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Protection of Civilians' Note Conflict in Darfur: Key Protection Impacts in June-July 2024¹ 15 August 2024

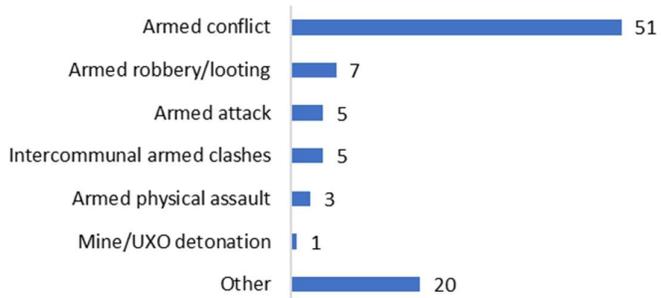
Key Points:

- Direct impacts of the conflict were most severe in El Fasher in North Darfur, driving displacement towards the western parts of the city and into neighbouring localities and states. Violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) such as occupation of civilian objects, damage and destruction of civilian objects including hospitals, markets and IDP camps by shelling and aerial bombardments continued to be regularly reported.
- Civilians fleeing areas of active conflict faced a range of barriers including looting, extortion, harassment physical assault, abduction and killing, with indications of ethnically targeted violence in some cases.
- The proliferation of armed elements, imposition of checkpoints and incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention are reported both in areas affected by ongoing conflict and areas that are relatively more stable. Furthermore, wide-scale banditry and criminality is reportedly affecting the overall protection, safety and security of civilians.
- Risks of famine are exacerbated by protection incidents inhibiting agricultural activities, including harassment, intimidation, looting, physical and sexual assault and the establishment of new settlements on agricultural land that preclude use of the land for crop production.
- The presence of unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in conflict-affected areas of Darfur continued to cause risks of death and injury to civilians, particularly children.

Overview:

A total of 92 protection incidents were reported by Darfur Protection Sector members over June-July 2024, resulting in the deaths of at least 231 civilians and injuries to 234. It is understood that more incidents have occurred but reporting is inhibited by communication challenges, constraints on access and generalized insecurity. Armed conflict was once again the most frequently reported protection incident, with a disproportionate concentration of these incidents in North Darfur. Armed robbery, theft and looting also continued to be reported on a frequent basis, underscoring the insecurity that remains pervasive in areas less affected by the direct impacts of conflict in recent months. While relatively few incidents of gender-based violence were captured in the incident tracker, broader protection monitoring and feedback from communities indicate that gender-based violence incidents take place much more frequently and is underreported. Other incidents reported at a smaller scale included: flooding, abduction/kidnapping; arrest/detention; and, intercommunal clashes.

Reported Protection Incidents: June-July 2024



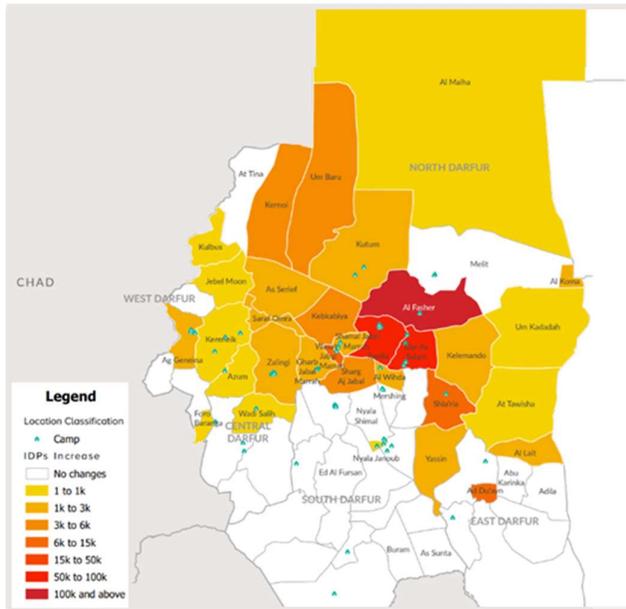
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Key Conflict Impacts on Civilians:

