - Military coup

General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan stages a coup against the transitional government. Prime Minister Hamdok is briefly arrested. The military takes sole control. Mass protests follow.

## 2022 - Tensions between military leaders

A power struggle develops between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan -head of the army, de-facto head of state- and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (“Hemedti”) - head of the RSF, a powerful paramilitary force formed from the former Janjaweed militias.

## 15 April 2023 - Outbreak of war

Escalation of the power struggle: war between the SAF and the RSF breaks out in Khartoum and spreads throughout the country.

To this day: severe humanitarian crisis, millions displaced, thousands dead, impending famine.



# HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND WAR CRIMES IN SUDAN

**APRIL 2023 - MARCH 2025**

The Report of ACJPS to the African Commission

*The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) submitted this report to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) Hybrid Joint Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan to provide insights into the severe human rights violations occurring in Sudan since the war began on 15 April 2023. The armed conflict between the SAF and the RSF has resulted in mass killings, sexual violence, forced disappearances, modern slavery, and humanitarian crises.*

## Key Findings:

### 1. Massacres and indiscriminate attacks on civilians

El Geneina Massacre (June 2023): Over 1,100 civilians from the Massalit ethnic group were executed by RSF forces in West Darfur. Witnesses described men being shot, while women and children were forcibly displaced or killed.

Wad Al-Noora Massacre (5 June 2024): RSF forces attacked Wad Al-Noora village in Al-Jazira state, killing at least 100 civilians through heavy shelling.

Khartoum Airstrikes (September 2024): SAF bombed Shambat and Bahri districts, killing at least 78 civilians, mostly women and children.

### 2. Ethnic cleansing in Darfur

Mistri Village Attack (June 2023): RSF-led militias killed over 200 Massalit people and burned homes. Women were reportedly abducted and trafficked.

Tawila Raid (February 2025): RSF attacked Tawila, North Darfur, killing at least 60 people, looting homes, and displacing thousands.

The fall of El Fasher (October 25): After a 18 months siege RSF committed a massacre in El Fasher. Refugees report murder, violence, torture, rape and looting in the city and during their flight. Thousands of people were killed, 80,000 fled the city.

### 3. Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)

Omdurman Abduction (July 2023): A 16-year-old girl was abducted by RSF fighters, held captive for a week, and repeatedly assaulted.

Khartoum Refugee Camps (November 2023 – Ongoing): RSF soldiers gang-raped and forced female Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees into marriage.

Nyala Attacks (January 2025): Survivors report at least 47 cases of sexual violence against women and girls in Nyala, South Darfur.

### 4. Enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions

Journalist Disappearance (8 October 2023): Journalist Mohammed Ahmed- known for covering war crimes- was abducted by RSF in Khartoum. His whereabouts remain unknown.

Targeting of Activists (March 2024): RSF detained human rights defender Abdelmalik Mousa in Khartoum. He was later released after international pressure.

University Students Kidnapped (February 2025): At least 30 students from Khartoum University disappeared after an anti-war protest.

## 5. Modern slavery and forced labor

Nyala RSF Camps (November 2023): Over 50 women and girls were enslaved in RSF-run camps, used as domestic laborers and victims of sexual exploitation.

Porter Slavery (March 2024): Men from North Kordofan were forcibly recruited to work as porters and cooks for RSF troops under threat of execution.

Child Soldier Recruitment (January 2025): Reports indicate boys as young as 13 are being forcibly recruited by both RSF and SAF via threats against their families.

## 6. Abuses against migrants and refugees

Gedaref Refugee Camp Attack (July 2023): RSF kidnapped 23 Eritrean refugees; their fate remains unknown.

Human Trafficking (October 2024): A smuggling network connected to RSF forces trafficked Sudanese and South Sudanese women to Gulf states for forced labor and exploitation.

## 7. Humanitarian crisis and starvation as a weapon

Famine in Darfur (2024-2025): RSF has deliberately blocked aid routes to North and West Darfur, leading to widespread starvation. Aid workers report looting of supplies and executions of civilians seeking food.

World Food Programme Attack (September 2023): RSF forces ambushed a WFP convoy in North Kordofan killing three aid workers.

Khartoum shutdown (February 2024 – Ongoing): RSF took control of telecommunication centers, shutting down an internet and communications, cutting off humanitarian assistance.

## 8. International response and calls for justice

Jeddah Declaration (May 2023): Failed attempt at peace as both SAF and RSF continued war crimes.

ICC War Crimes Investigation (March 2024): The International Criminal Court (ICC) launched investigations into ethnic cleansing and war crimes in Darfur.

Sudan's Case Against UAE (March 2025): The International Court of Justice (ICJ) agreed to hear Sudan's case against the United Arab Emirates for allegedly violating the Genocide Convention by arming the RSF.

### Conclusion:

The conflict in Sudan has resulted in mass atrocities, including genocide, sexual violence, slavery, enforced disappearances, and starvation tactics. Despite international condemnation, the crimes continue into 2025. Immediate and decisive action is required from the United Nations, African Union, and International Criminal Court to halt these violations and condemn the perpetrators.

