

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	861
Land:	Sudan
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Titel:	Sudan: After 2 Years of War, Global Action Needed
Udgivet:	13. april 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	27. august 2025



Document #2124044

HRW – Human Rights Watch (Author)

Sudan: After 2 Years of War, Global Action Needed

Focus on Protecting Civilians, Aid Access, Accountability

(Nairobi) – Leaders gathering in London on April 15, 2025, should urgently work to protect civilians and guarantee safe, unfettered aid provision as the conflict in [Sudan](#) enters its third year, Human Rights Watch said today. The conference, co-hosted by the United Kingdom, the European Union, France, and Germany, takes place as civilians across Sudan continue to [face egregious abuses](#) and deliberate harm.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have committed widespread abuses, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, and rampant looting, and destruction of civilian infrastructure since conflict broke out on April 15, 2023. The RSF and allied militias have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in a campaign of ethnic cleansing in West Darfur. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and more injured. An estimated 12.9 million people have fled their homes; half the country's population faces acute hunger, and famine is spreading.

"For the last two years, Sudan's warring parties have subjected the population to horrific abuses and suffering, and blocked aid, plunging the country into the world's worst humanitarian disasters," said [Mohamed Osman](#), Sudan researcher at Human Rights Watch. "International leaders should ensure that discussions to improve the humanitarian situation go hand in hand with commitments at the highest level to protect civilians."

The UK, as co-host of the conference, should build on past efforts at the United Nations Security Council to advance the discussion on civilian

protection. They should ensure that like-minded countries, including from Africa and Middle East, make concrete commitments to protect civilians such as by forming a coalition of countries dedicated to moving this agenda forward and considering options such as the deployment of a mission to protect civilians, Human Rights Watch said.

Participants should also publicly acknowledge the lifesaving role of local responders and health workers, commit to provide them with support and protection, and make it clear that war crimes like attacks on medical facilities and personnel will have consequences.

In recent weeks, the SAF has regained control over areas previously under RSF control. On March 27, 2025, Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, SAF's commander, [announced](#) his forces had pushed the RSF out of the capital, Khartoum, which had been largely under RSF control since the conflict's onset. On March 20, the [UN](#) reported that dozens of civilians including local humanitarian workers had been killed in shelling and bombings, and that the RSF had summarily executed people in their homes, while forces from both sides had looted civilian property and aid supplies.

Three volunteers in Khartoum told Human Rights Watch that in the months before the SAF drove the RSF out of Khartoum, the RSF targeted community kitchens in areas under their control, detaining several volunteers, looting food supplies, and imposing so called "protection fees." The SAF has also intimidated, and arrested volunteers in areas under their [control](#).

On April 3, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk [condemned](#) reports of "widespread extrajudicial killings of civilians in Khartoum following its recapture by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) on 26 March."

As displaced people start returning to Khartoum, images are emerging confirming massive destruction of civilian infrastructure and looting of property. International media outlets [reported](#) the discovery of an RSF detention center and up to 550 new graves, and former detainees spoke of torture and starvation at the site.

"We came back to Khartoum to find it in ruins," a 51-year-old woman who returned home to Bahri, Khartoum's sister city, told Human Rights Watch. "In our neighborhood, everyone lost a relative or neighbor because of the fighting. Some of our neighbors have been missing for months. We found out that people are using a playground nearby as a graveyard because they couldn't bury their loved ones properly in the cemetery."

Civilians are still under attack in areas where hostilities continue. For almost a year, incessant fighting in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, has killed countless civilians and forced many to flee to Zamzam, a camp for displaced people 15 kilometers away, where famine was first declared

last August and which the RSF has repeatedly [attacked](#) in 2025. In January, an alleged drone [strike](#) on a hospital in El Fasher reportedly killed dozens of people. These attacks forced the UN World Food Programme to [pause](#) food distribution there in February. According to the UN, at least 70 [children](#) have been reportedly killed or maimed in El Fasher in the last three months alone. Leaders meeting in London should press the warring parties in and around El Fasher to protect civilians, allow safe movement of people and aid in line with their international humanitarian law obligations and the Security Council resolution adopted in June 2024.

During the SAF offensive to recapture Gezira state, which was largely under RSF control between December 2023 and February 2025, SAF and allied militia [attacked](#) civilians in the capital city, Madani, and surrounding areas. Human Rights Watch [found](#) that the Sudan Shield, an armed group fighting alongside SAF, intentionally targeted civilians and their property in an attack on the village of Tayba on January 10, 2025, killing at least 26 people. The RSF, which has carried out widespread summary killings, rape, and looting in Gezira while the state was under its control, also reportedly continued to attack parts of the state, [killing](#) at least 18 people in March 2025.

Aerial bombardments by SAF continue, including an attack on a busy [market](#) in Tora, North Darfur, in March 2025 that reportedly killed and injured dozens of people.

Both sides are obstructing aid and continue to target local responders, while funding cuts to humanitarian aid, including those imposed by the Trump administration, have further undermined aid operations including the operating capacity of local responders. UN experts [said](#) in June 2024, that both parties are using starvation as a weapon of war. On March 14, 2025, the secretary general of the international medical charity MSF (Doctors Without Borders) told the Security Council that “violence against civilians is driving humanitarian needs.”

Impunity for the crimes in Sudan emboldens abusive forces, Human Rights Watch said. In February 2025, Türk said that “accountability, regardless of the rank and affiliation of the perpetrators, is critical to breaking the recurring cycle of violence and impunity in Sudan.”

Governments should also commit to closing the impunity gap, including by ensuring the necessary political and financial support for ongoing investigations, notably by the International Criminal Court, the UN Fact-Finding Mission, and the African Commission for Peoples’ and Human Rights, as well as pushing the warring parties to allow access to Sudan by independent monitors and investigators.

Another key factor fueling the violence and emboldening the warring parties is the undeterred flow of weapons from external actors. In

September 2024, Human Rights Watch [documented](#) the use of apparently newly acquired foreign-made equipment in regions of Sudan including Darfur, where a UN arms embargo is still in effect.

Leaders meeting in London should condemn arms embargo violations, including by the UAE, and commit to expanding the UN arms embargo and sanctions regime and to preventing the sale of any arms that could end up in the hands of Sudan's warring parties.

"Global leaders have a chance to take firmer action to stop the warring sides from carrying out atrocities against civilians and allow aid to flow to those in dire need," Osman said. "Leaders should provide life-saving aid, provide financial and political backing to local responders, support accountability efforts, and support creation of a global mission to protect civilians."

ecoi.net description:

Article on the situation of civilians and obstruction of humanitarian aid

Country:
Sudan

Source:
[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Published:
13 April 2025

Original link:
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/13/sudan-after-2-years-war-global-action-needed>

Document type:
Appeal or News Release

Language:
English

Available on ecoi.net since:
24 April 2025

Document ID:
2124044

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Austrian Centre for	32, 1041 Wien	Imprint & Disclaimer
Country of Origin and	T +43 1 589 00 583	F.A.Q.
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(ACCORD)		

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