Direct impacts of the ongoing conflict continued to have severe impacts on civilians in **North Darfur** during June and July, with ongoing clashes between parties to the conflict as well as aerial bombardments. Abu Shouk IDP camp continued to be heavily impacted, with reports that shelling on 18 June resulted in the deaths of 14 camp residents and injuries to 26 others. Those injured and killed were described as being predominantly women and children. Repeated rounds of shelling damaged El Fasher South Hospital and were reportedly followed by looting of hospital supplies by armed elements, forcing it to cease functioning depriving the civilian population of the key health facility relied upon for treatment of those wounded by the ongoing conflict. The only remaining hospital with surgical capacity in El Fasher town accessible to civilians was Elsaoudi Hospital. That hospital was also reportedly shelled on 21 June, resulting in partial destruction of the hospital and pharmacy. On 1 July, a drone strike reportedly killed 8 at a Quran center north-east of El Fasher and injured 11 others. The next day on 2 July, drone strikes reportedly caused damage and destruction to the Jebel Marra health centre in El Fasher town as well as shops and other buildings, followed by shelling on 3 July that caused damage to Mawashi market and reportedly resulted in the deaths of 15 civilians with a further 29 injured. Over 4-10 July, at least four more instances of shelling targeting the western and southern neighbourhoods of El Fasher were reported, with aerial bombardments simultaneously targeting the eastern and north-eastern areas of the city. The

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

following week witnessed a relative lull in the clashes, which enabled civilians to engage somewhat more safely in population movement. As a result, an estimated 2,300 displaced households arrived in Tawila, predominantly reported to have fled from Abu Shouk IDP camp, while some return movements back to El Fasher were also reported to have occurred from Tawila, Zamzam IDP camp and El Fasher rural areas as IDPs sought greater access to basic necessities and shelter in the gathering sites across the southern and western suburbs of the city. Shelling resumed over 17-22 July, targeting multiple areas of El Fasher and reportedly causing the deaths of eight civilians and injuries to at least 16 more. Aerial bombardments targeting multiple areas of the city were also reported over the same period. Clashes accelerated towards the end of the month, with shelling on 27 July once again hitting multiple locations across El Fasher including



markets, health facilities and residential areas to which return movements had recently taken place. Reports indicate that at least 30 civilians were killed and an estimated 100 wounded. Most of those killed were reportedly engaged in livelihoods activities in the markets when the shelling took place. Impacts of the shelling were reported to include destruction of shops and burning of food stocks, further exacerbating food insecurity in the city, amidst increased reports of the use of civilian objects (including private houses) for military purposes. The shelling also prompted another wave of displacement from affected areas towards gathering sites in the western neighbourhoods, and neighbouring localities. IOM DTM reporting indicates that over June and July there were an additional 271,205 civilians displaced from their homes in North Darfur, the largest proportion of whom are likely to have fled from El Fasher. Of that number, as illustrated in the map (left), 40.63% displaced to other parts of El Fasher locality, while 20.82% displaced to Tawila and 18.95% displaced to Dar Essalam.

In parallel to the situation inside El Fasher town, conflict also escalated in the **rural areas of El Fasher and nearby localities** in June and July. Continuous fighting between parties to the conflict was reported between 13 and 19 June, concentrated on villages in Umbaru locality, to the north-west of El Fasher city, including Wadi Anbar, Al Zurug, Um Baar and Arouri. The following week, the village of Kida Bayia, in the same area of Umbaru locality, was also reportedly attacked. Attacks on these villages are reported to have resulted in widespread looting and burning, driving whole scale displacement of affected communities towards Tina, Kernoi and other areas of Umbaru, as well as Chad. This escalation was foreshadowed by earlier rounds of clashes causing the displacement of the entire population of Ourie Beri village on 8 June towards Um Haraz in Umbaru locality. Tensions ratcheted up once more in early July when rumours of an imminent attack on the area drove an estimated 500 households to engage in precautionary displacement out of Alzoroq and Um Alhoush villages in Kutum locality and Donkey Wakheim village in Umbaru locality towards Shagig Karro (also in Umbaru locality).

