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“The Massalit Will Not Come Home”

Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina,
West Darfur, Sudan



“The Massalit Will Not Come Home”

**Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity
in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan**

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Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan

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Glossary

Warring Parties	
Self-defense militias/fighters	Composed predominantly of Massalit youth, these groups emerged following large-scale attacks on internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps in El Geneina in 2019.
Sudanese Alliance	A Juba Peace Agreement signatory group, composed largely of Massalit fighters led, until his killing, by Gen. Khamis Abbakar.
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces; Sudan's national army.
RSF	Rapid Support Forces, established in 2013 by then-president Omar al-Bashir. The force initially supported counterinsurgency operations in Darfur and Kordofan and largely recruited former Janjaweed.
Tamazuj	Third Front-Tamazuj; known simply as Tamazuj, an armed group signatory to the Juba Peace Agreement, composed mostly of nomadic Arab fighters from the border regions of Darfur and Kordofan. In August 2023, Tamazuj leaders declared their allegiance to the RSF.
Key Officials	
Gen. Khamis Abdallah Abbakar	The commander of the Sudanese Alliance and governor of West Darfur until his killing on June 14, 2023.
Massar Abdelrahman Assil	Leader of the Native Administration (a system formalizing the role of traditional leaders in governance) for Arab tribes and representative of the Rizeigat tribe in West Darfur.
Sultan Saad Bahr El Din	The paramount chief of the Massalit people.
Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah	The RSF commander for West Darfur state.
Gen. Abdelfattah al-Burhan	The commander of the Sudanese Armed Forces.

Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo (“Hemedti”)	The commander of the RSF. A former Janjaweed leader, Hemedti rose to prominence as the RSF leader throughout the 2010s and became the second most prominent figure in government from 2019 to 2023, with the rank of general. In October 2023, al-Burhan issued a decree formally disbanding the RSF.
Al-Tijani al-Tahir Karshoum	De facto governor of West Darfur since June 2023, following the killing of Governor Abbakar. Until then, Karshoum served as deputy governor.
Ethnicities	
Arab	In the context of Darfur, “Arab” people refers to nomadic tribes who live across western Sudan, including both Darfur and Kordofan regions. The Rizeigat tribe predominates in Darfur.
Bargo	Bargos are a non-Arab group inhabiting parts of Darfur and eastern Chad.
Massalit	A non-Arab ethnic group which at the time of the events in this report was among the largest communities in West Darfur state, including in the state capital El Geneina, and parts of eastern Chad. The Massalit people have been the target of systematic and widespread attacks by government forces and allied militias since the start of the conflict in Darfur in 2003.
Rizeigat	An Arab tribe found in different parts of Darfur. The RSF has recruited heavily from among Rizeigat communities. The RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (“Hemedti”) comes from a Rizeigat sub-clan.
Tamma	A non-Arab group living in both Darfur and Chad. Eringa people form a sub-group of the Tamma group.
Zaghawa	A non-Arab group residing in different parts of Darfur as well in Chad.

Ethnic Slurs	
<i>Kumurud</i>	Literally, “comrade,” used by non-Arab fighters to refer to each other but also by their opponents as a derogatory term for them.
<i>Nawab</i>	A term used as a racial slur.
<i>Nuba</i>	<i>Nuba</i> , the name of an ethnic group of people hailing from the Kordofan region, used as a derogatory term against Black or “African” (in the local sense of having non-Arab ancestry) people in the context of the events in this report.
<i>Tora Bora / Toro Boro</i>	A term referring to non-Arab fighters. It can be broadly translated as “rebels” and is sometimes used in a derogatory fashion.
<i>Zurga</i>	Derogatory term referring to non-Arab groups in Darfur.
Dress	
<i>Jalabiya</i>	A traditional male outfit in Sudan, longer and looser than the <i>Kaptania</i> , sometimes worn without trousers.
<i>Kadamul</i>	A turban or thick cloth wrapped around the head, ending in a tail wrapped around the neck and sometimes the mouth, hiding the wearer’s identity. <i>Kadamuls</i> are often worn by Arab militiamen and by RSF members.
<i>Kaptani/Kaptania/Komplet</i>	A traditional outfit in Chad, often worn by Arab communities from Chad and Darfur, consisting of trousers and a long shirt dropping below the knees.
Locations	
<i>Dar</i>	Arabic word for home; when appended to an ethnic group, denotes a claim to the land.

Summary

Early on June 15, 2023, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) attacked a makeshift medical clinic in West Darfur's capital, El Geneina, where 25 injured patients were seeking treatment. Ali, who had been shot in the leg during a previous attack, described what happened: "They started shooting at us and killed everyone except me and a woman [who was also wounded]. They shot me in the right arm. I slumped over, pretending I was dead."

Ali and the woman stayed in the clinic, surrounded by the corpses of the patients and medical workers, for ten hours, as the RSF continued their assault on the city. At around 5 p.m., another group of seven armed men in uniform entered the clinic. "One saw that I was alive and came up to me and smashed his hand on my broken leg," Ali recalled. "I said: 'Please stop! Just kill me instead!' He said: 'We won't kill you! We want to torture you, *Nuba*! We got rid of most of your family, and no one is here to care for you.'"

Ali was rescued by his family hours later after the forces had left the clinic.

From late April until early November 2023, the RSF and allied militias conducted a systematic campaign to remove, including by killing, ethnic Massalit residents, such as Ali, from El Geneina, home to an ethnically mixed population of around 540,000 people. Violence began on April 24 and continued in phases over seven weeks, peaking in mid-June, with another surge in November. The massacre that Ali survived was just one in a deluge of atrocities that the RSF and allied militias, predominantly from Darfuri Arab groups, have carried out in El Geneina and West Darfur in general since the outbreak of the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF on April 15, 2023.

The events are among the worst atrocities against civilians so far in the current conflict in Sudan. The total number of dead is unknown. Sudanese Red Crescent staff said that on June 13, they counted 2,000 bodies on the streets of El Geneina and then, overwhelmed by the numbers, stopped counting. Two days later, on June 15, a large-scale massacre took place. The UN panel of experts on the Sudan estimated, citing intelligence sources, that between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed in El Geneina in 2023.

This report provides an account of how the Rapid Support Forces and allied forces committed numerous serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights

law as part of their campaign against the Massalit people of El Geneina. It is based on over 220 interviews, verification and assessment of 110 photographs and videos, and analysis of satellite imagery and documents shared by humanitarian organizations. Between April and November 2023, researchers interviewed recently displaced residents of El Geneina in person during six trips to Chad, Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan, and also conducted supplementary telephone interviews.

Most interviewees were Massalit civilians. They included victims and witnesses, medical and humanitarian workers, lawyers, human rights activists, religious figures, and former government officials. Researchers also interviewed Massalit men who were current and former members of law enforcement or armed groups, 38 Arab residents of El Geneina as well as international aid workers and analysts.

A short bout of clashes broke out on April 24 between the SAF and the RSF, and then the RSF and allied militias attacked majority Massalit neighborhoods. They clashed with predominantly Massalit armed groups, including forces from the Sudanese Alliance, led by the late state governor, Khamis Abdallah Abbakar, as well as Massalit men—primarily youth—loosely organized and mobilized in local “self-defense groups.”

Over the next weeks, and even after Massalit armed groups lost control of their neighborhoods, the RSF and allied militias systematically targeted unarmed civilians, killing them in large numbers. Adolescent boys and men were especially singled out for killings, but among those unlawfully killed were also many children and women. The RSF and allied militias also appear to have targeted injured people as well as prominent members of the Massalit community, including lawyers, doctors, human rights defenders, academics, community leaders, religious figures, and local government officials.

Women and girls were raped, and detainees were tortured and otherwise ill-treated. The RSF and allied militias methodically destroyed civilian infrastructure. They looted on a grand scale, and they burned, shelled, and razed neighborhoods to the ground, homing in on neighborhoods and sites, including schools, hosting primarily Massalit displaced communities.

Thousands of civilians, mostly men and adolescent boys, but also younger children including babies, older people, and women were killed in less than two months, and

thousands more were injured. A retrospective mortality survey conducted by Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) in three refugee camps in eastern Chad concluded that there were 167 violent deaths in the households of 6,918 people from El Geneina. This amounted to a staggering mortality rate of 241 per 10,000 people, marking a 23-fold increase in the male mortality rate and a 11-fold increase in the women's mortality rate.

During their campaign, RSF fighters and allied militias used derogatory racial slurs against Massalits and people from other non-Arab ethnic groups. They told them to leave, that the land was no longer theirs, and that it would be “cleaned” and become “the land of the Arabs.” Ahmad, 41, a Massalit man, recalled, in an interview with Human Rights Watch, forces telling fleeing civilians: “No Massalit people will live here!” and “No *Nuba* will live here!” and “No slaves will live here!”

Throughout the seven-week campaign, SAF soldiers largely hunkered down in their barracks, unable or maybe unwilling to protect the population. The UN Panel of Experts found that, “throughout the attacks, [the SAF] failed to protect the population.”

On June 14, the governor of West Darfur and leader of the Sudanese Alliance armed group, Khamis Abbakar, was killed. He was last seen in the custody of the RSF West Darfur commander, Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah. His killing, coinciding with the collapse of Massalit forces' ability to fight back against RSF attacks in primarily Massalit neighborhoods, led to a mass exodus from El Geneina. Some civilians and fighters tried to go west, toward Chad, only to come under attack by the RSF and militias. Many civilians and fighters then decided to flee toward Ardamata, a northern suburb of the city hosting a garrison of the Sudanese Armed Forces, leaving overnight in a convoy of tens of thousands of civilians and fighters.

In the early hours of June 15, the RSF and allied militias attacked the convoy as it proceeded through El Geneina, killing civilians in large numbers as they ran through the streets, tried to find refuge in homes and mosques, or attempted to swim across the seasonal Kajja river flowing through the city.

“My mom was pushing me in a wheelbarrow,” said Malik, an injured 17-year-old boy who was in the convoy when it came under attack. He said he saw RSF forces kill at least 12 young children, including infants, three men, and two women:

Two RSF forces... grabb[ed] the children from their parents and, as the parents started screaming, two other RSF forces shot the parents, killing them. Then they piled up the children and shot them. They threw their bodies into the river and their belongings in after them.

The killings continued over the following days in El Geneina and on the road to Chad, where tens of thousands of civilians, as well as Massalit fighters, headed in search of refuge.

On the road, the RSF and allied militias shot and killed or injured large numbers of civilians, including disarmed fighters. Arab civilians living in villages along the route to Chad extorted, beat, and harassed fleeing civilians. During the exodus, RSF forces sought to identify prominent Massalit community leaders, apparently to prevent them from reaching Chad.

Satellite imagery corroborates that, since the RSF and allied militias took control of El Geneina in June, predominantly Massalit neighborhoods have been systematically dismantled, many with bulldozers, preventing civilians who fled from returning to their homes.

In early November, nearly five months after the June 15 massacre, RSF and allied militias again killed at least 1,000 civilians in El Geneina’s suburb of Ardamata, according to the United Nations. The forces also looted civilian property and assaulted and unlawfully detained scores of predominantly Massalit people.

As a result of these atrocities, over 570,000 predominantly Massalit people, as well as members of other non-Arab groups, are now in refugee camps in Chad, with little hope of returning home safely in the near future.

Many abuses carried out by the RSF and allied militias documented in this report constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The targeting of Massalit people and other non-Arab communities with the apparent objective of at least having them permanently leave the region constitutes ethnic cleansing.

War crimes include the serious violations of international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, of intentionally directing attacks against the civilian population, intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects, and the intentional conduct of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. They also include pillage, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, murder and forcible displacement.

These acts were part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against the Massalit and other non-Arab civilian populations of majority-Massalit neighborhoods, and as such also constitute the crimes against humanity of murder, torture, and forcible transfer of the civilian population. The fact that the RSF and allied forces carried out these acts, constituting severe deprivation of fundamental rights, against the Massalit and non-Arab communities by reason of their ethnic identity, constitutes the crime against humanity of persecution.

The mass killings of ethnic Massalit civilians, and in particular the context in which these killings took place, also requires urgent action from all governments and international institutions to ensure investigation of whether the facts demonstrate a specific intent on the part of the RSF leadership and their allies to destroy in whole or in part the Massalit and other non-Arab ethnic communities in West Darfur, that is to commit genocide, and if so, to prevent its perpetration, and to hold those responsible for its planning and conduct accountable.