*The full report can be found under the following link: <https://www.acjps.org/publications/a-report-documenting-the-human-rights-violations-in-sudan-since-15-april-2023-submitted-by-acjps-to-the-achpr-hybrid-joint-fact-finding-mission-on-sudan>*

*ACJPS is a Sudanese non-profit, non-governmental organization focused on monitoring and promoting respect for human rights and legal reform in Sudan. ACJPS' vision is one where all individuals can live and thrive free from fear in Sudan.*

# INVISIBLE BATTLE SUDANESE REFUGEE WOMEN IN EGYPT

by Shimaa Sami



## SUDANESE REFUGEE WOMEN IN EGYPT FACE LEGAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND HUMANITARIAN STRUGGLES



As the world marks the third anniversary of the war in Sudan, the spotlight remains dim on the plight of those who fled. Among them are hundreds of thousands of Sudanese women and children who have crossed into Egypt in search of safety - only to find a different kind of battle awaiting them.

This report draws on fieldwork, survivor testimonies, and over a decade of experience in legal and social advocacy, as well as on the work we have done through the *Madad Initiative* since the

war began. *Madad* is an Arabic word that means “support,” “reinforcement”, or “coming to someone’s aid in times of hardship.” It carries the spirit of solidarity and mutual assistance - values we try to live by every day. *Madad* is a grassroots initiative that I direct in Egypt, in partnership with the Berlin-based NGO Borderline Europe. “We work closely with Sudanese women and children who have fled conflict, providing legal aid, psychological support, and community-based protection.”

Beyond our casework, we also organize regular activities at our community space in Cairo which include training sessions, dialogue circles, and networking events. These gatherings are designed to empower women, promote knowledge exchange, and support community integration between refugees and host communities. They create a safe and welcoming environment where people can connect, learn from each other, and build networks of care and solidarity.

## A crisis beyond numbers

Egypt officially hosts over 630,000 registered Sudanese refugees, according to UNHCR figures. Yet this is only a fraction of the real number. Many have arrived through unofficial routes and remain undocumented, lacking legal status or access to basic services.

Most of these refugees are women and children. They are not only fleeing war, but also enduring its long tail - separation from family, gender-based violence, and loss of livelihood. Once in Egypt, they are met not with relief, but with systemic neglect. Racism, xenophobia, and economic exploitation shape their daily experiences. In informal labour markets, women are routinely underpaid or harassed. In schools and hospitals, they face discrimination, exclusion, or bureaucratic dead-ends.



## Trauma in silence

Psychological trauma is one of the least visible yet most devastating consequences of forced displacement. At Madad, we work with dozens of women who exhibit signs of acute psychological distress: mutism, hyper-vigilance, dissociation, panic attacks, and self-isolation.

One mother described how her 9-year-old daughter began wetting herself in school after witnessing violence during their escape. Another woman said she had not slept for more than two hours a night since losing her son at a border checkpoint. A seven-year-old girl we support with medical aid has not spoken a word since witnessing her father's murder in Sudan.

Despite this, Egypt lacks any national psychological support system for refugees. The burden falls entirely on underfunded civil society actors and informal peer networks. Even when mental health support is offered by NGOs, many women hesitate to access it, fearing stigma, language barriers, or deportation.

### **Legal walls instead of legal pathways**

In December 2024, Egypt passed its first, long-awaited, asylum law. However, more than four months later, the law remains dormant. The implementing regulations have not been issued. There is no independent refugee status determination body. There are no functioning complaint mechanisms or protective services.

Even in its written form, the law presents significant gaps:

- It does not enshrine non-refoulement (the international principle of not returning refugees to danger).
- It fails to guarantee access to healthcare, education, or justice.
- It contains no special provisions for women, survivors of trauma, or those with medical conditions.

This legal vacuum leaves refugee women especially vulnerable. Without clear rules, many fall into undocumented status and are treated as “illegal migrants.” This opens the door to arbitrary arrest, detention, and deportation—even for mothers with children or women fleeing sexual violence.



### **Gendered violence and reproductive injustice**

One of the most urgent yet silenced issues affecting Sudanese women refugees is sexual violence, both in conflict zones and along migration routes. Many women arrive in Egypt already pregnant from rape, whether by armed groups, traffickers, or border guards. Others are subjected to sexual exploitation inside Egypt, often in exchange for shelter or employment.

In Egypt, abortion is criminalized—even in cases of rape. Survivors are forced to carry pregnancies to term, often with no psychological or medical support. Many experience obstetric complications, unsafe childbirth, or postpartum depression. Some attempt unsafe abortions, risking infection, infertility, or death.



The injustice does not end with childbirth. Registering a child without legal documentation or proof of paternity is nearly impossible. Many of these children grow up stateless, excluded from education, healthcare, and all forms of legal identity. Mothers often avoid hospitals out of fear of being reported or shamed. There are no clear procedures for reporting rape - especially for undocumented women - and no specialized units trained to handle such cases.

