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# Sudan: UN Should Act to Protect Starving Civilians

Security Council Should Intervene to Halt Attacks on Civilians, Allow Aid to Enter



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*People who fled the Zamzam displacement camp after it fell under RSF control, line up for food rations in a makeshift encampment near the town of Tawila in Sudan's western Darfur region, April 13, 2025. © 2025 AFP via Getty Images*

(New York) – [United Nations](#) Security Council members should urgently act to protect civilians in western parts of [Sudan](#) from unlawful attacks and starvation, Human Rights Watch said today.

The Security Council should pressure the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to end their unlawful attacks against civilians, including on displaced persons camps, in parts of western Sudan and both warring parties to stop blocking humanitarian aid. The Security Council should renew and expand the arms embargo on Darfur to cover the entire country and

impose sanctions against the warring parties' leadership, especially the RSF, for serious violations of international humanitarian law. [UN officials](#) have warned that civilians trapped amid fighting between Sudan's warring parties – the RSF, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and forces allied to both in areas in [North Darfur](#) and the Kordofan region – face starvation.

“The Security Council needs to confront the Rapid Support Forces over their ongoing siege and deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and press both warring parties over blocking access to aid,” said [Laetitia Bader](#), deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Council members should expand the arms embargo and impose targeted actions against warring parties' leadership, while setting a clear time frame for action.”

On August 11, 2025, the RSF again attacked a camp for displaced people in the North Darfur state capital, El Fasher, which its forces have besieged for over a year. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said [the RSF killed](#) at least 57 civilians on that day and [at least 32 more](#) in attacks between August 16 and 20. Most of the civilians killed on August 11 were in the Abu Shouk displacement camp, one of the last remaining civilian enclaves.

On August 13, the UN Security Council issued [a statement demanding](#) an end to the siege and access for aid. But the council did not commit to concrete measures against parties who continue to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law.

In early August, the World Food Programme [warned](#) that it had not been able to enter El Fasher for over a year and that its cash transfers could not meet people's needs given the massive price increases because of the siege. Civilians in the city told Human Rights Watch in mid-August that they had resorted to eating animal fodder. Several soup kitchens – a lifeline for many – have been forced to [close](#) over the last month. On August 20, a drone attacked a UN World Food Programme convoy [heading to Melit](#), 60 kilometers north of El Fasher, [destroying three trucks](#).

The RSF has been imposing a siege on El Fasher since April 2024, preventing both suppliers and humanitarian aid groups from accessing the city. While international humanitarian law does not prohibit sieges of opposition forces, a siege cannot include deliberate attacks on civilians or starvation of the civilian population, both of which are war crimes. The RSF has failed to respect the fundamental requirement under international humanitarian law to distinguish between civilians and fighters and between civilian and military objects, which applies at all times.

The Sudanese Armed Forces and its allied joint forces present in different parts of El Fasher, including in and around Abu Shouk, also have an obligation to take all feasible measures to protect civilians, including by not locating military targets near or within densely populated areas.

In mid-April, the RSF carried out a large-scale attack on the Zamzam displacement camp, south of El Fasher. The forces [indiscriminately killed and executed civilians](#), including [health care workers](#), [burned civilian buildings](#), detained civilians, and carried out widespread pillage, forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee.

In July, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders or MSF) [reported](#) that civilians in El Fasher and in Zamzam had [faced](#) “systematic patterns of violence that includes looting, mass killings, sexual violence, abductions, starvation and attacks against markets, health facilities, and other civilian infrastructure” since April 2024. MSF found that the RSF and their allies systematically targeted non-Arab communities, particularly ethnic Zaghawa.

Civilians who fled these attacks told Human Rights Watch that they had to dig foxholes to shelter from incessant shelling and bombings. They said the warring sides subjected them to more abuse as they fled. A young man who fled El Fasher on August 11 said he saw two men shot dead and three injured as they fled the city.

Others interviewed said that on the road to Tawila, a town 60 kilometers away where [hundreds of thousands](#) have fled, RSF fighters and allied

armed Arab militia manning checkpoints pillaged their belongings, water, food, and means of transport. Several said that forces at the checkpoints raped women and girls.

A 45-year-old woman who fled with her 11 children in May said that two of her daughters, ages 13 and 15, were among 30 women and girls the militia fighters took away at a checkpoint in RSF-controlled territory. “When they brought my daughters back, one was bleeding,” she said. “They were raped not far from us. We saw it. They shot at my neighbor, so I couldn’t get up [to intervene].”

On August 12, the Sudan International Nongovernmental Organizations Forum [warned](#) that there is “no safe passage out of the city, with roads blocked and those attempting to flee facing attacks, taxation at checkpoints, community-based discrimination and death.”

A local volunteer who fled El Fasher on August 11 said: “The most important is to find ways to evacuate people from this place. And then make sure food and medical supplies can go in.”

There is also fierce fighting in the Kordofan region, where SAF [airstrikes](#) have killed civilians and hit civilian infrastructure, including [sites hosting displaced people](#). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and [other groups reported](#) a large-scale RSF attack on villages in North Kordofan state in mid-July, saying it killed “at least 300 people – including children and pregnant women.” Both sides have harassed and detained local responders.

In July, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, the leading body that monitors food insecurity, [warned](#) that the fighting in these areas is causing ongoing severe food shortages, with communities in El Fasher and in the Nuba mountains, in Southern Kordofan state, continuing to face starvation.

The UN Security Council should assess to what extent the UN has bolstered civilian protection since an October 2024 [report](#) by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. This assessment should include a

public briefing to the council by the UN and African Union fact-finding missions and special envoys on preventing genocide regarding the ongoing violations against civilians ahead of the UN General Assembly's annual gathering of heads of state in New York.

The council is expected to decide on the renewal of the arms embargo on [September 12](#); it should renew the Sudan sanctions regime and its restrictions on the Darfur region to all of Sudan and hold violators to account, Human Rights Watch said. Council members should also consider the extent to which the warring parties and governments that are supporting and arming them have undermined UN efforts to deliver aid and protect civilians. The council should also revisit the idea of deploying a protection-of-civilians mission to Sudan, a long-overdue step that Guterres has been unwilling to endorse.

“For over a year, civilians in North Darfur have faced starvation and deliberate attacks while at the same time violence is surging in the Kordofan region,” Bader said. “As the warring parties repeatedly flout international law, UN Security Council members should commit to concrete, time-bound measures, including targeted sanctions and concerted action against those violating the Darfur arms embargo.”