This report also documents how the SAF and the RSF's use of explosive weapons in residential neighborhoods killed and endangered civilians, as well as killings, looting, and other abuses committed by Massalit fighters against Arab civilians. It also underscores the failure by the SAF and the Central Reserve Police (CRP), a militarized police unit, to protect civilians.

The politics of the conflict in Darfur have changed: In the 2000s, the Janjaweed—the Arab militias from which the RSF were formed—were armed by the military, which the RSF is now

fighting across much of Sudan. But the abuses carried out in El Geneina felt all too familiar to many of the interviewees. Many recalled fleeing—sometimes as children—from their home villages in the 2000s, when they came under attack by the Janjaweed. The Darfur conflict of the 2000s killed and displaced many Massalit people. Survivors then found refuge in the camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) that swelled the population on the outskirts of El Geneina.

The Darfur conflict of the 2000s occurred against a backdrop of recurrent tensions over resources between non-Arab farming communities—including the Massalit, who claimed a historical right to the land in El Geneina—and Arab pastoralist communities. These tensions were instrumentalized by the government of Omar al-Bashir, who ruled until 2019. Over the past two decades, the proliferation of weapons in Darfur and the failure of successive governments to address grievances over land and political power at the state level, or to provide accountability for past violations, have allowed these tensions to fester.

Since 2019, Massalit people in West Darfur have come under renewed attack from Arab militias and the RSF. In 2020, following years of a progressive drawdown of peacekeeping forces from sites across Darfur, the United Nations Security Council ended the mandate of UNAMID, the joint African Union-United Nations peacekeeping force in the region, despite repeated warnings from displaced communities that this would remove a key deterrent to further attacks. Three large-scale attacks between 2019 and 2021 destroyed neighborhoods and IDP camps in and near El Geneina. Displaced persons, overwhelmingly Massalit, moved into the compounds of schools and official buildings in the inner city, which became known locally as IDP “gathering sites.”

These attacks led to the militarization of parts of the Massalit community. Young adults and adolescent boys in neighborhoods and camps purchased weapons and organized in what were locally called “self-defense groups.” Following the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020, Massalit fighters organized in the newly formed Sudanese Alliance, an armed group led by Khamis Abbakar, who later became governor in June 2021. The group steadily recruited and trained within the Massalit community until the start of the conflict in 2023.

The appointment of Mohamed Abdalla al-Doma, a Massalit man and Abbakar's predecessor, as governor in 2020 had heightened tensions with Arab communities. Representatives of Arab tribes in early 2021 held a sit-in demanding the removal of camps of displaced persons from the city and the appointment of a non-Massalit governor. They also demanded that the RSF, which disproportionately recruited from among Darfuri Arabs, be deployed in El Geneina to provide security in lieu of the police, in which Massalit people were more represented. With the ethnic cleansing campaign of 2023, much of this agenda was accomplished.

The crimes committed against the Massalit since April 2023 have not been restricted to El Geneina. At least seven towns and villages of West Darfur have been deliberately destroyed by fire since mid-April 2023. On May 28, 2023, while the assault on El Geneina was underway, the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias attacked the predominantly Massalit town of Misterei, killed and injured dozens of civilians, including at least 28 ethnic Massalit men who were executed, and destroyed the town.

The response of actors from the regional and international community to the unfolding atrocities has been muted, in line with their lackluster engagement on Darfur and Sudan in recent years. Since April 2023, these actors were repeatedly warned, including by the UN Panel of Experts, about events unfolding in West Darfur, and, instead of expanding the scope of UN engagement, many failed to even condemn the violations of an existing arms embargo on the region, let alone act to prevent further atrocities. Actions to punish and deter arms embargo violations by the UN Security Council were nonexistent, and any positive developments were few and far between.

In July 2023 the office of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) said it was opening investigations into recent abuses in Darfur as part of its broader mandate in the region, stemming from a UN Security Council referral in 2005. In October, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva established an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) for the Sudan, but its investigations were significantly delayed by a liquidity crisis at the UN, at time of writing.

The humanitarian response in Chad has been woefully underfunded and struggled to provide adequate basic support for the tremendous needs of a massive population that

has suffered such extreme violence. Over 88 percent of the refugees are women and children; most have received paltry humanitarian support to date.

The UN and the AU, in consultation with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), should deploy a new mission to Darfur with a strong policing component, mandated to protect civilians, monitor human rights and humanitarian law violations, and lay the groundwork for the safe returns of those displaced. The UN Security Council should immediately roll out targeted sanctions against those most responsible for the heinous crimes documented in this report, including against Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo “Hemedti,” Gen. Abdel Raheem Hamdan Dagalo, Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma’a Barakallah, Musa Angir, *Amir* Massar Abdelrahman Assil, and *Amir* Hafiz Hassan. It should also sanction individuals and entities violating the arms embargo on Darfur. The UN Human Rights Council should ensure the FFM for Sudan is able to carry out necessary investigations, extending and renewing its mandate as necessary, and UN leadership and member states should ensure the FFM has the resources to carry out its work. States should also cooperate fully with the ICC’s investigations, and the court’s member states should ensure it has the robust financial resources necessary to support work across its docket, including in Sudan. All of these efforts should work with survivors when formulating accountability, reparations and justice responses.

Concerned governments and international and regional institutions, including the European Union (EU), Kenya, and the United States, should insist that communities from Darfur be represented in ongoing political processes. Donors should fund initiatives undertaken by Sudanese rights organizations to document ongoing crimes, including specialists in women’s rights. EU member states, the US, Canada, and others should increase refugee resettlement from neighboring countries for refugees who remain at high risk and cannot return to Sudan. Donors should also significantly increase humanitarian assistance for the Sudan humanitarian response, including by increasing assistance to local aid actors.

Key Recommendations

UN and AU member states, including ICC states parties, should:

- Call on the UN Secretariat and AU Commission, in consultation with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), to:
 - Urgently develop options for a civilian protection mission for Sudan, with a view to deploying a new mission;
 - Mandate the new mission to protect civilians, monitor international human rights and humanitarian law violations, including obstruction of humanitarian assistance, and lay the groundwork for the safe returns of those displaced;
 - Include a robust policing unit in the mission and focus on key locations where civilians are most at risk of deliberate attacks, including in Darfur;
 - Insist on sufficient resources for the civilian protection mission with thoroughly vetted personnel and civilian oversight mechanisms to report on and mitigate abuses.
- Establish a countrywide arms embargo.
- Impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, on commanders, officials, and militia leaders responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes in West Darfur, including the six people identified in this report and those identified in the recent Panel of Experts report, as well as on commanders and officials obstructing humanitarian assistance.
- Publicly condemn individual governments not respecting the existing UN Security Council arms embargo on Darfur and impose sanctions on individuals or entities breaking the arms embargo on Darfur.
- Investigate whether the facts demonstrate a specific intent on the part of the RSF leadership and their allies to destroy in whole or in part the Massalit and other non-Arab ethnic communities in West Darfur, that is to commit genocide, and if so, take urgent action to prevent its perpetration, and to hold those responsible for its planning and conduct accountable.
- Provide proactive political and practical support to the International Criminal Court's investigation, including by engaging with the ICC prosecutor to identify and meet needs for legal assistance or other forms of cooperation, in order to ensure

the effective prosecution of those implicated in the most serious recent crimes committed.

- Support, cooperate with, and ensure the extension and renewal of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan as needed, to ensure it is able to carry out the comprehensive investigations it has been tasked with.
- Significantly increase humanitarian funding both in Sudan and in Chad and other neighboring countries, notably for the Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) and the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRRP), to adequately meet the needs of those fleeing abuse. This support should include funding for protection, gender-based violence response, and psychosocial and trauma programming.
- Increase access to resettlement for Sudanese refugees who are at risk.

Methodology

This research is based on interviews with a total of 221 people, including 174 residents of El Geneina and surrounding villages who witnessed abuses in the city and on the road to Chad between April and July 2023, and analysis of relevant videos, photographs, and satellite imagery. Most of the interviews were conducted in person in Chad, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, with a smaller number of interviews conducted over the phone. Following renewed attacks in November in the El Geneina suburb of Ardamata, Human Rights Watch interviewed an additional 20 Massalit people who had fled from Ardamata to eastern Chad between November 1 and 10.

The vast majority of the 221 interviewees identified as non-Arab, most as ethnic Massalit, though researchers interviewed 38 people from the Arab community in El Geneina as well, all of whom also spoke about abuses they had witnessed. Human Rights Watch interviewed two other members of the Arab community of West Darfur and one representative of the Arab community in North Darfur who provided valuable analysis of the dynamics of the conflict in West Darfur. Human Rights Watch had limited access to Arab communities affected by the fighting in El Geneina because researchers conducted interviews in Chad for security and access reasons, whereas the Arab population largely remained in the city, or had been displaced to other areas in Darfur. As a result, it was difficult to document the full impact of attacks on the community. Interviews were conducted in Arabic, in some cases through interpreters, or in Massalit, through interpreters.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed 27 international aid workers with direct knowledge of the situation in El Geneina during and after the events covered in this report.

Researchers informed all interviewees about the purpose and voluntary nature of the interviews, and the ways in which Human Rights Watch would use the information, and obtained consent from all interviewees, who understood they would receive no compensation for their participation. Every effort was made to abide by best practice standards for ethical research and documentation of sexual violence and torture including all efforts to avoid re-traumatization of survivors. We preceded all interviews with a detailed explanation of informed consent to ensure that interviewees understood the nature and purpose of the interview and could choose whether to speak with researchers.

In each case, we explained how we would use and disseminate the information and sought the interviewees' permission to include their experiences and recommendations in this report. We informed all interviewees that they could stop or pause the interview at any time and could decline to answer questions or discuss topics. Human Rights Watch referred all rape survivors, with their consent, to medical services in eastern Chad and followed up with providers to ensure that those interviewed had been supported.

Human Rights Watch has withheld most people's names, replacing them with pseudonyms, and some other identifiable characteristics for security reasons. Most of the names in the report are pseudonyms.

There is scant photo and video evidence of the events in El Geneina between April and late June because of electricity cuts, limited availability of smartphones, significant looting of private property, including phones, and the inherent danger of documenting abuses and being found in possession of visual evidence in case of searches. Despite these limitations, Human Rights Watch reviewed over 120 videos and photographs taken during or after attacks and shared directly with researchers or collected from social media platforms, including Facebook, Telegram, TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly known as Twitter). We also analyzed high and very high-resolution commercial satellite images of the locations where the attacks documented in this report occurred and compared them across time. By matching landmarks in the videos with satellite imagery, street-level photographs, or other visual material, Human Rights Watch used the videos and photographs collected to corroborate the location and approximate time and date of the attacks. Following the events in the El Geneina suburb of Ardamata in November 2023, Human Rights Watch also analyzed eight videos and images posted on social media.

There is no official death toll of people killed in El Geneina since April 2023. Human Rights Watch researchers assessed the magnitude of the civilian casualties by counting killings that interviewees said they had witnessed and the numbers of bodies they had seen, both in the city or as they fled to Chad. The tally undercounts the actual toll by a degree that is impossible to assess.

Nearly all of the 221 non-Arab and Arab refugees interviewed by Human Rights Watch who fled El Geneina between April 24 and June 27 mentioned witnessing people being killed or

injured, and seeing dead bodies in El Geneina and as they fled toward Chad (see Section VII box: Targeted Civilian Killings).

On August 11, 2023, Human Rights Watch shared, via email, a summary of its allegations on sexual violence incidents in El Geneina with Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commander of the Rapid Support Forces, but had not received a response at time of writing. On November 22, Human Rights Watch shared, also via email, a summary of the findings of killings, arson, and unlawful detentions and treatment, in Ardamata, but had received no response at time of writing. On April 13, 2024, Human Rights Watch shared a more detailed summary of its findings on the full array of abuses it documented in El Geneina with Dagalo and the government of Sudan, and asked for responses, but had received no response from either at time of writing.

In this report, Human Rights Watch refers to people in Darfur as members of “African,” “non-Arab,” or “Arab” ethnic groups and communities. However, the historical connections and formulations of identities in Darfur are complex and fluid. The distinctions between Darfuri Arab and non-Arab identities correlate with differences between pastoralist and agriculturalist lifestyles, societal practices, language, and complexion, which are captured in the stereotyping of the perpetrators. These identities have evolved over time and continue to shift. These terms are not used in any way to oversimplify or dismiss these complexities.