At Madad, we supported a young woman who had been gang-raped during her journey to Egypt. When she tried to file a police report, she was told: "You have no ID. We cannot help you." She left in silence. Months later, she gave birth alone in a shared apartment with no medical supervision.

### The health crisis within the humanitarian crisis

In early 2024, UNHCR announced it would suspend all healthcare services for refugees in Egypt due to a global funding crisis.

Only emergency and life-saving care remains available. This decision has left thousands of refugees - especially women with chronic illnesses - without access to medication, diagnostic services, or preventive care.

Women with diabetes, high blood pressure, or cancer have had to stop treatment. Mothers cannot access paediatric care for their children. Survivors of sexual violence cannot get reproductive health services. Mental health care has also been gutted, creating a silent wave of untreated trauma.

One woman told us:

**"I used to get medicine for my heart from the UN clinic. Now, I stay awake at night wondering if I'll die in my sleep. My daughter cries every time I cough."**

The collapse of healthcare is not just a humanitarian failure: it is a violation of basic human rights. International donors must not turn away from this unfolding catastrophe.



## What needs to change

Sudanese refugee women in Egypt are not just victims of war - they are survivors of a prolonged, compounded crisis. Their suffering is shaped by institutional indifference, legal gaps, and the erosion of humanitarian support.

### We urgently call for:

- Immediate implementation of a by-law for Egypt's new asylum law, with a focus on protection for women against GBV.
- Legal guarantees for non-refoulement, access to services, and documentation of the cases.
- Access to safe abortion in cases of rape, and recognition of reproductive rights.
- Development of a gender-sensitive documentation, reporting and communication system
- International funding for healthcare, psychosocial services, and legal aid.
- International solidarity and pressure to ensure refugee women are protected, not punished.

## Conclusion

This is **not** a side story. Transitional justice must not be confined to courtrooms, peace talks, or international commissions. It must include those who were forced to flee - the women who lost homes, children, and dignity in a war they did not choose.

Sudanese refugee women in Egypt are raising their voices - not for pity, but for justice. Not for charity, but for rights. Their trauma is not anecdotal. It is structural. It is political.

Their realities must be seen. Their stories must be heard. Their rights must be restored.

**“We urge governments, donors, UN agencies, and civil society actors to invest in refugee-led and community-based solutions. To prioritize protection over paperwork. To fund dignity - not just survival.”**

The struggle of Sudanese women refugees in Egypt is not a side story. It is central to the unfinished narrative of justice in our region. The time to act is now.



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# Double Victims: The Brutal Impact of Sudan's Conflict on Migrants and Refugees

by Bashari Ali

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**Preliminary remark:** *It should be noted that the information we have provided in this report is obtained directly through official and non-official interviews with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers from Eritrea and Ethiopia who are survivors or witnesses of the war that broke out in Sudan on 15 April 2023; alternatively, from other Sudanese activists who dealt with them and provided support services. First of all, we address some of the types of violence, persecution, and discrimination of non-Sudanese migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Sudan based on nationality/ethnicity and/or gender. These testimonies refer to the time period starting from the outbreak of the Sudanese war, and they particularly come from residents in Khartoum and Al-Jazeera state. Moreover, the official position of the Sudanese government, institutions, and migrant communities is examined with respect to their responsibilities towards protection. Finally, we report about some of the efforts undertaken by national and foreign organizations to provide some needed services.*

---

We can say that the suffering of non-Sudanese migrants varied according to their nationality, gender and sometimes ethnicity.

For example, during the very first days of war, although there were no clear and widespread cases of violations recorded among the Sudanese citizens, most of the Ethiopians and Eritreans who lived among the citizens were exposed to cases of violence and systematic looting. They were subject of attacks by RSF on their property whilst women were subjected to sexual assaults in the areas of Al-Daim, Al-Sahafa, and Al-Sajana. A number of women were raped, and others were forced into marriage - even underage girls. Young men were obliged to serve the military.

Most migrant and refugee families - especially Eritreans - rely on remittances from their young men living outside Sudan. After the war began and during the siege of the capital, communication and internet services were interrupted, cutting off money transfers. As a result, many families struggled to meet their basic needs. Additionally, traveling out of Khartoum became risky and costly, even for Sudanese citizens. Many migrants and refugees - particularly Ethiopian domestic workers - were unable to leave the city.

To this extent, some migrant families reported that the situation deteriorated after Sudanese families who had previously supported them fled the war zones.

Certain groups of migrants managed to escape during initial evacuation operations, reaching Uganda, Angola, Ethiopia, and a few to Egypt. However, the majority were unable to flee due to lack of money or the loss of identification documents. Some moved to other Sudanese states, especially to eastern Sudan, while others remained in combat zones in Khartoum. All groups has been facing dire humanitarian conditions.