Both **South Darfur and West Darfur** were also affected by aerial bombardments during July. On 13 July, around midnight, an aerial bombardment of the El Naseem neighbourhood in El Geneina town and Ronga area (about 7km west of El Geneina) in West Darfur took place. In El Naseem neighbourhood, five houses were reported to have been completely destroyed and a further two houses damaged as a result of the bombing. In addition, one 27 year old woman was reportedly killed and seven other civilians (including one child) injured. The incident provoked fear amongst households living in and around El Geneina town, prompting an estimated 100 households to gather in Al Zariba market to find transport across the border into Chad. There is particular concern in the town regarding the reported use of Al Rasheed School, in Altalasher area, as a staging or training facility for armed elements, which is perceived as heightening risks the school and surrounding residential areas may be targeted in any future aerial bombardments on the town. The next day, on 14 July, an aerial bombardment on Nyala town in South Darfur was conducted, reportedly resulting in damage to a number of public facilities including the new Gynaecology Hospital, Customs Building, Water Corporation building, WESS building and a gas station. While no civilian casualties were reported as a result of the incident, fear of future incidents remained high in the aftermath of the bombardment. Increased tensions between RSF and SLA/AW elements in Thur village in Gharb Jebel Marra locality of **Central Darfur** were also reported in the second week of June. The tensions drove precautionary displacement of an estimated 109 households from Thur towards Kass locality in South Darfur. The aerial bombardments and persistent tensions between elements of different armed forces and groups that continue to proliferate across Darfur both highlight the continued volatility and related protection risks that communities are exposed to as a result of the ongoing conflict.

Priority Protection Concerns:

Despite the significant population movement out of El Fasher over June and July, **barriers to movement for those fleeing the fighting** are also consistently described as high. These include generalized insecurity and high costs, with limited transport options and the inability of many remaining residents, including those who have experienced multiple rounds of displacement within the town, to pay for the journey out of El Fasher. Others attempting to flee, particularly towards Dar Essalam, Shengil Tobaya and Kelemando have reported looting, extortion, harassment and intimidation, physical assault, abduction and killing. Some incidents of killing, physical assault and abduction appear to have been motivated by financial gain, occurring during looting or for the apparent purpose of seeking ransom payments; however, in other cases there have also been allegations that the ethnicity of the victims was a key factor in their targeting. In the first half of July, there were reports of armed elements in vehicles positioned along a key road in Um Kaoia village in Kalemendo locality that is used by civilians fleeing towards Tawisha, targeting men among the travellers for physical assault and looting and reportedly killing five. As a result, men stopped using the route and women and children became more likely to travel alone, facing increased risks of other protection violations. There are allegations that men and boys attempting to flee El Fasher town and other conflict affected areas are subjected to screening based on their ethnic profile, which heightens their exposure to protection risks. For example, on 4 June, nine civilians attempting to flee the conflict in El Fasher for Melit were reportedly shot and killed when armed elements on the road stopped the vehicle they were travelling in and opened fire on it. While the reasons for the shooting are unverified, those reporting the incident believed that ethnicity played a role in the targeting of those who were killed. Those fleeing from other conflict-affected areas of North Darfur have also faced risks while on the move. For example, when clashes escalated in Umbaru locality in early July, civilians fleeing from Muzbad and Arouri reported that women, in particular, faced intimidation, harassment and looting by armed elements while moving towards the Chadian border.