This report uses the term “youth” to refer to adolescent boys and young men in their twenties. As much as possible, in specific incidents when the age of the youth is known to be under 18, the age of the individual is spelled out.

I. Background: Over Two Decades of Conflict in Darfur

The events of 2023 come two decades after the conflict started in Darfur. In 2003, Sudan's then president, Omar al-Bashir, launched a devastating counterinsurgency campaign against Darfuri opposition armed groups, targeting the non-Arab communities from which these groups overwhelmingly recruited.

Though the intensity of the Darfur conflict ebbed throughout the 2010s, non-Arab Darfuri communities continued to bear the brunt of cycles of violence and targeted campaigns of abuses. Nowhere is this more the case than in West Darfur state, the site of some of the worst attacks on civilians in recent years.

Demographic Changes and Land Disputes in the 1990s and Early 2000s

Darfur is an ethnically diverse region, traditionally inhabited by farming communities such as the Fur, the Zaghawa, and the Massalit, as well as various Arab nomadic groups who herd cattle or camels. El Geneina is one of the largest cities of Darfur, alongside Nyala and El Fasher. The city, which, until the events described in this report, had a large Massalit population, has historically been the political, cultural and demographic center of this ethnic group. It is also home to people from other ethnicities, including Arab groups such as the Rizeigat.

The Massalit people, a farming and trading community, ruled a sultanate straddling the border between present-day Darfur and eastern Chad in the pre-colonial period, and the British, in their colonial "native administration" system, cemented Massalit jurisdiction over land in West Darfur.

The war of the 2000s in Darfur occurred after recurrent conflicts over resources between non-Arab farming communities and Arab pastoralist communities increased throughout the 1990s, following extended periods of drought and demographic growth due to the sizable migration of Chadian Arabs into West Darfur. From the mid-1980s, facing drought, Arab pastoralists and other communities migrated south and east from Chad into West Darfur, in search of farmland, grazing areas, and water, and came into conflict over land with agriculturalist groups.

In the 1990s, al-Bashir, who was pursuing a policy of Arabization across all of Sudan, relied on Arab communities in Darfur for support. He gave their members new positions of power. This was perceived by many among the non-Arab communities of Darfur, including many Massalit people in West Darfur, as an effort to marginalize them in their homeland.¹ By the late 1990s, attacks on Massalit communities by Arab militias began to increase.²

Mass Violence, Ethnic Cleansing, Scorched Earth Tactics: 2003 to 2013

In 2001, a group of ethnic Zaghawa and Fur people met and committed to take up arms against the government in revolt for what they saw as the ongoing marginalization of their communities.³ Later that year, they rallied Massalit activists, including Khamis Abdallah Abbakar, who went on to be governor and was killed while in post during the events documented in this report. The first attack on a government garrison took place in February 2002.⁴

Al-Bashir exploited local tensions to defeat this new Darfuri insurgency.⁵ He built political and military alliances with some local Arab tribes, such as the Rizeigat tribe, who provided fighters in exchange for land, power, and money.⁶ These proxy forces fought alongside the regular Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) against the opposition armed groups and came to be known as Janjaweed militias.⁷

¹ Julie Flint, Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War*, (London, New York: Zed Books; Cape Town: David Philip, in association with International African Institute, 2005). For more background to the conflict in West Darfur, see Human Rights Watch, *Sudan. Darfur in Flames: Atrocities in Western Sudan*, April 2004, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/sudano404/sudano404.pdf>;

Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic Cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/05/06/darfur-destroyed/ethnic-cleansing-government-and-militia-forces-western-sudan#_ftnref4.

² Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2000* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2000), Sudan chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k/Africa-11.htm#TopOfPage>.

³ Julie Flint, Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War*, (London, New York: Zed Books; Cape Town: David Philip, in association with International African Institute, 2005), p.82.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Oxfam, “We No Longer Share the Land: Agricultural Change, Land, and Violence in Darfur,” <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/we-no-longer-share-the-land-agricultural-change-land-and-violence-in-darfur-315857/> (accessed September 5, 2023); Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Destroyed: Ethnic Cleansing by Government and Militia Forces in Western Sudan*, https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/05/06/darfur-destroyed/ethnic-cleansing-government-and-militia-forces-western-sudan#_ftnref4.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Destroyed*; Human Rights Watch interviews with two Darfuri activists, Kampala, Uganda, August 14, 2023.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Entrenching Impunity: Government’s Responsibility for International Crimes in Darfur*, December 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/12/08/entrenching-impunity/government-responsibility-international-crimes->

Government forces and their allied militias committed crimes against humanity in targeting whole communities—primarily the Massalit, Fur, and Zaghawa—for ethnic cleansing.⁸ They burned large tracts of land, laid waste to villages and livelihoods, and forcibly depopulated wide swaths of land long inhabited by non-Arab communities, forcing them to flee internally or to neighboring Chad. They also systematically targeted women and girls with rape.⁹

The impact on the civilian population was horrific. By 2006, hundreds of thousands of people were estimated to have died as a result of the conflict.¹⁰ The campaigns also forced hundreds of thousands to flee, primarily into camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in and around urban centers such as Nyala, El Fasher, and El Geneina, while hundreds of thousands more fled into neighboring Chad.¹¹

West Darfur state was among the worst affected areas. Bordering Chad—and at the time larger than present-day West Darfur—the state was ethnically mixed, with ethnic Fur and Massalit groups comprising much of the population.¹² Arab groups, chiefly from Rizeigat tribes, also lived in the state.¹³ As in other parts of the region, government forces and their proxy militias systemically burned large swaths of fertile areas and desolated Massalit and Fur villages throughout West Darfur. Janjaweed militias occupied the land.¹⁴

darfur; *Men with No Mercy: Rapid Support Forces Attacks against Civilians in Darfur, Sudan*, September 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/09/men-no-mercy/rapid-support-forces-attacks-against-civilians-darfur-sudan>.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Destroyed; They Shot at Us as We Fled: Government Attacks on Civilians in West Darfur* in February 2008, May 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/05/18/they-shot-us-we-fled/government-attacks-civilians-west-darfur-february-2008>; *Men with No Mercy*.

⁹ “Sexual Violence and its Consequences among Displaced Persons in Darfur and Chad,” Human Rights Watch briefing paper, April 12, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgroundunder/africa/darfuro505/darfuro405.pdf>.

¹⁰ John Hagan and Alberto Palloni, “Death in Darfur,” *Science*, 313 (5793), 2006, pp. 1,578-1,579.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Destroyed*.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ ACAPS, “Sudan: West Darfur Pre-Crisis Profile,” July 2023, https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20230718_ACAPS_Thematic_report_Sudan_West_Darfur_conflict.pdf (accessed March 20, 2024).

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Destroyed*. The ICC issued arrest warrants against Ali Kosheib (Kushayb) and Ahmad Harun for crimes committed in the Wadi Salah in the southern part of West Darfur during this period. Ali Kosheib (Kushayb) was charged with 50 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes for his alleged responsibility for rapes, destruction of property, inhumane acts, and attacks and killing of civilians in four villages in West Darfur in 2003 and 2004. For more details on the Kushayb case, see Human Rights Watch, “First ICC Trial on Darfur Crimes: Ali Mohammed Ali, Known as Ali Kosheib or Kushayb, Janjaweed Leader, Questions and Answers,” March 29, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/29/first-icc-trial-darfur-crimes-ali-mohammed-ali-known-ali-kosheib-or-kushayb>.

International Reaction: ICC Investigation and Deployment of AU-UN Force

The violence against civilians in Darfur led to international outcry and spurred intense discussions around the protection of civilians and accountability for crimes.

In October 2004, the African Union deployed a small military and police force to Darfur, with a mandate that included the protection of internally displaced persons.¹⁵ In March 2005, the UN Security Council referred the situation to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and three months later, the prosecutor's office began its investigations. Five individuals, including former president Omar al-Bashir, face ICC charges for war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide.¹⁶ The ICC prosecutor included charges of rape among other war crimes in its existing Darfur cases, noting that “rape is an integral part of the pattern of destruction that the Government of the Sudan is inflicting upon the target groups in Darfur.”¹⁷ Al-Bashir's government refused to cooperate with the ICC, impeding the court's ability to advance its cases.¹⁸

In 2007, the UN Security Council authorized the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), a hybrid—or joint—peacekeeping mission whose mandate included the protection of civilians.¹⁹

Residents of West Darfur nevertheless continued to come under attack. In 2008, after offensives by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a major non-Arab opposition armed group, Human Rights Watch documented government and militia attacks against civilians

¹⁵ African Union, Communiqué of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Peace and Security Council, October 20, 2004, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/communiqué-seventeenth-meeting-peace-and-security-council> (accessed March 20, 2024); African Union Mission in Sudan official website, accessed on Web Archive, April 29, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070429130630/http://www.amis-sudan.org/index.html> (accessed March 20, 2024).

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Questions and Answers: Justice for Serious International Crimes Committed in Sudan,” June 22, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/22/qa-justice-serious-international-crimes-committed-sudan>.

¹⁷ “Situation in Darfur, The Sudan: Summary of the Case: Prosecutor's Application for Warrant of Arrest under Article 58 Against Omar Hassan Ahmad AL Bashir,” International Criminal Court, The Office of the Prosecutor, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/NR/rdonlyres/64FA6B33-05C3-4E9C-A672-3FA2B58CB2C9/277758/ICCOTPSummary20081704ENG.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2024).

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Questions and Answers: Justice for Serious International Crimes Committed in Sudan.”

¹⁹ UNAMID Fact Sheet, “Protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian aid & helping political process in Darfur,” African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation In Darfur, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unamid> (accessed April 13, 2023).

amounting to war crimes in areas north of El Geneina, including Jebel Mun.²⁰ Attacks against civilians continued into 2010.²¹

Multiple agreements aiming to stop the violence in Darfur were signed between the government and opposition armed groups over the years, starting with the Abuja agreement in 2005 and ending with the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020.²² These deals failed to sustain peace; at times, they even fueled recruitment among armed groups.²³

Rise of the RSF, Brutal Counterinsurgency Operations: 2013 to 2015

In 2013, drawing from the Border Guards—a first attempt by Bashir to formalize the Janjaweed militias—and other proxy militias, al-Bashir created the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), hoping to establish firmer control over these forces, which lacked discipline.²⁴ At the outset, the RSF was led by a senior officer from the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), Gen. Abbas Abdelaziz, while Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo “Hemedti,” a former Border Guard and Janjaweed militia leader hailing from the Rizeigat Arab tribe, served as its operations commander. Hemedti gradually took more leadership responsibilities.²⁵ He recruited heavily from his sub-clan into the force (see Section III sub-section on Rapid Support Forces).²⁶

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *They Shot at Us as We Fled*.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, “UN strengthen civilian protection in Darfur,” July 19, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/07/19/un-strengthen-civilian-protection-darfur>.

²² “20 Years Since War Began in Sudan’s Darfur Suffering Continues,” *Al Jazeera*, February 26, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/26/20-years-since-war-began-in-sudans-darfur-suffering-continues> (accessed October 25, 2023).

²³ UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan, “Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan,” S/2021/40, January 13, 2021, <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2F2021%2F40&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False> (accessed March 20, 2024).

²⁴ “Dozens of Borders Guards Join the RSF Militia,” *Dabanga*, November 5, 2017, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/dozens-of-border-guards-join-sudan-rsf-militia> (accessed October 25, 2023). For more background on Sudan’s use of proxy militias and the rise of the RSF, see Jérôme Tubiana, “Remote-Control Breakdown, Sudanese Paramilitary Forces and Pro-Government Militias,” Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan *HSBA Issue Brief*, April 2017, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-IB-27-Sudanese-paramilitary-forces.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2023).

²⁵ “السريع؟ الدعم لقوات قائد أصبح الذي والذهب الإبل تاجر .” *Al Jazeera*, April 17, 2023 <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2023/4/17/إبل-وذهب-إبل-تاجر-حميدتي-دقلو-حمدان-محمد> (accessed March 20, 2024).

²⁶ “Darfur’s Recruitment Race: Sudan’s army and rapid support forces compete for influence,” Ayin Network, March 26, 2023, <https://3ayin.com/en/darfur-recruits/> (accessed October 25, 2023). Even following the outbreak of conflict, several Arab tribal leaders pledged to support the RSF in the conflict, see for example, “Sudan: Darfur Arab tribes ‘pledge allegiance’ to RSF in move that could tip scales in war-torn Sudan,” *New Arab*, July 6, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/news/sudan-several-darfur-arab-tribes-pledge-allegiance-rsf> (accessed October 25, 2023).