On the one hand, Ethiopians from the Tigray region chose to return to Al-Gadaref State because they could not go back to Ethiopia. Their relatives were in refugee camps around Gadaref, and they had cooperative relations with the SAF, so they did not fear being in SAF-controlled areas. Unfortunately, many were later forced to work with the army. On the other hand, Ethiopians of Amharic ethnicity faced political hate speech due to being perceived as loyal to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, prompting many to return to Ethiopia.

As far as Eritreans are concerned, some went to Ethiopia, but returned to Sudan after political clashes between the two states made it unsafe.

Moreover, during official evacuation efforts organized by embassies, many Eritreans preferred to be deported to Kasala State. Unfortunately, the buses took them to the Eritrean border instead. Fearing forced return and military conscription, many Eritrean youth attempted to jump from the moving buses. Their forced return violated international conventions that prohibit the deportation of refugees to their countries of origin. Nonetheless, many were handed over to Eritrean authorities.

Those who reached Kasala and Gadaref - were not allowed into the official IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) centers. At the same time, the prices of basic goods and housing soared. These migrants had lost everything in Khartoum and during their escape. Job opportunities were scarce, and competition with displaced Sudanese - who had better social networks and language skills - worsened the situation. Hate speech against non-Sudanese, labeling them as mercenaries and intruders, was on the rise.

In the River Nile and Northern States, authorities refused to accept any foreign IDPs and even expelled those who had previously lived there - with the exception of Ethiopians from the Tigray region.

Migrants and refugees received minimal support - limited food, sanitary supplies for women, and some psychological support. This came mainly from a few donors, local initiatives, and activists, particularly from the Eritrean community.

However, shelter and medical treatment remained largely unavailable. The government exerted complete control over humanitarian aid, often diverting resources for political and economic purposes. In some states, like Kasala, aid was used to pay state employees' salaries.



The role of the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in helping their members was largely negative.

For many migrants, fleeing war zones did not mean escaping danger. In Kasala and Gadaref, Ethiopian men and women of non-Tigray ethnicity were accused of collaborating with the Rapid Support Forces - a charge that can carry the death penalty.

We have documented cases of enforced disappearances in SAF-controlled areas. Two underage girls were later released, but others remain in detention. More than 30 Ethiopian men, women, and children are currently detained in Khartoum's Al-Drushab. One 17-year-old girl was arrested by Kasala military intelligence in May 2024. She has not been brought to trial, and her whereabouts remain unknown.

Our monitoring and follow-up indicate that there have been no fair trials in these types of cases.

# FROM WAR TO PRISON – HOW SUDANESE YOUTH FLEEING TO EUROPE ARE SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT

by Julia Winkler



Bildname

**Crete, Greece.** *They fled war, only to end up behind bars in Europe – because they steered the boat or took on another task on board. The story of Emmanuel A. is emblematic of a European border policy that treats refugees like serious criminals.*

Emmanuel A. is 18 years old. He has been held in pre-trial detention in Greece for months. He now faces a life sentence – not for murder, but for fleeing to Europe in a rubber boat.

In 2016, Emmanuel's family fled the conflict in South Sudan to seek safety in Sudan. But seven years later, they were forced to flee again when war reached Sudan as well. Emmanuel's father and older brother were killed. He fled with his mother to Egypt, where they lived in constant insecurity – without work permits, without access to school, and with no prospects for the future.

At 17, Emmanuel made a decision: he wanted to help his mother and start a new life. He traveled alone to Libya, working on construction sites and cleaning houses to save every dinar he could. But life in Libya was harsh – dangerous, exploitative, and hopeless. With no other options left, Emmanuel decided to use his savings to cross the Mediterranean in the hope of finally finding safety and building a future.

The boat he boarded with others was overcrowded. No one wanted to steer it. Emmanuel says that the organizers in Libya forced passengers at gunpoint to take on tasks during the journey. Though Emmanuel did not steer the boat himself, he helped distribute food and refill fuel.

On 29 October 2024, the boat reached the shores of Crete. But instead of safety, Emmanuel was met with handcuffs. Greece charged him with “smuggling.” Under Greek law, anyone who steers the boat – or performs any task on board – can be prosecuted. The penalty is up to 15 years in prison per person on board. Whether the accused were part of the group themselves does not matter to them.

Emmanuel was taken into pre-trial detention. He is not alone. In Avlona youth prison near Athens, more than 40 Sudanese teenagers are currently in similar situations. Most are barely adults, just 18 to 20 years old. Many – like Emmanuel – have lost their fathers and older brothers to war. Suddenly, they became the sole providers for their families and did everything they could to ensure their survival.

Some have already been sentenced – with devastating consequences. On 6 March 2025, the court in Heraklion, Crete, sentenced nine of them to life imprisonment and imposed fines between three and four million euros – in a trial that lasted less than ten minutes. One of the nine wrote from prison:

**“I can’t stop thinking about my 55-year-old mother and my little sisters. They’re still in the war zone. I haven’t heard from them in six months. I’m losing hope – everything is dark here.”**

Emmanuel, too, has heard nothing from his mother since his arrest. To make phone calls, detainees need prepaid phone cards – which most cannot afford. The isolation is total and suffocating.

