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Sudan: Türk decries catastrophic cost of inaction as conflict approaches third year

GENEVA – Warring parties in Sudan are overseeing a wholesale assault on human rights amid global inaction, with deeply catastrophic consequences for civilians, said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk today as the conflict approaches its third year.

“As hostilities have expanded in reach and intensity over the past year, the lives and hopes of so many Sudanese have been uprooted and caught in a mire of death, deprivation and suffering,” said Türk. “Two years of this brutal and senseless conflict must be a wake-up call to the parties to lay down their weapons and for the international community to act. Sudan must not remain on this destructive path.”

The ongoing conflict is not merely a power struggle, he said, but is significantly influenced by economic and business interests of national and international actors, in key sectors such as gold and agricultural commodities. Revenue generated from international trade in Sudan’s gold, gum arabic and livestock has become the financial backbone of the war economy.

Proliferation of arms and continued weapons supplies, including to the western Darfur region, where a UN Security Council arms embargo is in place, are also compounding the fighting, enabling violations of international law and undermining peace efforts. “All those involved in facilitating the transfer of arms and military material to Darfur must stop, in line with their obligations to comply with the arms embargo,” said Türk, also calling for the arms embargo to be expanded to cover the whole of Sudan.

The conflict, between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, has been marked by complete disregard for the laws of war and for international human rights law from the outset, with the parties regularly attacking populated areas and critical civilian infrastructure, such as healthcare facilities, water stations and power plants, perpetrating serious human rights violations and abuses, and obstructing humanitarian aid, added the High Commissioner.

Retaliatory attacks and summary killings of people suspected of collaborating with opposing forces – which are often ethnically-motivated – have continued unabated, fanned by hate speech and incitement to violence, particularly on social media. At the end of last month, for example, dozens of people were brutally killed in Khartoum in the aftermath of its recapture by the SAF, on suspicions that they were collaborating with the RSF. In North and West Darfur, the UN Human Rights Office has documented targeted attacks by the RSF on villages, based on the ethnicity of the residents.

Sexual violence remains pervasive across Sudan. Women and girls have been raped, gang-raped, sexually exploited and abducted for sex on a large scale since the conflict began.

Torture and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, remain widespread in conflict-affected areas across the country. Threats, harassment, and intimidation of members of civil society, among them human rights defenders, journalists and local humanitarian volunteers, are also on the rise, and are further limiting civic space and the free flow of information.

The conflict has also led to an unprecedented humanitarian and displacement crisis in the country, ruining lives and livelihoods. At least 12.6 million people have been displaced, an estimated 24.6 million are facing acute food insecurity, and some 17 million children are out of school.

“With people’s rights to food, water, health, housing and education massively curtailed, the brutal conflict in Sudan is not only laying waste to today’s Sudan, but also practically decimating Sudan’s future,” said Türk. “And the more protracted it gets, the more difficult the recovery will be.”

The second anniversary of the conflict also comes amid heightened concerns for civilians in and around El Fasher in North Darfur State, where the RSF has tightened its already longstanding siege amid fears of an imminent attack. There are also growing concerns about the hostilities escalating and expanding to new areas, including in Kordofan, Blue Nile and Northern State.

“We must take to heart the people of Sudan, as well as their hopes and ambitions for peace, justice and equality,” said the High Commissioner.

“It is absolutely critical to ensure respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law and deliver accountability for the widespread breaches which have occurred over the last two years. The fighting must stop. We need to see the start of an inclusive process that fosters social cohesion and addresses the root causes of the conflict, including entrenched impunity.”

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