The RSF gained prominence through its brutal tactics. Starting in 2014, the force led massive ground attacks on dozens of villages in South and North Darfur, targeting areas where it accused the population of sympathizing with opposition armed groups and perpetrating widespread sexual violence.²⁷ The RSF also deployed to areas held by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N), an opposition armed group in the *Nuba* Mountains in Southern Kordofan, where the RSF killed and raped civilians, destroyed villages, and forced thousands to flee.²⁸ This campaign caused large losses of men among the armed groups opposing the government, and ended much of the fighting.

Communal conflicts, including among Arab groups themselves, came to dominate the 2010s in Darfur.

The End of the al-Bashir Era and the Juba Peace Agreement: 2019 to 2020

In mid-2018, demonstrations broke out in towns across Sudan, amid runaway inflation and cuts to subsidies on wheat. In April 2019, following months of protests and government repression, al-Bashir was ousted.²⁹ Lt. Gen. Abdel Fatah al-Burhan, an army officer, assumed power the following day, as head of a “transitional military council.”³⁰ Al-Burhan appointed Hemedti, commander of the RSF, as his deputy.³¹ After months of negotiations, civilian opposition leaders in August 2019 signed a power-sharing agreement, setting up a transitional government in which Dr. Abdalla Hamdok, a civilian, became prime minister, while al-Burhan and Hemedti took the helm of the Sovereign Council, the transitional government's most powerful organ.³²

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Men with No Mercy*.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2015*, Sudan chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/sudan>; *Men With No Mercy*.

²⁹ “Sudan's Military Seizes Power from President Omar al-Bashir,” *Al Jazeera*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/11/sudans-military-seizes-power-from-president-omar-al-bashir> (accessed October 25, 2023).

³⁰ “Veteran Soldier Burhan Becomes Sudan's New Ruler,” *France 24*, April 13, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190413-veteran-soldier-burhan-becomes-sudans-new-ruler> (accessed October 25, 2023).

³¹ RSF forces deployed in Khartoum quashed renewed protests that called for civilian rule. On June 3, 2019, the RSF led a brutal clampdown on a sit-in, killing at least 120 people, injuring hundreds, and resulting in widespread sexual violence. See Human Rights Watch, *They were Shouting ‘Kill Them.’ Sudan's Violent Crackdown on Protesters in Khartoum*, November 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/18/they-were-shouting-kill-them/sudans-violent-crackdown-protesters-khartoum>.

³² “Who are the members of Sudan's new sovereign council?” *Middle East Eye*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/who-sudans-new-sovereign-council> (accessed March 20, 2024).

Al-Burhan and Hemedti further consolidated their dominance over the state, setting the stage for their rivalry to become the key fault line of Sudan's politics. In October 2021, they ousted the civilian wing of the government. Their struggle for power ultimately led to the outbreak of conflict in April 2023 between the SAF and the RSF.

The transitional period saw attempts to address Sudan's longstanding conflicts in regions such as Darfur. In October 2020, the government signed the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) with all but two opposition armed groups from these regions.³³ But provisions that sought to tackle land disputes in Darfur, provide justice for the victims of the conflict, and facilitate voluntary returns for displaced persons, were not implemented.³⁴

The signing of the JPA paradoxically gave rise to new armed group recruitment in Darfur. Some groups were established in the run-up to the agreement and subsequently used funds made available as part of the agreement to recruit new fighters, without any real security sector reform in place to manage and deal with these forces.³⁵

In West Darfur, one of the key signatories was the Sudanese Alliance, an armed coalition led by Khamis Abbakar, who, after signing the JPA, became the governor of West Darfur in June 2021 until his killing in June 2023 (see Section V sub-section on Killing of the Governor). Experts told Human Rights Watch that the Sudanese Alliance was formed around the time of the JPA negotiations—and with the blessing of Hemedti—in part to ensure Massalit representation in the peace process. The group gathered diaspora activists and former fighters from various armed groups and began recruiting and training new fighters.³⁶

³³ For more information see: "The Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan: Summary and Analysis," *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)*, 2021, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-juba-agreement-for-peace-in-sudan-en.pdf> (accessed September 11, 2023).

³⁴ The Juba Peace Agreement provided a justice matrix: formation of a special criminal court for Darfur, a truth and reconciliation commission, traditional justice, and enhancing cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC). See "The Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan, Summary and Analysis."

³⁵ Joshu Craze and Khulood Khair, "The Remains of the JPA: The Unlearned Lessons of the Juba Peace Agreement," *Rift Valley Institute*, 2023. https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/The-Remains-of-the-JPA_Nov-2023-FINAL.pdf (accessed April 23, 2024).

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with an expert, September 14, 2022; a journalist, January 17, 2023; a Darfuri journalist, December 7, 2022; and an NGO worker, January 24, 2023. The Sudanese Alliance was one of several Sudanese armed groups listed in the annual report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as having engaged in the recruitment of children. "Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary General," *United Nations Security Council*, June 22, 2022. A/76/871 – S/2022/493 <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Secretary-General-Annual-Report-on-children-and-armed-conflict.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2024).

Third Front-Tamazuj was also among the signatories. It reportedly joined the JPA at the eleventh hour and subsequently became active in Darfur, recruiting primarily from among disaffected Arab militia members.³⁷ The UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan reported that other JPA peace signatory groups saw Third Front-Tamazuj as a creation of the security services and the SAF.³⁸

From the onset of negotiations, affected populations, particularly displaced communities, said they did not feel consulted in the Juba process or represented by the parties to the agreement, and questioned whether the agreement would bring stability or justice.³⁹ Some Arab community leaders voiced concerns that provisions regarding the return of displaced persons to their areas of origin without a broader agreement on contentious issues such as land ownership could trigger renewed violence.⁴⁰ Arab representatives in West Darfur argued Massalit communities had benefitted in an unfair manner from the fall of al-Bashir and the ensuing political agreements, including the JPA.⁴¹

Departure of the AU-UN Peacekeeping Mission: December 2020

In December 2020, at the request of the Sudanese government, the UN Security Council terminated the mandate of the joint African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and called on the government to assume full responsibility for civilian protection. The withdrawal was completed by June 2021, despite warnings from displaced

³⁷ “Letter dated 24 January 2022 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,” *UN Security Council*, para. 36, January 24, 2022, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_48_E.pdf (accessed October 26, 2023). Third Front-Tamazuj was also listed in the annual report of the UN secretary-general on children and armed conflict as having engaged in the recruitment of children. “Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary General.”

³⁸ “Letter dated 24 January 2022 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council.”

³⁹ International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), “Delays and Dilemmas: New Violence in Darfur and Uncertain Justice Efforts within Sudan’s Fragile Transition, Fact-finding mission report,” p.12 https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/fidh_report_sudan2021.pdf_.pdf (accessed April 13, 2023).

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with two male representatives of Arab communities, August 14, 2022; “Sudan Transparency and Policy Tracker, What Happened in Darfur Doesn’t Stay in Darfur,” *Suliman Baldo*, May 9, 2022, p.6, <https://sudantransparency.org/the-wave-of-recent-violence-in-west-darfur-state-has-left-many-shocked-observers-asking-who-was-involved-in-the-mass-atrocities-that-occurred-and-what-are-the-drivers-of-the-violence-and-its-root-ca/> (accessed April 13, 2023).

⁴¹ “Joint UNAMID-OHCHR Public Report: Report on Human Rights violations Committed by Rapid Support Forces and Armed Arab Militias Against IDPs and Villages in West Darfur 29-31 December 2020,” https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/Report_Violations_Darfur_29_31_December_2019.docx, para. 14 (accessed September 6, 2023).

communities that this would leave them with no effective, rights-respecting protection forces amid escalating violence in West Darfur.⁴²

UNAMID's departure followed years of drawdown under pressure from the al-Bashir government, which from the onset had opposed the peacekeeping presence, and from governments eager to reduce costs. In early 2020, Sudan's transitional government asked the UN to delay UNAMID's withdrawal, but then, under the influence of the generals, reversed its position. In May 2020, it pushed for the exit of the peacekeeping forces and pledged to protect civilians in Darfur under a UN Security Council-endorsed plan.

The UN Security Council established a new political mission, the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), in June 2020. UNITAMS' mandate did not include a physical civilian protection component, despite proposals for it from experts, human rights monitors, and internally displaced communities.⁴³ The new mission remained Khartoum-focused, concentrating on national political negotiations. While mandated to support the protection of civilians and human rights, the mission did not allocate sufficient resources to enhance existing human rights reporting and monitoring in Darfur, resulting in a gap in the documentation of abuses and the identification of perpetrators at a critical time when violence against civilians was surging.⁴⁴

Resurgence in Attacks on Massalit People and Displacement Camps: 2019 to Early 2023

After years of suffering, many Darfuri communities had hoped that al-Bashir's 2019 ouster would bring them respite. But this never came to pass.

Beginning in late 2019, West Darfur and its capital El Geneina became the epicenter of large-scale attacks against non-Arab residents. These were facilitated by the removal from

⁴² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Inter-communal violence increased in Darfur during the second half of 2020," January 17, 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/card/1R5yoxqxpR/> (accessed April 13, 2023); Obi Anyadike, "Rethink urged over withdrawal of peacekeepers from Sudan", *The New Humanitarian*, July 1, 2019, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2019/07/01/Darfur-withdrawal-peacekeepers-sudan> (accessed April 13, 2023).

⁴³ "Sudan: UN/AU Plan for Darfur Falls Short," Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/16/sudan-un/au-plan-darfur-falls-short>.

⁴⁴ UNITAMS mandate <https://unitams.unmissions.org/en/mandate>.

the state in May 2019 of UNAMID peacekeeping forces.⁴⁵ These attacks resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties, tens of thousands of people forcibly displaced, and the large-scale destruction of property.⁴⁶

The first large-scale attack on camps in El Geneina took place on December 31, 2019. Armed Arab men and RSF members attacked the predominantly Massalit Krinding IDP camp. They killed at least 101 people, primarily men and boys.⁴⁷ A UN investigation described the attacks as widespread, systematic, and targeted against IDPs, particularly Massalit people.⁴⁸ The 2021 report on Darfur of the UN Security Council Panel of Experts on the Sudan cited witnesses who had seen then-RSF West Darfur commander, Lt. Col. Musa Hamid Duday “Ambello,” leading the attacks.⁴⁹

With the support of the RSF, Arab militiamen attacked the camp again in January 2021, killing at least 150 people, burning homes and shops, and displacing at least 109,000 people.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Displaced communities had warned the UN and other actors against withdrawing the peacekeepers with no clear plan on how to ensure their safety. See Mohamed Osman, “The UN cannot abandon Darfur amid rising violence,” Human Rights Watch dispatch, January 6, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/06/un-cannot-abandon-darfur-amid-rising-violence>; “UNAMID Joint Special Representative visits El Geneina following intercommunal clashes,” *United Nations Peacekeeping*, January 14, 2019, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/unamid-joint-special-representative-visits-el-geneina-west-darfur-following-intercommunal-clashes> (accessed January 9, 2024).

⁴⁶ For more details on the dynamics around returns in the 2010s, see FIDH, *Delays and Dilemmas*, p.23 for example.

⁴⁷ “Joint UNAMID and OHCHR Public Report, Report on Human Rights violations Committed by Rapid Support Forces and Armed Arab Militias Against IDPs and Villages in West Darfur 29-31 December 2020.”

⁴⁸ “Joint UNAMID-OHCHR Public Report: Report on Human Rights violations Committed by Rapid Support Forces and Armed Arab Militias Against IDPs and Villages in West Darfur 29-31 December 2020,” para.12

⁴⁹ After complaints were made against Ambello, he was subsequently given a leave of absence, promoted, and then appointed as the head of the RSF Peace and Reconciliation Committee. UN Security Council, “Letter dated 13 January 2021 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,” January 13, 2021, S/2021/40, page 66 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/382/45/PDF/N2038245.pdf?OpenElement>. FIDH, *Delays and Dilemmas*, p.18 describes an Arab lawyer in the town addressing a crowd in the presence of Ambello and 100 RSF forces, demanding the dismantling of Krinding camp within 24 hours. The RSF Peace and Reconciliation Committee, tasked with facilitating traditional settlements among communities, was led by Col. Musa Ambello. See UN Security Council, “Letter dated 13 January 2021 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council, January 13, 2021,” and FIDH, *Delays and Dilemmas*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁰ “Deadly Darfur Attack Just Days After Last Peacekeepers Leave,” Human Rights Watch dispatch, January 22, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/22/deadly-darfur-attack-just-days-after-last-peacekeepers-leave>. For more details on the attack, which also included fighting between the Arab assailants and Massalit self-defense forces see, FIDH, *Delays and Dilemmas*, pp.25-26. See also Amnesty International, “Sudan: Horrific Attacks on Displacement Camps Show UN peacekeepers still Needed in Darfur,” March 1, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2021/03/sudan-horrific-attacks-on-displacement-camps-show-in-darfur/#:~:text=217%20people%20were%20injured.,part%20of%20a%20wider%20pattern> (accessed September 4, 2023).