Greece and the EU justify their actions with the so-called “fight against smugglers,” framing it as a crackdown on organized crime. But the reality tells a different story:

First, EU border policies leave most people fleeing to Europe with no choice but to rely on smugglers.

Second, prosecuting migrants in this way contradicts international law. The UN Protocol against the “Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air” – ratified by both Greece and the EU – clearly states that people shall not be held criminally liable for being the object of smuggling. This applies also if they took on tasks on board – and especially if they were forced to do so, as in Emmanuel’s case.



It applies even more critically to forcibly displaced people, who often have no choice but to rely on smugglers to access the international protection to which they are entitled. The protocol requires states to ensure that anti-smuggling measures do not undermine states’ other obligations under international law – such as those under the Geneva Refugee Convention.

**“Criminalizing asylum seekers for the sole fact of having resorted to smugglers to cross irregularly a border, particularly when it results in a denial of protection, breaches Greece’s obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention.”**

Moreover, individuals who act under coercion may be considered victims of human trafficking – and, as stipulated in the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol, should receive support rather than punishment. Yet in practice, these obligations are routinely disregarded across Europe.

Instead, Greek courts, with the knowledge and approval of the other member states, sentence young people almost weekly simply for fleeing war, persecution, and hopelessness – to prison sentences longer than the lives they’ve lived so far.

*by Julia Winkler*

*edited by Imke Behrends / de:criminalize*

*de:criminalize e.V., which emerged from the anti-criminalization working group of borderline-europe, has been supporting people for years who are criminalized either for migrating themselves or for helping others along the way. We focus especially on refugees who are prosecuted as “smugglers” in fast-track trials – often without any legal basis. We connect them with lawyers, maintain contact with those affected and their families, organize prison support, monitor and document cases and court proceedings, and engage in public advocacy. Follow us on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/de.criminalize/>*

# Sudanese Women in the Face of War: Resilience and Resistance

by Manal Abdelhalim

In Sudan long decades of conflict have resulted in high levels of armed forces and a high spread of militia combatants and small arms across Sudan. Economic and social development is at risk when former combatants hold on to their weapons and continue to use armed violence. The most serious and disastrous nature of this current war lays in the fact that the two warring parties are leading polarization campaign trying to divide Sudanese into two camps: one is pro-SAF, and the other one is pro-RSF.

***The serious impact of an armed conflict on women and gendered violence are often ignored and hence not taken serious by policy makers, legislators and even native leaders.***

Continuous violence or conflict often prevents women from reporting cases and in many regions, shame and social stigma are attached to certain types of violence against women-particularly rape. Widespread Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), primarily affecting women and girls, are categorized as a war crime. Rape and SGBV have been used as tools and weapons of war to instil fear and exert control by terrorizing and demoralizing communities as well as by 'punishing' communities for autonomous activities.

## Sexual Slavery

In July troupes of (RSF) have kidnapped female civilians and held them hostage in Darfur for extorting ransome from their families or possibly to be sold later in markets. An eyewitness in Al-Fashir, North Darfur, confirmed that three women and/or girls- whose ages were not identified- were brought by the RSF to the Dar Al Salam locality. Civilians tried to appeal to the RSF to release the hostages. The RSF soldiers then requested a ransom of 30 million Sudanese Pounds. The hostages were given mobiles to call their families in Khartoum to pay the requested amount. After further negotiations, 21 million Sudanese Pounds were paid, and the three hostages were freed.  
(Kidnapping and Slavery, SIHA report, 1 August 2023)

SIHA has written a comprehensive paper on GBV: [More than Numbers – Report on the State of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sudan \(2023-2025\)](#).

Conflict-induced displacement increases women's vulnerability and exposure to heightened risk of trafficking, loss of property and assets, violence, exploitation and other forms of abuse. [1]

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugee women living in overcrowded reception centres with low security are at increased risk of GBV; additionally, access to essential health services and hygiene products is reduced, leaving those with disabilities or high medical needs, including maternity, greatly affected.

## Sudanese women's mobilization and solidarity respond - Response and recovery

Realities on the ground show that women have been active during conflicts and for social change in Sudan, often under the radar and navigating social pressure, gendered roles and their own exposure to violence, with solidarity efforts. Young women in the safe states playing great roles to rescue the IDPs from Khartoum and other affected area through the Emergency Response Rooms (ERR), communal kitchens and Takaya[1]. (ERRs) as a decisive entry point for emergency humanitarian aid, the idea emerged from a group of young activists (male and female) to help Khartoum inhabitants left their houses and fled in the aftermath of the war that broke out in Khartoum on April 15, 2023, families fled to the nearest cities and towns to the capital, Khartoum. We are now facing a pattern - which may be new or at least unfamiliar in the operations of humanitarian interventions. It is required of the youth communities on the ground to propose a new pattern of humanitarian interventions that help the host communities bear the burden of hosting.

