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Protection of Civilians' Flash Update¹
Civilians Struggle to Reach Safety from Fighting in Al Jazirah
25 December 2023

The Protection Sector in Sudan has received reports that clashes between RSF and SAF in Al Jazirah state are putting civilians at risk, and that civilians are being prevented from moving safely out of conflict affected areas.

Situation overview: Al Jazirah has received multiple influxes of internally displaced people (IDPs) from other conflict affected areas of Sudan, with the majority displaced from Khartoum. Of the 524,919 IDPs estimated by IOM DTM to be present in Al Jazirah on 17 December, the last available locality-level breakdown indicates more than half were split across the localities of Medani Al Kubra, Al Hasahisa and Al Kamlin.² RSF forces advancing on Wad Madani from Khartoum moved through each of those localities. As SAF forces withdrew, markets, banks and private residences in villages along the route were reportedly looted, while violence was also reported against civilians attempting to resist. Following clashes in Tamboul, in the Sharg Al Jazirah locality, about 130km north of Wad Madani, several RSF vehicles attempted to make an incursion into Wad Madani town on 15 December, leading to heavy clashes over that day and the next. Despite a short-lived lull in hostilities on 17 December, which prompted premature reports that SAF held off attacks on their positions in and around Wad Madani, heavy fighting resumed on 18 December leading to RSF taking control of the city. As RSF consolidated control of the state over 18 and 19 December, multiple reports from those on the ground indicate extensive looting, as well as arbitrary arrests of those to whom affiliations with specific political entities had been attributed. Sexual violence was also reported, including the abduction of women and girls from their families and incidents of conflict related sexual violence affecting children.

While IOM DTM estimates that up to 300,000 civilians fled Wad Madani and other areas of Al Jazirah in the first days of the fighting, civilians attempting to flee areas affected by the conflict in Al Jazirah following the consolidation of control over the state by RSF are reportedly facing significant barriers in doing so. In particular, key routes out of Wad Madani, Tamboul and Hasahisa are reportedly almost completely blocked to civilians attempting to flee. In some cases, reports indicate that RSF turned back civilians attempting to flee, ordering them to remain in locations where they felt insecure. Some reports indicate that even pregnant women experiencing medical emergencies have struggled to move. Those in affected areas have attributed the movement restrictions to RSF's perception of the political affiliation of the civilian populations residing there. As the area affected by hostilities has expanded, now reaching the outskirts of Sennar and Ad Doueim (130km north of Kost), civilians unable to flee to safety are reportedly experiencing shortages of basic necessities. Meanwhile, those who have managed to flee to the east are described as being in shock and great distress.

Protection implications: In addition to depriving civilians of their private property, looting may also deprive those seeking to travel out of conflict affected areas of the financial resources required to do so. Looting of markets may also deprive civilian populations of access to the necessities of life, particularly as the ongoing clashes and volatility impede delivery of humanitarian aid to conflict affected areas. Blocking civilians from moving away from conflict areas increases the likelihood that they will be exposed to conflict impacts. As SAF continues to contest control of Wad Madani and other areas in Al Jazirah state, there are significant risks that civilian populations trapped in the vicinity of RSF positions may be caught in crossfire.

Parties to the conflict are urged to immediately issue command orders to all persons acting under their instructions, direction or control to abide by the provisions of the Jeddah Declaration and to their core obligations under IHL to take all feasible precautions to protect civilian populations and objects under their control from the effects of attacks, to enable civilians wishing to flee conflict areas to do so safely, and to refrain from the looting and destruction of private property.

¹ This brief by the Sudan Protection Sector is based on inputs from partners, community networks and other sources. It has not been possible to verify all the information included in it due to access constraints and telecommunications breakdowns.

² Publicly available dataset is accessible here: [DTM Sudan Weekly Displacement Snapshot 13](#) | [Displacement Tracking Matrix \(iom.int\)](#).