These events prompted Massalit youth in the camps to acquire weapons (see Section I sub-section on Militarization, Mobilization, and Recruitment), exacerbating tensions.

Following the January 2021 attacks, Arab tribesmen organized a sit-in along two main routes into El Geneina.⁵¹ They demanded that the Khartoum authorities dismantle all the sites for displaced persons in and around El Geneina. They also demanded the removal of the West Darfur governor, Mohammed Abdalla al-Douma, an ethnic Massalit, to be replaced by a governor who was neither Massalit nor Arab, and the deployment of the RSF to provide security, instead of the police and SAF, which Arab communities saw as being predominantly non-Arab.⁵² The sit-in eventually stopped following negotiations with several national figures, including Hemedti's brother and deputy commander of the RSF, Abdel Raheem Dagalo.⁵³ But Arab demands were not satisfied, and the Massalit governor was replaced by Khamis Abbakar, also a Massalit.⁵⁴

The attacks continued. Between April 4 and 7, 2021, Arab militias, with the support of RSF members, attacked al-Jabal, one of El Geneina's most densely populated neighborhoods, chiefly inhabited by Massalit people. The attackers shot indiscriminately, killing people as they fled, and looted and set fire to property. One hundred and forty-four were reportedly killed and 233 injured, many with gunshot wounds to the head and neck.⁵⁵ On April 6, the RSF and Arab militias conducted a large-scale attack on the Abu Zar camp for displaced persons, one of El Geneina's key sites hosting Massalit and other non-Arab internally displaced persons, in which assailants burned thousands of homes. They also attacked

⁵¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Sudan Flash Update #2: Al Geneina West Darfur, January 30, 2021," January 30, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unfpa-sudan-flash-update-2-al-geneina-west-darfur-january-30-2021> (accessed October 18, 2023); "Sudan Flash Update #3: Al Geneina West Darfur, February 9, 2021," February 9, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unfpa-sudan-flash-update-3-al-geneina-west-darfur-february-09-2021> (accessed October 18, 2021).

⁵² "West Darfur sit-in lifted, govt meets demands of protestors," *Dabanga*, February 8, 2021, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/west-darfur-sit-in-lifted-govt-meets-demands-of-protestors> (accessed March 20, 2024).

⁵³ FIDH, *Delays and Dilemmas*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ "Hamdok Relieves, Appoints New Governors," *Darfur 24*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.darfur24.com/en/2021/06/14/hamdok-relieves-appoints-new-governors/> (accessed October 25, 2023).

⁵⁵ "West Darfur Doctors Committee, Statement No. 7," Sudan Central Doctors Committee post to Facebook, April 11, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/Sudandocctorscommittee/photos/a.1775635796055662/2914330828852814/?type=3> (accessed March 20, 2024). Doctors shared a list of 128 names of killed in El Geneina, including four women. Human Rights Watch interview with a medical doctor, April 12, 2021.

medical staff and facilities. Humanitarian aid workers reported that over 39,000 people were displaced.⁵⁶

Similar attacks on camps for internally displaced persons and on Massalit neighborhoods unfolded beyond El Geneina.

Kereneik town, 80 kilometers east, came under attack from the RSF and allied militias between December 2021 and April 2022. Assaultants killed over 250 people, primarily men, although children, older people, and women were also killed.⁵⁷

In the December 2021 attack, armed Arab militias, backed by RSF members, targeted Kereneik's two main camps for displaced persons, Um Duwein and Abuja. Satellite imagery of the town analyzed by Human Rights Watch showed a massive level of destruction, primarily around the two camps and their surroundings in the western and southern parts of the town.

On April 22, 2022, armed Arab men and Massalit self-defense forces fought for hours. Arab militias then mobilized over the next two days before launching a much larger, coordinated attack targeting and plundering civilian infrastructure and property. Survivors said attackers burned their shops and killed their cattle, which are crucial sources of income and wealth. The attackers also killed at least seven people in the local hospital and looted essential items. Surrounding villages were not spared: 36 were damaged and 5 were fully burned and looted, according to the UN.⁵⁸

According to Human Rights Watch research, RSF members, using RSF equipment including vehicles and weaponry, actively participated in all these attacks, often initiating them and

⁵⁶ "Sudan Ag [sic] Geneina, West Darfur Emergency Event Tracking Data collection," International Organization for Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix: Sudan April 11, 2021, https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/reports/DTM%20Sudan_EET_Ag%20Geneina%2C%20West%20Darfur_%20013%20%28Part%201%29.pdf (accessed April 13, 2023).

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Violence in West Darfur: Human Rights Watch 2023 Submission to U.K. Parliament," November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/violence-west-darfur>.

⁵⁸ OCHA, "Sudan Kereneik Conflict, West Darfur Situation Report No. 01 (As of 1 June 2022)," <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-kereneik-conflict-west-darfur-situation-report-no-01-1-june-2022> (accessed October 8, 2023).

paving the way for other assailants. On occasion, they engaged in abuses, including extrajudicial killings and widespread looting and arson in residential areas.⁵⁹

The RSF repeatedly denied being involved and failed to investigate.⁶⁰ Witnesses who filed complaints against the RSF for its role in the 2019 events in Krinding faced reprisals, creating a chilling effect and contributing to the ongoing climate of impunity.⁶¹

The SAF and other government forces for their part failed to deter massive Arab mobilization and to protect affected communities, despite their commitments under a UN Security Council-endorsed civilian protection plan.⁶² In general, they withdrew promptly to their garrisons when attacks started.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, “Violence in West Darfur: Human Rights Watch 2023 Submission to U.K. Parliament,” November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/violence-west-darfur>, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/violence-west-darfur>.

⁶⁰ For example, following the January 2021 attacks in El Geneina, Hemedti blamed “hidden hands” trying to sabotage the transition: <https://sputnikarabic.ae/20210120/الانتقالية-ومد-السودان-في-الحرائق-لم-يسمها-بإشغال-الحرائق-في-السودان-ومد-الانتقالية-1047855971.html> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶¹ “The Attorney-General: The Investigation Committee in El Genaina Events Started its Work,” *Al Taghyeer Newspaper*, January 5, 2020, <https://www.altaghyeer.info/ar/2020/01/05/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%81%D9%8A/> (accessed April 14, 2023). The Darfur Bar Association (DBA), a group of Darfuri human rights lawyers, represented victims and complainants from attacks. On March 25, 2021, the attorney-general’s office announced the referral of 33 cases in connection with the previous violence to the local court, including 18 cases of murder. According to two lawyers, a number of witnesses and complainants started to receive threatening phone calls from unknown numbers once the attorney-general’s committee started issuing arrest warrants against suspects, including members of the RSF. The bar association lawyers complained to the office of the then-attorney-general about the apparent leaking of classified information about the witnesses and plaintiffs, who formed another committee to investigate the matter. Human Rights Watch interviews with two lawyers, September 14, 2021 and October 22, 2022. See also “Sudan: Referral of 33 cases in the Events of Kirinding Camp to Court,” *Al Taghyeer Newspaper*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.altaghyeer.info/ar/2021/03/25/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A5%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-33-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83/> (accessed April 14, 2023).

⁶² Security Council Report, “UN Transitions in a Fractured Multilateral Environment,” December 8, 2023, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/transitions_2023.pdf (accessed April 23, 2024). On the SAF’s failure to protect, see Human Rights Watch, “Violence in West Darfur. Human Rights Watch February 2023 Submission to U.K. Parliament,” November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/violence-west-darfur>

Militarization, Mobilization, and Recruitment

In 2022, residents of West Darfur, including Arab community leaders, raised concerns over sustained recruitment, largely along ethnic lines, by armed actors, including the RSF, SAF, and JPA signatory groups, which they said heightened tensions.⁶³

Since the attacks in late 2019 in El Geneina, some of the Massalit community had begun arming themselves and formed, or, in some cases, re-formed, what they called self-defense groups, reportedly acquiring assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) with funds raised from the diaspora.⁶⁴ In the January 2021 attack on Krinding, a self-defense group caused significant casualties among the Arab assailants.⁶⁵

During the April 2021 attacks in El Geneina, Human Rights Watch documented clashes between armed Massalit youth and Arab attackers, notably in the initial phases of the assault on Abu Zar camp; the Massalit youth were then rapidly overrun.⁶⁶ The UN Panel of Experts mentioned “the presence of openly separatist Masalit [sic] propaganda” during these events.⁶⁷

Monitors and residents said the militarization of the Massalit community of El Geneina increased around 2021, following the arrival of the Sudanese Alliance (see Section I subsection on The End of the al-Bashir Era and the Juba Peace Agreement: 2019 to 2020) which added to ethnic tensions and the proliferation of weapons.⁶⁸

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interviews with an independent expert, January 24, 2023; an independent expert, February 15, 2023; and a resident of Kereneik, March 20, 2023. “Darfur’s recruitment race: Sudan’s army and Rapid Support Forces compete for influence,” *Ayin*, March 26, 2023, <https://3ayin.com/en/darfur-recruits/> (accessed April 23, 2023); In March 2023, the Rizeigat leader warned against recruitment campaigns targeting the youth of the tribe, pointing to the SAF, see “Rizeigat Paramount Leader Rejects Recruitment among His Tribesmen in Darfur,” *Sudan Tribune*, March 16, 2023, <https://sudantribune.com/article271945/> (accessed April 14, 2023).

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, N’Djamena, August 1, 2023; a former local official from West Darfur, September 14, 2021; and a local journalist from West Darfur, April 20, 2021. See also, What Happened in Darfur Doesn’t Stay in Darfur, p.5 and FIDH report. UN Panel of Experts Report, January 2022, para. 80.

⁶⁵ FIDH, *Delays and Dilemmas*, pp.25-26.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Violence in West Darfur. Human Rights Watch February 2023 Submission to U.K. Parliament,” November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/violence-west-darfur>.

⁶⁷ “Letter dated 24 January 2022 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council.”

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with an El Geneina resident, August 1, 2023; an aid worker, August 7, 2023; a Darfuri activist, August 13, 2023. In February 2023, the UN Panel of Experts February raised concerns about the proliferation of weapons in West Darfur. “Letter dated 7 February 2023 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,” UN Panel of Experts Report, S/2023/93, para.40, February 2023.

Similar militarization was also observed among Massalit youth in other parts of West Darfur, such as the town of Misterei.⁶⁹

As tensions between the SAF and the RSF rose in 2022 and early 2023, the two forces engaged in recruitment drives across Darfur.⁷⁰ The UN panel of experts reported that from mid-2022 onwards, the RSF launched the “most aggressive recruitment campaign” since the signing of the JPA.⁷¹

Prelude to the 2023 Violence in El Geneina

Tensions ran high in El Geneina and West Darfur in April 2023, even before the outbreak of the conflict between the RSF and SAF in Khartoum.

In late March and early April, incidents in El Geneina, Foro Baranga (200 kilometers south of El Geneina), and Tendelti (42 kilometers northwest of El Geneina) spurred ethnic tensions in West Darfur.⁷² In response, on April 10, Governor Abbakar declared a one-month state of emergency, which imposed a curfew and restrictions on movement.⁷³

On April 15, as fighting broke out between the SAF and the RSF in Khartoum, the two forces briefly clashed outside El Geneina.⁷⁴ Sporadic clashes were reported again on April 17.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ “Sudan: Darfur Town Destroyed,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 11, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/11/sudan-darfur-town-destroyed> (accessed April 23, 2024); FIDH *Delays and Dilemmas*, p. 20).

⁷⁰ “Darfur’s recruitment race: Sudan’s army and Rapid Support Forces compete for influence,” Ayin Network, March 26, 2023, <https://3ayin.com/en/darfur-recruits/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁷¹ “Letter dated 7 February 2023 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council.”