[1] OHCHR, "Sudan: Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation and Recruitment of Children", 22 March 2024

## Emergency Reponse Rooms - a unique model of Young Women Leadership

The network of ERRs led by Young Feminist Leaders has become a crucial movement during the war, making a significant impact, creating resilience and fostering empowerment.

The humanitarian crisis started in Gederef with the influx of displaced people from Khartoum.

The Women and Students Alliance Gedaref has been leading the humanitarian response as displaced people - especially women and girls - disproportionately affected by increased levels of SGBV, sexual slavery, ethnic violence, forced labour, kidnappings and forced disappearance and limited access to healthcare services such as maternity & reproductive health services. 80% of the emergency rooms' members are young women working with different offices they work even during night shifts; such intensity presence of young women really changes and broke the chain of the societal stereotypes' roles of women. They work day and night to facilitate the sheltering operations within the local communities (hosting communities). They also worked to help well-off families to rent houses and apartments. They were also able to provide hospitals facilities deliveries, especially caesarean deliveries, and to arrange dialysis sessions and chemotherapy doses for cancer patients.

(PAX, Al-Nissa Gidam - promotion of community-based leadership project, in Blue Nile and Gedaref states, final report, October 2024)

Young women engaged in humanitarian activities have introduced a new pattern of women leadership by supporting communities to host displaced persons and organise basic humanitarian support. This way, they succeeded to remove some of gender barriers that used to limit their movement and participation in civil space such as:

**1. Late-night volunteer work:** Previously, it was unacceptable for women to participate in activities outside the home late at night, but as the situation has evolved, their participation in volunteer work even at night has become necessary acceptable and even acknowledged by their communities/families.

**2. Collaborating side by side with men:** Previously, social norms restricted cooperation between men and women in some communities, but in light of the conflict, working together has become a necessity to achieve community goals.

## Why women are absent during peace settlements / negotiations

Peace Agreements (i.e. Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Darfur Peace Agreement, East Peace Agreements, the Juba tracks and the current Quad-Process) are the result of a typical bilateral negotiation between armed adversaries and mediated by a third party, where the three parties' goal is to stop war and to develop a consensus document so as to create an environment for the official process to take place. A series of secret, informal negotiations have taken place in which the degree of confidence building was very low, making the two parties and mediators reluctant to involve other actors such as women activists, political actors and CSOs 'affiliates. For instance, Darfur Women's Priorities (DWP) is a document adopted by Sudanese women who were supposed to participate in the 7th Round of the Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks on the Conflict in Darfur in Abuja, Nigeria-i.e. the round that was followed by the signature of Darfur Peace Agreement. DWP was developed by a so called "Gender Expert Support Team" (GEST) with direct support of the AU and UNIFEM in Sudan. Overall, it is a very comprehensive piece based on the situation in Darfur and calls for women's protection. Indeed, Sudanese women kept sending petitions and calls as the negotiating parties's agenda was neglecting their concerns and priorities.

Agenda formulations were not transferred into a public campaign, that means it was not publicized enough to gain a wide range of supporters.

All peace negotiations like CPA, DPA EPA and recently Juba process had the same topics:

- Power Sharing
- Wealth Sharing
- Security Arrangements

While men solely look for positions, women are looking for change of power structure fitting to their needs and concerns. That is why women are often not heard. Again, while men are looking for money transfers women look for fair utilization and management of their resources. That is why they were excluded.

### **Getting lessons and experiences from the past:**

Past experiences show that - despite huge amounts of funds disbursed on capacity building programs for Sudanese women to be engaged with peace process – the result was modest contribution and poor impact on the whole process. Women's different peace agendas are promoted mainly during conferences, workshops and negotiation meetings held outside of Sudan (Tripoli Declaration, Sert declaration, the Heidelberg document, Abuja, Doha, etc.), the community lacks necessary mobilization to raise local public awareness and visible support for these peace documents. They also lack appropriate planning capacities needed to engage large groups of people and promote a common community agenda. Women peace builders, as well as women's peace organizations, lack a consistent strategy to inform their social constituencies about their contributions to peace process talks and to discuss the community's needs and how these can be addressed and improved with regards to women participation.



### **A way forward**

Free space created by female leaders is more than support of the family, it has become an essential component of humanitarian efforts, providing relief and assistance - via Women Emergency Response Room (WEER) - to those in need under difficult circumstances, and sometimes, they are calling for a ceasefire and building peace. This dual role that combines family care and community leadership reflects their ability to adapt to crises, and highlights the importance of the role of women to guide communities through the political and conflict transformation process towards a just, peaceful environment.

Manal Abdelhalim works as consultant in Blue Nile and Gederef States.