Civilians in areas not currently experiencing active conflict were nonetheless exposed to protection risks linked to a range of security-related measures including **imposition of checkpoints, and arbitrary arrest and detention**. A number of cases of arbitrary arrest and detention were premised upon suspicions or accusations of support for armed groups or forces other than those controlling the area in which the incident took place. In mid-June, a Misseriya Arab tribesman was reportedly the subject of attempted detention by an armed group in Forobaranga on the charge of collaborating with another armed force; however, his relatives mobilized with weapons in order to prevent his detention. Tensions were de-escalated with the intervention of other community leaders in the area, and the accused man was not detained. In early July, 10 men from an area approximately 27km north-east of Forobaranga were reportedly arbitrarily arrested and detained on the same basis and were transported to El Geneina for further investigation. The arbitrary arrest of 37 civilians was reported in mid-July in Nyala, South Darfur, on the basis that they had violated 'emergency orders' imposed by de facto authorities in the city. The details of the emergency orders that the arrested persons were alleged to have violated could not be verified. In North Darfur, male youth are reported to be particularly targeted for violence, abduction and arbitrary arrest by armed groups and militias, with some reports indicating that the targeting of arbitrary arrests reflects ethnic profiling. Three persons were reported to have been arrested in Kebkabiya in the third week of July amidst a wave of harassment, intimidation and other protection violations that reportedly drove the displacement of an estimated 50 households to Chad. Arbitrary arrest and detention of civilians in El Fasher was also reported, again predominately targeting male youth, with attempts to access internet services a key risk factor. Many incidents of arbitrary arrest are carried out at checkpoints, which is reflected in reports from East Darfur where four new checkpoints were established inside El Neem IDP camp in mid-June by a party to the conflict. More than 25 youth from the camp were reportedly arbitrarily detained after being stopped at the checkpoints, accused of affiliation with another armed group. In mid-July, a party to the conflict arbitrarily detained six community leaders in Hajlija village of Jebel Moon locality in West Darfur when they opposed establishment of a checkpoint inside their village. In both of those two incidents, the detained people were released only upon payment of significant fines or bail amounts.

Generalized insecurity and the proliferation of armed elements remain a defining characteristic of the protection landscape across the Darfur region. The impacts of ongoing criminality, coercion and intimidation are particularly egregious where they pose **protection risks to civilians attempting to engage in livelihoods activities, thereby contributing to deepening food insecurity**. In the first week of June, feedback from displaced and host community members in South Darfur highlighted the restrictions on movement outside camps and towns due to rampant criminality and highlighted the constraints on access to firewood, grass and charcoal collection areas due to tensions between RSF and SLA/AW in Kass and East Jebel Marra localities that made civilians fearful of movement. On 19 June, one IDP was killed and two injured by armed men while engaged in agricultural activities at Sabah Al Neema farming area east of Ed Daein town in East Darfur. Both IDPs and host community members raised concerns about similar risks posed to those attempting to access farmland in other areas of East Darfur, including Muhajiria, Labado, Sha'aria and Khazan Jadeed, highlighting the presence of armed men threatening those attempting to farm. In the last few days of June, in West Darfur, two IDP youth returning from farmland in the vicinity of Beida were physically assaulted and robbed of money

by armed men on motorbikes, while three Masalit tribesmen were robbed of their money and mobile phones in a similar incident while returning from farmland near Habila. In North Darfur, three civilians were beaten while attempting to engage in farming activities in Kabkabiya on 8 July and the following day, also in Kabkabiya, two civilians were reportedly killed and third injured when they tried to access their farmland. There are multiple reports of women and girls attempting to engage in agricultural activities being subjected to **sexual and gender-based violence** incidents. These incidents include harassment by armed men, as was experienced by a group of refugee women who moved outside of Um Shalaya refugee camp in Central Darfur to collect firewood in the first week of June. They also include numerous cases of rape (many of which go unreported), with an uptick in rape cases reported in El Geneina town in West Darfur during June attributed at least partially to the engagement of women and girls in mango collection in the Kaja valley as the activity made them vulnerable to harassment and attack. Similar examples were reported across the Darfur region. In South Darfur during June, seven GBV cases were reported among women and girls from Kalma IDP camp who had moved out of the camp to fetch wood or water, or search for work. In early July, two teenage girls returning from working on a farm outside Zalengei in Central Darfur were reportedly raped by unidentified men. Over just five days in the second half of July, three women and one girl were reported to have been raped in Kebkabiya in North Darfur, all of whom had been engaged in farming activities at or around the time they were attacked. Community leaders noted that they anticipated such incidents to continue to increase in frequency during the agricultural season.