⁷² “Sudan: tribal clashes kill 24 in Darfur,” Voice of America, April 12, 2023, <https://www.voaafrigue.com/a/soudan-darfur-24-morts-dans-des-affrontements-tribaux/7048000.html> (accessed April 23, 2024); “West Darfur declares state of emergency after killing of three people,” *Sudan Tribune*, April 10, 2023, <https://sudantribune.com/article272780/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Deadly Sudan Army-RSF clashes spark human tragedy, widespread looting in Darfur,” *Dabanga*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/deadly-sudan-army-rsf-clashes-spark-human-tragedy-widespread-looting-in-darfur> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁷⁵ “Clashes renew in El Geneina, West Darfur,” *Al Mayadeen*, April 28, 2023, <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/clashes-renew-in-el-geneina-west-darfur> (accessed April 23, 2024).

Tensions in the city rose further on April 20 after three Arab men were killed at a checkpoint in downtown El Geneina in disputed circumstances (see Section XI on Killings of Arab Civilians). The next day, the West Darfur Doctors Union announced a work stoppage until local authorities guaranteed the security of medical staff.⁷⁶ On April 22, word spread that Arab militias were mobilizing in the village of Shukri, a village on the road toward Chad, and in other locations in West Darfur, witnesses said.⁷⁷ One interviewee spoke of significant Massalit mobilization too.⁷⁸

For almost 10 days after the outbreak of fighting in Khartoum, civil society actors, community elders, and some government officials worked to prevent the conflict from spreading to El Geneina, acutely aware of the magnitude of fighting that could occur in a city which had experienced three large-scale attacks since late 2019. The initiative yielded a cross-community meeting on April 23, 2023, which concluded that the RSF and SAF should refrain from fighting, and that the Central Reserve Police, a government force, would be deployed the morning of April 24, to ensure the reopening of the town's market, closed since fighting broke out in Khartoum. The agreement was expected to be announced publicly on April 24.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Mustafa, lawyer and human rights defender, July 23, 2023; Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Rami, former senior government official, July 29, 2023. The UN panel of experts report documented widespread mobilization in and around El Geneina by Arab community leaders even before April 15 through to April 24. UN Panel of Experts, "Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan," para. 78, p. 20.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023.

II. A Timeline of Key Events in El Geneina from April to November 2023



Map of neighborhoods and key locations in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan. Data © Openstreetmap, Wikimapia, Google Maps, Human Rights Watch. Graphic © Human Rights Watch

This timeline highlights selected key incidents which happened in El Geneina before, during, and immediately after the main attacks on the Massalit population of the city.

April 15 – Fighting breaks out between the SAF and the RSF in Khartoum; the two forces briefly clash outside El Geneina.⁷⁹

April 22 – Witnesses report hearing of Arab militia mobilization in Shukri, a village on the road toward Chad, and in other locations in West Darfur.⁸⁰

April 23 – Civil society actors, community elders, and some government officials meet as part of an effort to prevent the conflict between the SAF and the RSF from spreading to El Geneina. They reach an agreement with terms expected to be announced on April 24. Arab militias mobilize in locations around El Geneina.⁸¹

April 24 – Fighting erupts between the RSF and the SAF in El Geneina. Following initial clashes, the SAF, for the most part, remains in its barracks in the suburbs of Ardamata. Shortly after the clashes, the RSF and allied militias launch attacks on several neighborhoods and displaced persons' (IDP) sites, including al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Mansoura, al-Tadhamun, some IDP gathering sites (densely populated smaller, informal sites housing displaced persons within the compounds of schools and government offices), and the central market.

Clashes occur between the RSF and allied militias, and Massalit fighters from self-defense groups and the Sudanese Alliance of Governor Abbakar.

Crowds enter the weapons and munitions depot to arm themselves and manage to get hold of Kalashnikov rifles, Goryunov machine guns, and ammunition.

Electricity and water are cut.

⁷⁹ "Deadly Sudan Army-RSF clashes spark human tragedy, widespread looting in Darfur," *Dabanga*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/deadly-sudan-army-rsf-clashes-spark-human-tragedy-widespread-looting-in-darfur> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023, and Mustafa, lawyer and human rights defender, July 23, 2023; UN Panel of Experts, "Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan," para. 78, p. 20.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Rami, former senior government official, July 29, 2023.

April 25 – RSF and allied militias attack several Massalit majority neighborhoods, including al-Jamarek and al-Majliss, and numerous IDP gathering sites), including Imam al-Kazem school and the Ministry of Education.

April 27 – RSF and allied militias carry out widespread attacks throughout majority-Massalit neighborhoods of the city, including al-Majliss, al-Tadhamun and al-Thawra, and on gathering sites, including al-Burhan square.

April 28 – IDP sites at the Imam al-Kazem school and al-Burhan square burn during an attack.

April 30 – Satellite imagery shows widespread burning caused by fires across IDP sites and gathering points, including Abu Zar camp located along the central A5 road, the main artery crossing El Geneina from east to west and then linking El Geneina to Chad to the west.



Satellite imagery recorded on April 30 showing the burning of IDP gathering sites along the A5 road in the center of El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan. Image © 2024 Planet Labs PBC

Late April-May 12 – A locally brokered ceasefire leads to a lull in attacks, though witnesses say snipers remain active and sporadic shelling continues.

May 12 – Five days of intense fighting begin, with attacks on neighborhoods held by Massalit armed groups, including al-Buhaira, al-Ghabat, al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Majliss, al-Mansoura, al-Tadhamun, al-Thawra, and al-Zuhur. Some notable attacks over these days include attacks on al-Hashab and Gilani IDP sites, al-Qadima school and al-Zahra girls’ boarding school, and in the Krinding IDP camp.

May 17 – Satellite imagery shows that, in the period between May 1 and 17, fire destruction expanded to residential areas in the western and eastern parts of the city, where the clashes had been taking place. Additional burned houses are visible west of the Dunkey 13 water treatment plant and in al-Jabal neighborhood, while several IDP sites in al-Jamarek are affected by fire and destroyed.

Mid-May – The telecommunications network in El Geneina is cut.⁸² There is a lull in large-scale attacks.

May 21-27 – There are renewed RSF and militias attacks, targeting al-Jamarek on May 21 and eight other majority-Massalit neighborhoods and multiple gathering sites in the following days.

June 6-13 – The RSF and allied forces begin another wave of attacks, targeting at least six majority-Massalit neighborhoods and four IDP sites, and shelling some gathering sites including al-Zahra girls’ boarding school.



An Arab militia member stands in front of the Sultan’s house in El Geneina and says, "This is not Dar Massalit (home of the Massalit) anymore. This is Dar Arab (home of the Arabs)." © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023; Freedom House “Freedom of the Net 2023 – Sudan,” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/sudan/freedom-net/2023> (accessed April 23, 2024).

June 14 – Hours after Governor Abbakar accuses the RSF of committing genocide, the RSF takes Abbakar into custody at the RSF headquarters in El Geneina. A video uploaded to the social media platform Telegram later that day and verified by Human Rights Watch shows Abbakar dead. SAF officers and Massalit armed groups evacuate their fighters and their families to Ardamata. Large numbers of civilians follow suit.

June 15 – Tens of thousands of people, mostly Massalit, try to flee to Ardamata in a kilometers-long column. The convoy comes under attack by the RSF and allied forces and many people are killed. Some civilians reach Ardamata, others attempt to flee to Chad later that day and in the following days, but they are attacked and abused repeatedly on the way by the RSF and allied militias as well as Arab civilians.

Mid-June-early July: At least 45,000 refugees arrive in Adré, Chad, overwhelmingly from El Geneina.

June 25 – Two bulldozers raze all structures in Abu Zar camp to the ground.



June 29 – Satellite imagery shows the last remaining IDP sites in El Geneina have been burned to the ground.

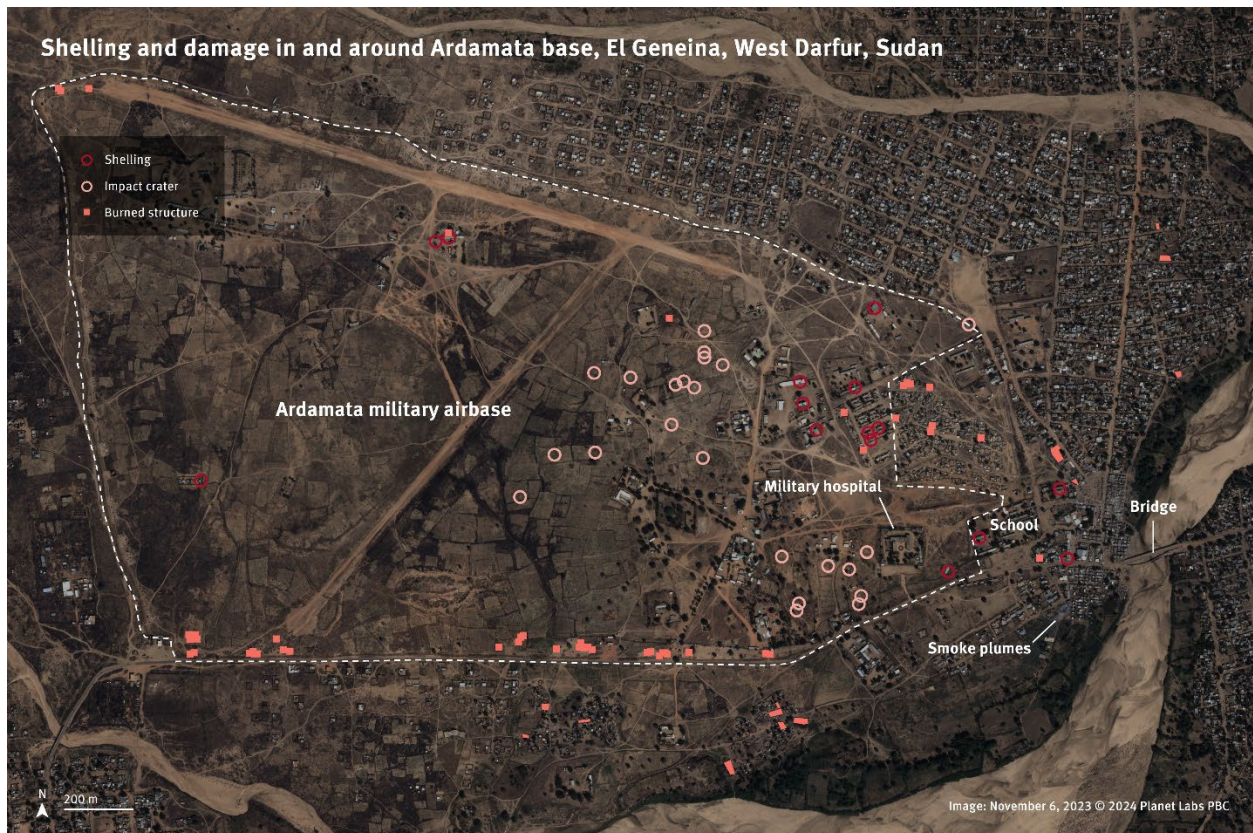
August 12 – Satellite imagery shows large residential areas across El Geneina have been completely destroyed by bulldozers. In other areas, the rooftops of buildings have been removed, which suggests they are to be destroyed.

November 1 – Fighting breaks out between the SAF and the RSF in Ardamata. The attacks follow days of mobilization by the RSF and allied militias, and negotiations by local leaders to facilitate the peaceful surrender of the SAF and Massalit fighters reportedly fighting alongside the SAF.

November 3 – Massalit leaders and the RSF begin negotiations, facilitated by the de facto governor, al-Tijani Karshoum, seeking a deal whereby civilians would be allowed safe passage in exchange for the neutrality of Massalit fighters in the fighting between the RSF and allied militias against the SAF.

November 4 – The SAF garrison is taken over by the RSF. The RSF and Arab militias go on a rampage in the Ardamata IDP camp and other residential areas, reportedly killing at least 1,000 people and forcing at least 8,000 to flee to Chad.

November 6 - Satellite imagery from November 6 shows new burned areas in Ardamata and an increase of graves in the cemetery.



Overall damage inside Ardamata military base and in surrounding areas as of November 6, 2023. Image © 2023 Planet Labs PBC. Analysis and graphics. © 2023 Human Rights Watch

El Geneina's Neighborhoods

The demography of neighborhoods in El Geneina at the time the violence started reflected the multiethnic nature of the city as well as the troubled and volatile history of West Darfur state over the past 20 years.