# COORDINATING CRISIS RESPONSE: INSIDE SUDAN'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE ROOMS

by Dr. Maysoon Salah

**Dr Salah is a Member of the Gedaref student and women association and established the Women's Emergency Response Room (WERR) in Gedaref in the context of her work as a doctor.**

## **Why were the women's emergency response rooms established?**

During times of war and conflict, women and children are often the most vulnerable and disproportionately affected, through displacement, loss of shelter, limited access to healthcare, malnourishment and lack of psychological support. The needs of women during crises are both urgent and unique and because of this the women's emergency rooms in Gedaref were founded. They address critical gaps and provide gender-sensitive, life-saving support.

The women's emergency response rooms in Gedaref were created as a humanitarian response by a coalition of activist women and political groups in the Gedaref state in Sudan. They were born out of the strong belief that the need of women must be seen as essential, just as food, shelter, and clothes and furthermore, that women themselves must be at the forefront of this kind of work. The rooms also aim to structure and coordinate the humanitarian effort already being made by women on the ground.



The Gedaref womens emergency response rooms have distributed about 10.000 dignity kits for women, which include hygiene kits, underwear and sanitary pads. We partner with other organisations to set up mobile clinics, providing clinical and laboratory exams and distributing medication to approximately 2000 people. Additionally, we organise psychosocial support for children and women.

In addition to emergency response, we are also working on empowering women economically. We support displaced and conflict-affected women in rebuilding their livelihoods through skills training and supporting small businesses. Our goal is to foster women's independence and long-term resilience, so they can continue to support their families and communities even during crises. Furthermore, we work in the field of protection and are raising awareness about gender-based and sexual violence committed during conflicts, including during war. This includes teaching about community awareness and women's rights, legal protection and how to report and respond to violence. We also train women and local activists on monitoring, reporting and documenting human rights violations, especially cases of sexual and gender-based violence, in order to promote advocacy and accountability. We also try to connect local organisations with



international organisations, as a way to advocate and raise international awareness about the humanitarian and especially the women's situation in Sudan.

#### **How are the rooms organised?**

The emergency response rooms have been structured into specialised offices to ensure and organise an effective response. The media office raises awareness and advocates for women's needs, while the medical office coordinates access to health care services and provides clinical and laboratory services as well as medications for patients. The finance office manages incoming donations, and the psychological support office offers mental health and trauma care. Further, the logistics office handles the delivery of goods to affected areas and the monitoring and follow-up office tracks, leads and evaluates responses. Together these teams work to assess, respond and support the ongoing needs of women affected by the war!





### How are the donations used?

All the donations go directly towards supporting the essential needs of women in war affected areas, which includes providing medical aid and health care services, distributing food and dignity kits, creating and offering safe spaces, psychological or psychosocial support and covering transportation costs and emergency supplies. The funds are all managed transparently by the finance office in coordination with the founding women's groups.

### How is the situation in Sudan, especially for women?

Access to healthcare is nearly non-existent, clinics are overwhelmed, and resources are destroyed, even basic necessities like food and clean water are scarce. Malnutrition among the displaced women is rising and some are giving birth without skilled assistance, which endangers the lives of the women as well as that of the newborns. Beyond these physical hardships, women also face extreme social rejection and stigma. In some cases, survivors of sexual violence are subjected to hate speech and discrimination within their own communities and are being blamed, isolated and denied support simply for being victims of sexual violence. Still, despite these challenges, Sudanese women continue to show remarkable strength and resilience. Community-led initiatives and grassroots women's groups are stepping in to offer psychosocial support, shelter or food while continuing to advocate for Sudanese women's rights.

However, we cannot do it alone! The **international community must not look away**: the displacement and endangerment of Sudanese women is not just a humanitarian issue, it is a matter of justice, dignity and human rights. Their stories must be heard, their needs and resilience supported with solidarity.

Dr. Maysoon Salah is working as a doctor in El Gederef State and is founder of the WERR.

*You may donate to support the important work of Dr.Saleh and the Women Emergency Response Rooms:*

*borderline-europe e.V.*

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*BIC: GENODEM1GLS (Bochum)*

*Stichwort WERR SUDAN*

*or:*

*<https://www.betterplace.org/de/projects/153113-unterstuetzt-frauen-und-kinder-im-sudan>*





# International Mechanisms & the War in Sudan

by Caroline Buisman

*Caroline Buisman was selected as coordinator of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan established in October 2023. Due to an internal UN crisis, the mission officially began with a six-month delay. It was not until May 2024 that the secretariat was able to start its work in Nairobi. The first report was submitted in September 2024[2] followed by an update in September 2025 [3].*

## **Severe human rights violations on both sides**

Even in its early stages, the mission uncovered shocking human rights violations committed by both warring parties. The Sudanese army, primarily operating as an air force, frequently targets civilian areas - sometimes with only minimal military justification. Documented incidents include direct attacks on hospitals, markets, and camps for internally displaced persons. There appears to be a systematic effort to destroy civilian infrastructure.