Risks of violence escalate into an effective **denial of access to agricultural land** when accompanied by exacerbating factors. For example, in the second half of July it was reported that civilians in Kebkabiya were required to pay money in order to access agricultural land, creating a de facto tax on engagement in farming activities. In a different example, the reported large-scale movement of Arab tribesmen from Beida to Habila in the first half of June was described as preventing community members in Tulus from having any access to their farmland or pursuing other means of livelihoods. Similar concerns were reported in Mornei, in Kreneik locality of West Darfur, in the second half of July. Similarly, reports from Kutum in North Darfur and Beida in West Darfur indicate that there are areas where newly created Nomad settlements on land previously used for agricultural purposes has precluded community members from accessing the land to engage in farming activities. These situations pose significant risks for the outbreak of intercommunal conflict linked to competition over access to land and other resources. Those risks were reported in mid-June in Bendisi and Wadi Salih localities of Central Darfur, where a significant proportion of the local population was described as preparing to engage in agricultural activities but being prevented from accessing their farmland by Nomads living in the surrounding areas. In Um Tajouk in Kreneik locality of West Darfur, access to farmland was effectively denied to community members due to the presence of armed men outside the town. In response, community leaders established a farm protection committee and introduced fines for farm destruction incidents (a similar mechanism to the Crop Protection Committees that receive support in different areas of Darfur). To date, it is unclear whether the establishment of the committee has mitigated the risks to those attempting to engage in agricultural activities but, if successful, it may provide a model for replication in other areas.

The presence of **unexploded ordnance** (UXOs) in conflict-affected areas of Darfur continued to cause risks of death and injury to civilians, particularly children, over June and July. In the second week of June, two UXOs exploded in Dereige IDP camp and residential area of Nyala in South Darfur. The explosions caused serious injury to a boy whose hand was later amputated. Over the period 21-27 June, 11 children in Otash IDP camp, also in Nyala in South Darfur, were injured in explosions caused by UXOs. While the majority of injuries they sustained were relatively minor, two children had to be hospitalized as a result. In North Darfur, on 28 June, the explosion of UXOs in Kutum locality caused the death of two children and injuries to three more. Finally, on 4 July, a UXO exploded while nine children were playing with it in Karrari neighbourhood in Nyala Janoub. The children were referred to hospital for treatment of their wounds and were all expected to recover. Deaths and injuries caused by explosive remnants of war are likely to continue to be reported in the absence of systematic surveys, marking and disposal activities.

Conclusions and Key Messages:

- Parties to the conflict are urged to immediately strengthen measures for protection of civilians, in alignment with any recommendations forthcoming from the UN Secretary General as requested in UNSCR 2736.
- Parties to the conflict are called upon to address increased criminality in territory under their control by facilitating the re-operationalization of formal justice mechanisms where feasible to do so.
- Relevant authorities are urged to mitigate food insecurity by addressing protection risks inhibiting agricultural activities including through revitalization of Crop Protection Committees, demarcation of migratory routes and preventing the establishment of new settlements on agricultural land.
- Humanitarian actors are encouraged to bolster efforts to address community stigma faced by survivors of gender-based violence and expand access to relevant services to increase the confidence and capacity of survivors to access services in support of their recovery.
- Relevant authorities are requested to facilitate activities to reduce the risks of UXOs in conflict affected areas.