A predominantly Massalit city, El Geneina was also home to members of other non-Arab communities (including Bargo, Tamma, Fellata, and others), many of whom had arrived in the tens of thousands fleeing conflict since the early 2000s, as well as a sizeable Arab population.

Some neighborhoods were predominantly Massalit or non-Arab, and others were dominated by Arab residents. Some were mixed.⁸³

Al-Jamarek and al-Madaress neighborhoods were known to be largely Massalit, as was al-Tadhamun, an older and more developed neighborhood home to many prominent Massalit figures.

Al-Nasseem, to the north, and Um Duwein, to the east, were predominantly inhabited by members of the Arab community.

Mixed neighborhoods included al-Jabal, El Geneina's most densely populated area, which was split into blocks along ethnic lines. Blocks 1 to 3 were predominantly inhabited by Arab people, while blocks 4 to 7, further west, were predominantly Massalit.⁸⁴

Al-Kifah and al-Shati were among the other areas hosting mixed communities of Arabs and non-Arabs, notably ethnic Zaghawa people.⁸⁵

Al-Imtidad, al-Salam, and al-Shati neighborhoods were home mainly to non-Arab traders with middle to high incomes.⁸⁶ A resident said al-Majliss and al-Zuhur neighborhoods were popular with the professional class of the non-Arab communities, such as people employed in higher education, local government, and international organizations.⁸⁷

⁸³ Although the general locations of these neighborhoods are known, the exact boundaries of one in relation to the other are vague. Human Rights Watch was not able to find a map detailing these boundaries.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist, December 4, 2023.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist, December 7, 2023.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist, December 7, 2023.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist, December 7, 2023.

III. Forces and Mobilization in the El-Geneina Conflict

The abuses documented in this report took place in the context of a conflict in El Geneina between the RSF, its predominantly Arab allied militias, and the Third Front-Tamazuj armed group on the one hand, and the Massalit forces of Governor Abbakar's Sudanese Alliance and members of the Massalit "self-defense groups," on the other.

RSF, Militias, Tamazuj

In many incidents described in this report, the RSF, Tamazuj and allied militias appear to have acted with a common purpose, starting on April 24 and culminating in the attack against the convoy to Ardamata the night of June 14-15 (see Section VI on Climax of the Campaign: June 15 Massacre and its Aftermath).

Rapid Support Forces

RSF forces, identified by witnesses through their uniforms and vehicles, were central actors in the coordinated, large-scale attacks on majority-Massalit neighborhoods, in the abuses against civilians, and in the efforts to establish military ascendancy and territorial control over El Geneina.

Since its founding, the RSF has recruited overwhelmingly from sections of Darfuri Arab communities. A joint report by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) described the relationship between the RSF and Arab communities in Darfur as "rooted in ethnicity... sustained by common economic, social and political motivations."⁸⁸ The RSF recruits through its officers' tribal networks and by rewarding with money, cars, and military ranks the traditional Arab leaders who enlisted their kinsmen through the formal tribal hierarchy.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Joint UNAMID and OHCHR Public Report, Report on Human Rights violations Committed by Rapid Support Forces and Armed Arab Militias Against IDPs and Villages in West Darfur 29-31 December 2020," https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/Report_Violations_Darfur_29_31_December_2019.docx, para. 14 (accessed September 6, 2023)

⁸⁹ The legislation governing the RSF gave it the status of a regular force operating under the supervision of the commander-in-chief, at the time al-Bashir, removing oversight from the SAF and the National Intelligence and Security Services. For more on the history of the RSF, see Jérôme Tubiana, "Remote-Control Breakdown, Sudanese Paramilitary Forces and Pro-Government Militias," Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan *HSBA Issue Brief*, April 2017, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-IB-27-Sudanese-paramilitary->

Witnesses on the ground told Human Rights Watch that RSF officers allowed new recruits to go on extended unpaid leave with their RSF uniforms, weapons, and even vehicles, with the result that those recruits could be rapidly mobilized in their area of residence, often alongside local tribal militia.⁹⁰

Arab Militias

Arab militias appear to have provided the bulk of the manpower in the alliance with the RSF. The mobilization was “all in the hands of Arab leaders,” many of whom also hold ranks within the RSF, a journalist from El Geneina with close ties to the local Arab community told Human Rights Watch. “The RSF does not have [sufficient] manpower in El Geneina or West Darfur in general, but Arabs do,” the journalist said.⁹¹ Aqeel, an activist, said he saw “heavy mobilization and movement of Arab militias, mainly moving ammunition in broad daylight” within El Geneina between April 15 and April 24, before the outbreak of violence in the city.⁹²

Arab interviewees spoke openly about the widespread involvement of Arab men and “youth”—which in the local context includes teenage boys—in the fighting.⁹³ Arab tribal leaders, such as *Amir* Massar Abdelrahman Assil, have also spoken publicly about their involvement in what they described as a “war.”⁹⁴ In a press conference in El Geneina on August 21, 2023, Assil denied his forces were aligned with the RSF, describing the events as a purely tribal conflict between the Massalit and Arab communities of El Geneina.⁹⁵

Arab tribal militias are not permanent forces, but rather mobilize on an ad hoc basis via tribal channels when the community perceives a threat from outside. In episodes of tribal mobilization, known as *Faza'*, the *Amir* or *Umda*—traditional leaders (see Section XIII on RSF, Tamazuj and Arab Community Leaders in Positions of Command)—contact the *Agid*

forces.pdf (accessed April 2024); “Sudanese parliament passes RSF act integrating militiamen into the army,” *Sudan Tribune*, January 16, 2017, <https://sudantribune.com/articles59634/> (accessed September 6, 2023).

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with an aid worker, Chad August 1, 2023, and a journalist, Kenya, August 3, 2023.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Zaid, reporter, August 8, 2023.

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Abbas, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Aziza, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; and Abdelhadi, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁹⁴ “Press enlightenment regarding the events of West Darfur State (El Geneina),” August 21, 2023, video clip, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/Elgeneinao/videos/975007877115746/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁹⁵ “تنوير صحفي بخصوص أحداث ولاية غرب دارفور (الجنينة),” August 21, 2023, video clip, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/Elgeneinao/videos/975007877115746/> (accessed April 23, 2024). https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=975007877115746

(field commanders or war chiefs) representing each of the subsections under the paramount chief, another journalist from El Geneina told Human Rights Watch.⁹⁶

An Arab militia fighter from al-Jabal neighborhood said each *Agid* is appointed by members of his tribe at the neighborhood level on the basis of perceived skill and bravery.⁹⁷ The *Agid*, in turn, can mobilize 50-60 men and receives a percentage of the loot, the same journalist said.⁹⁸ The fighter said that in al-Jabal neighborhood only, there were 12 groups of Arab militia fighters, each led by its own *Agid*.⁹⁹ An *Agid al-ugada* (“*Agid* of the *Agids*”) commands the *Agids*.

Armed Arab residents established checkpoints on the edges of their neighborhoods.¹⁰⁰ Three interviewees said Arab tribal leaders urged residents of Arab and mixed neighborhoods that came under attack to fight and defend their houses, and that they armed them. They said the groups included people from other non-Arab groups who were not Massalit.¹⁰¹

Third Front-Tamazuj Movement

Tamazuj, an armed group (see Section I sub-section on The End of the Al-Bashir Era and the Juba Peace Agreement: 2019 to 2020), was among the forces that participated in the fighting alongside the RSF and militias.

A 2022 UN Panel of Experts report said Tamazuj was made up of fighters from nomadic communities in border areas between Sudan and South Sudan, as well as former Chadian rebels in El Geneina.¹⁰² The Sudan Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), an armed group operating in Southern Kordofan state, denied Tamazuj’s claim that it originated from the

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Kabeer, journalist, Nairobi, August 3, 2023.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Tariq, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Kabeer, journalist, Nairobi, August 3, 2023.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tariq, Tleha village, July 25, 2023. Habab, an Arab woman residing in bloc 13 in al-Jabal, said the local *umda* distributed weapons to residents. Human Rights Watch interview with Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023; Bilqis, Chad, July 30, 2023; and Lana, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² UN Security Council, “Letter dated 24 January 2022 from the Panel of Experts on the Sudan addressed to the President of the Security Council,” S/2022/48, para. 36, January 24, 2022, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/416/20/PDF/N2141620.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed December 15, 2023).

SPLM-N, adding to speculation that Tamazuj was a creation of the SAF's Military Intelligence and Sudan's security services.¹⁰³

Like other armed groups that signed the Juba Peace Agreement, Tamazuj had close ties with military leaders prior to the outbreak of conflict in April 2023. In an August 2022 visit to El Geneina, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti," the commander of the RSF, publicly accused the movement of "instigating" violence in the city, vowing to hold them accountable.¹⁰⁴ No action was taken against them, at least not publicly.

It is unclear when Tamazuj entered an alliance with the RSF, but witnesses, fighters, and human rights monitors all described the movement's role in key attacks on, and abuses in, majority-Massalit neighborhoods.¹⁰⁵ For instance, two survivors identified Tamazuj commander Musa Angir as directing forces during an attack on a site for displaced persons and as manning a checkpoint littered with bodies (See Section XIII on RSF, Tamazuj and Arab Community Leaders in Positions of Command).¹⁰⁶ Khalil, 35, recognized one man who is a Tamazuj colonel participating in an attack on June 5 in al-Shati where people in RSF uniform and other forces looted homes.¹⁰⁷ On the evening of June 14, two Massalit fighters saw men they identified as Tamazuj commanders at checkpoints within El Geneina where the convoy heading to Ardamata later came under attack.¹⁰⁸

Aqeel, an activist, said there was a heavy presence of Tamazuj on the western side of the Sudanese-Chadian Joint Force headquarters, where the fighting erupted on April 24.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ As the report also mentions, interlocutors told the panel that Tamazuj also participated in 2021 attacks in El Geneina in al-Jabal as well Krinding and Abu Zar displaced persons' (IDP) camps, see https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_48_E.pdf, para. 36. (accessed December 15, 2023).

¹⁰⁴ "Hemedti accuses the Tamazuj movement of involvement in the Darfur conflicts and calls for an investigation into its sources of armament," *Sudan Tribune*, July 29, 2022, <https://sudantribune.net/article262035/> (accessed March 20, 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, 33, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023; Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023; Abdelhadi, Chad, July 27, 2023; Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023; Omar, former soldier, July 29, 2023; Khalil, Chad, July 29, 2023; and Osama, human rights defender, Kampala, August 13, 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023; Human Rights Watch text message correspondence with Mansour, Chad, March 24, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, Chad, July 29, 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Abdelhadi, Chad, July 27, 2023, and Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, 33, activist, N'djamena, July 20, 2023.

In August 2023, after most of the events described in this report, Tamazuj formally announced its alliance with the RSF in the war against the SAF.¹¹⁰ The RSF formally integrated Tamazuj fighters within its ranks, including in El Geneina. A video posted to Telegram by the RSF on September 18, 2023, shows Tamazuj fighters alongside the RSF, with commentary saying that 34,000 fighters from Tamazuj had agreed to join the RSF in El Geneina.¹¹¹

Other Militias and Alleged Foreign Fighters

Multiple witnesses said they saw gunmen participating in RSF and militia attacks who they believed were not from local Arab tribes, as well as alleged foreign fighters. Some witnesses said fighters who appeared to be non-Arab participated in the attacks alongside RSF and Arab militias, while Arab interviewees said that some non-Arab residents received weapons from Arab tribal leaders.¹¹² Other witnesses said they believed some militia members were not Sudanese.¹¹³

Five interviewees said that in some mixed areas of El Geneina, the RSF distributed weapons to residents, including some non-Arab people from the Tamma and Bargo communities who went on to build barricades and checkpoints to protect their neighborhoods.¹¹⁴ One Arab resident of al-Kifah said checkpoints in her neighborhood were manned by “members of all ethnicities... except Massalit,” which in this case included Arabs, Zaghawa, Bargo, Borno, and Fallata.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ “Tamazuj group aligns with RSF in Sudan’s ongoing war,” *Sudan Tribune*, August 17, 2023, <https://sudantribune.com/article276260/> (accessed March 20, 2024).

¹¹¹ Rapid Support Forces - قوات الدعم السريع (@RSFSudan) post to Telegram channel, September 17, 2023, <https://t.me/RSFSudan/5142> (accessed April 23, 2023).