On the other side, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), supported by allied militias, have committed widespread looting and brutal acts on the ground. These include rampant sexual violence - such as rape, gang rape, forced marriages, and instances of sexual slavery. While most of these violations are attributed to the RSF, there have been isolated incidents committed by the Sudanese army.

## **Escalating violence and shifting dynamics**

Since September 2024, the situation has continued to deteriorate. While the RSF was primarily responsible for violations at that time, the Sudanese army's recent offensives have also resulted in grave atrocities. In Al-Fashir, Darfur, and Khartoum, civilians have been killed in large numbers. Retaliatory violence, public executions, and mass arbitrary - and sometimes targeted - arrests have been reported. Anyone found in the other side's territory is viewed with suspicion. Human rights defenders, demonstrators (especially women), and those documenting violations have been singled out for sexual violence, detention, and torture.

## **Famine as a weapon of war**

A large portion of the humanitarian catastrophe is man-made. Many are dying of starvation - not merely as a byproduct of war, but as a result of deliberate strategies to block access to food and water. In camps near Al-Fashir, for example, armed groups are intentionally preventing humanitarian aid from reaching civilians. At the same time, infrastructure is being destroyed, making remaining resources unaffordable. Medical care is almost entirely unavailable in many regions.

[1] First comprehensive report adopted by Resolution A/HRC/57/23 of the HRC at the 57th regular session on 10th September 2024.

[2] Second comprehensive report adopted by Resolution A/HRC/59/2 of the HRC at its 59<sup>th</sup> session on 2 September 2025.

### **Aid blocked, exceptions confusing**

The situation has become even more dire following the suspension of much of the U.S. humanitarian aid. Around 50 percent of aid in Sudan had been funded by USAID. Numerous community kitchens - especially in Khartoum - have shut down, with half of such programs across the country ceasing operations. Similarly, medical aid programs have largely collapsed.

Although technical exceptions exist for emergency humanitarian assistance, in reality, confusion about how to apply for and implement these exceptions has led to a near-complete freeze in aid delivery. While some funds have been released, the challenge rests on ensuring that they reach those in need as no party takes clear responsibility and many obstruct access.

### **Hope for justice – But facing immense obstacles**

When it comes to criminal accountability, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is currently the only institution available to make use of the evidence being collected. The UN mission is mandated to share information with NGOs and national jurisdictions, provided they have a legal framework to pursue justice. However, in practice, this is not yet happening. Sudanese suspects are traveling easily to neighboring countries where universal jurisdiction is not enforced.

A major challenge is not only documenting crimes but also linking them to specific perpetrators - especially those behind the scenes who ordered, but did not directly commit, the acts. The ICC currently only has jurisdiction over Darfur, not the entirety of Sudan. Extending jurisdiction would

require a UN Security Council resolution - an unlikely prospect given the current geopolitical climate.

Even past ICC indictments, such as the longstanding arrest warrant for former President Omar al-Bashir, have not led to any extraditions. This illustrates the deep difficulties in achieving justice amid political obstacles. Nevertheless, the mission continues its work, collecting evidence and preparing cases with the hope that conditions will eventually allow prosecution. Some national proceedings - for example, in Sweden - have emerged against companies accused of complicity in abuses. This shows movement in a related but distinct legal avenue: corporate accountability.

### **International justice amidst political tensions and distrust**

The ICC also faces international pressure and reputational challenges. Some countries, like Hungary, have questioned its legitimacy or even considered withdrawing. Particularly in Africa, the Court has long faced criticism of being Western-dominated, allegedly biased against Black leaders. This perception allowed figures like al-Bashir to travel freely in Africa for years despite international arrest warrants.

This skepticism still affects today's work. When the Fact-Finding Mission was being established, it was difficult to gain political support from many African and Arab states. While the principle of "African solutions for African problems" is widely endorsed, the practical implementation of such solutions remains limited. Even cooperation with the African Union has proven challenging, as it is not always seen as truly representative of the continent.

Nonetheless, Buisman emphasizes that a long-term solution must involve both the African Union and the United Nations. There are signs that certain countries - such as South Africa - are becoming more open to International mechanisms. Given that Sudan has seen decades of recurring conflict with little to no accountability, impunity itself must be recognized as a root cause of the ongoing violence.



# GOODWILL MESSAGE

BY PETRA BOSSE-HUBER



The war in Sudan is a forgotten war, and the suffering of millions of people is hardly worth the news," says Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, in charge of foreign relations at the Lutheran Church. That is why she is grateful about activities like the panel discussion of borderline-europe and Protestant Academy and this publication "The forgotten war in Sudan - human rights violations in the country of origin and on the migration and escape routes".

"It is an indescribable suffering, and to an incredible extent, that is happening in this region of the world, which is already affected by violent conflicts, human rights violations, the consequences of climate catastrophe, displacement and flight. It is good that this booklet exists to raise awareness of the humanitarian catastrophe, but also of the possibilities for action to reduce the suffering."

*Petra Bosse-Huber is Foreign Affairs Bishop and Vice President of the Church Office of the EKD*