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interviews with Ibrahim, former local official, June 8, 2023; Hashim, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023; Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023; Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023; Habab, N’Djamena, July 30, 2023; Bilqis, Chad, July 30, 2023; and Lana, N’Djamena, July 30, 2023.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Anwar, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Adam, government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023; Bashir, aid worker for an international organization, Chad, July 24, 2023; Fadhel, Chad, July 24, 2023; Ashraf, Chad, July 24, 2023; Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023; Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023; Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023; and Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Adnan, Chad, July 22, 2023; Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, N’Djamena, August 1, 2023; and Osama, human rights defender, Kampala, August 13, 2023.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Sahar, Chad, July 30, 2023.

Several witnesses reported seeing fighters who they believed hailed from French-speaking African countries such as Chad and the Central African Republic.¹¹⁶ Six interviewees said they encountered perpetrators they believed were from Libya.¹¹⁷ One interviewee also said he thought some were from the Central African Republic. Researchers were unable to confirm the alleged identity of these fighters.

Coordination

Survivors of abuses in El Geneina and interviewees who were locally active—senior government officials, political advisers, prominent activists, and journalists—described the significant coordination between the RSF and fighters from Arab militias throughout the conflict. In addition to carrying out military operations and abuses together, these forces jointly manned checkpoints and together ran formal and informal detention sites (see Section VII sub-section on Unlawful Detentions, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment). Eleven interviewees also implicated fighters from Tamazuj in abuses alongside RSF members and Arab militia members and said the RSF provided materiel support to Tamazuj.

For instance, Muneer, a policeman who was on duty when the violence began on April 24, said he was in the police headquarters, when a force he estimated to be 5,000-strong attacked the neighborhood at noon, using artillery, Dushkas (heavy machine guns), and RPGs. Some of the attackers wore RSF uniforms, while others were armed men in civilian clothing, he said. Muneer recognized the logo of Tamazuj on some uniforms and vehicles.¹¹⁸

Coordination expanded well beyond El Geneina itself, all the way to the border with Chad. Among the many checkpoints interviewees said the RSF ran within and on the road out of El Geneina, some were jointly manned with militias. These checkpoints were the sites of widespread abuse, in particular in mid-June.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Ibrahim, former local official, June 8, 2023; Adam, government employee, July 24, 2023; Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023. The RSF reportedly has in its ranks thousands of recruits from Chad. “How Sudan’s infamous RSF bolsters its ranks with Chadian recruits,” *The New Arab*, October 13, 2021, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/poverty-drives-chadian-youth-join-sudans-brutal-rsf> (accessed April 23, 2024).

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Anwar, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Bashir, aid worker with an international organization, July 24, 2023; Ashraf, July 24, 2023; Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

Two interviewees described seeing RSF forces entering militia “bases,” and vice versa. Omar, 46, was detained and tortured at the RSF headquarters in El Geneina in July. He told Human Rights Watch he saw vehicles of the Central Reserve Police (CRP) and RSF at the headquarters, as well as armed Arab militiamen and Tamazuj members entering the base to refuel.¹¹⁹ Mali, 17, said he was detained in a house used jointly by the RSF and its allied militias.¹²⁰

The UN Panel of Experts found that several Arab tribal leaders from El Geneina met with the RSF leadership in Khartoum in January 2023, and “in exchange for money they recruited members of their communities.”¹²¹

Massalit Forces

When fighting erupted on April 24, the coalition led by the RSF came into conflict with the Massalit forces of Governor Abbakar’s Sudanese Alliance allied with members of self-described Massalit “self-defense groups.” Hundreds more Massalit young men and adolescent boys mobilized when the fighting escalated.¹²² They were joined by Massalit individuals with experience with weapons who mobilized on an ethnic basis, including current and former members of military and security institutions (the police, the General Intelligence Service, and the SAF) and of armed groups that were party to the Juba Peace Agreement, including the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minnawi, two major Darfuri, non-Arab armed groups.¹²³

A journalist from El Geneina said he believed the forces of the Sudanese Alliance numbered 1,000 to 2,000 men at most, and the self-defense groups, 500 to 1,000.¹²⁴ Hassan, a 62-year-old Massalit man who took up arms in al-Madaress neighborhood, estimated that a total of 1,500 non-Arabs mobilized against the RSF and allied militias.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Omar, former soldier, Chad, July 29, 2023.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Malik, Chad, July 25, 2023.

¹²¹ UN Panel of Experts, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan,” para. 78.

¹²² Human Rights Watch interview with Zaid, reporter, August 8, 2023.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023; Adnan, Chad, July 22, 2023.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist from El Geneina, December 6, 2023.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Naijb, Massalit fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023.

Interviewees said military coordination within the Sudanese Alliance and the self-defense groups was largely informal and ad hoc.¹²⁶

The newly mobilized Massalit fighters used weapons they looted from the police storage facilities in El Geneina and Ardamata when the conflict broke out. In addition, there are claims that the SAF provided some weapons to Massalit fighters at the start of the attacks.¹²⁷

These forces were unable to protect the population from the impending campaign of atrocities.

Sudanese Alliance

Massalit fighters of the Sudanese Alliance had about 20-25 vehicles in El Geneina at the onset of the conflict, bases in al-Madaress, in the governor's office, and in the General Secretariat of the Government opposite it, Massalit interviewees said.¹²⁸ Yahya, 60, a government adviser and a member of the Sudanese Alliance, said his forces also maintained a presence around the former UNAMID base in al-Jabal neighborhood during the fighting.¹²⁹ Adnan, a Sudanese Alliance fighter, was in a base with around 70 fighters across the street from the RSF headquarters in al-Jamarek where, he said, his men were attacked "immediately" on April 24 as clashes broke out between the SAF and the RSF.

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Adnan, July 22, 2023, and Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹²⁷ One journalist said a source in military intelligence (MI) acknowledged that MI had provided 400 weapons to Massalit fighters in the first days of the fighting. In a press conference in August, *Amir* Massar Assil, a prominent Arab tribal leader from El Geneina, accused the military of having opened 14 weapons storage units in El Geneina to Massalit fighters. In its report, the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan noted that the RSF in November 2023 arrested "Al-Walid Atta-Alla, the head of SAF Military Intelligence in El Geneina, accused by RSF of igniting intercommunal clashes in El Geneina by distributing arms and ammunition to the various local communities." Human Rights Watch interview with Zaid, reporter, August 8, 2023. "تنوير (الجنيينة) صحفي بخصوص أحداث ولاية غرب دارفور" August 21, 2023, video clip, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/Elgeneinao/videos/975007877115746/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

See also UN Panel of Experts, "Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan."

¹²⁸ Aqeel, a human rights activist, described seeing Sudanese Alliance forces engaging in intense hostilities to keep RSF forces out of the center of al-Madaress, where the governor's office was, on April 27. Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Ibrahim, former local official, Chad, June 8, 2023; Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023; Adnan, Chad, July 22, 2023; Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023. Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist from El Geneina, December 6, 2023. See also UN Panel of Experts, "Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan," para. 4.

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023.

Self-Defense Groups

Though Massalit self-defense groups had formed in majority-Massalit neighborhoods since 2019, the outbreak of fighting and the looting of police weapons led to a sudden wave of additional mobilization.

On at least two occasions, government arms depots were overrun by predominantly Massalit community members looking for weapons.

Mid-morning on April 24, as the initial attacks unfolded in Dunkey 13, al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, and other neighborhoods, youth from the neighborhoods came in waves to the police headquarters around al-Majliss avenue, asking for protection and to be armed.¹³⁰ Muneer, the policeman, joined the Massalit self-defense groups. He said the police director general, who commands police forces in the city, was present but did not give orders to respond to the unfolding attacks. Eventually the crowds entered the depots, in circumstances that are disputed.¹³¹ Muneer said people removed Kalashnikov-type rifles, Goryunov machine guns, and ammunition.¹³²

A witness and two observers with knowledge of the events said civilians also obtained weapons at SAF depot in Ardamata.¹³³ Safa, a women's rights activist, said:

On April 26, police commanders told the people in our camp to come to get weapons from their depot in Ardamata. People started to head there. Then I saw hundreds, if not thousands, running toward the camp. They wanted to get weapons, but the police wanted to give weapons to selected groups, so they could register them. Some people tried to break into the SAF garrison,

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Rawiya, Tleha village, May 31, 2023; Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Ibrahim, former local official, Chad, June 8, 2023; Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Muneer, a policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹³¹ "Around 2 p.m., hundreds of Masalit residents rushed to police weapon depots, according to six people present. Police officers, some of them Masalit, opened the doors, allowing the crowd to grab thousands of Kalashnikov rifles. Elderly men, women and teenagers, untrained in how to use the guns, were seen in the streets with rifles, five witnesses told Reuters." Maggie Michael, Ryan McNeill, "The Slaughter of El Geneina," *Reuters*, September 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-politics-darfur/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Safa, women's rights activist, Nairobi, August 3, 2023, and Zaid, reporter, August 8, 2023.

but the SAF shot at them. The SAF started to fire from [armored vehicles] to warn people to stay away. People insisted [they get weapons], and broke into the depot.¹³⁴

Residents of al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Mansoura, al-Salam, al-Tadhamun, and al-Thawra neighborhoods all said they saw Massalit men, youth, and children, pick up guns around that time to protect their neighborhoods in an ad hoc fashion.¹³⁵ Rubab, a teacher, said:

We were abandoned, so our young men came together to defend us. There were nine attacks on our area, and the young men were able to push them back each time... We were surprised they knew how to defend us.¹³⁶

An Arab resident of majority-Massalit al-Jamarek described the spread of weapons in her neighborhood from April 24:

From that day, if you went out, everyone had a gun. In front of my door, they would sit there... They were covering their faces and had weapons, sometimes machetes, rifles. Most had rifles. Sometimes they had two. And grenades. This was everywhere, everyone had it... There were boys who were like ten years old preparing rifles to try to make them work.¹³⁷

Three individuals, one of whom is a human rights monitor, said that some Massalit forces also possessed RPGs.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Safa, women's rights activist, Nairobi, August 3, 2023.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhadi, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Amin, Chad, June 3, 2023; Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; and Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023.

IV. Escalating Attacks on Massalit Displacement Sites and Neighborhoods: April 24 to June 14

Starting on April 24 and through mid-June, the RSF and Arab militias led three major waves of attacks on majority-Massalit neighborhoods where Massalit forces were present.

They deliberately looted and burned down neighborhoods identified as Massalit. They also systematically targeted the sites in the city where internally displaced persons (IDPs)—largely Massalit—and other non-Arab communities were living. They did so on foot and in vehicles, attacking with gunfire, but also with explosive weapons, which increase the risk of unlawful killings and injuries from indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. RSF forces looted and burned down site after site, shooting civilians as they fled.

Targeted areas included long-established IDP camps, where people had moved, following attacks on their communities in the 2000s, as well as the roughly 100 more recently-established IDP “gathering points”—smaller, informal, densely populated sites housing displaced persons within the compounds of schools and government offices.¹³⁹ These were located along the A5 road (the main artery that crosses El Geneina from east to west through al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Majilis, al-Tadhamun, al-Thawra, and al-Zuhur neighborhoods. Since late 2019, tens of thousands of predominantly Massalit community members had gathered at these sites, having fled the large-scale attacks on the Krinding and Abu Zar IDP camps and other locations in the city in 2019 and 2021.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Sources diverge on the number of IDP gathering sites. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) counted 86 sites. Norwegian Refugee Council, “Geneina Gathering Sites Overview (November 2022),” *Relief Web*, December 1, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/geneina-gathering-sites-overview-november-2022> (accessed November 3, 2023). The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) counted 113, which included the 86 sites identified by IOM and 27 ‘microsites’ identified by NRC. Norwegian Refugee Council, “Geneina Gathering Sites Overview (November 2022),” *Relief Web*, December 1, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/geneina-gathering-sites-overview-november-2022> (accessed November 3, 2023). The IDP Camps Network-El Geneina, a grassroots organization of activists, shared with Human Rights Watch a document titled “Lists of Gathering Sites in West Darfur State-2023”, listing 120 sites. IOM, “Sudan Escalating Conflict Situation Update 23 May 2023,” *Relief Web*, May 24, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-escalating-conflict-situation-update-23-may-2023> (accessed October 19, 2023).

¹⁴⁰ UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, “Protection Brief Darfur Region October 2023,” *Relief Web*, October 10, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/protection-brief-darfur-region-october-2023> (accessed October 19, 2023); “DTM Sudan emergency event tracking report, Ag Geneina [sic], West Darfur Update 30,” IOM, September 20, 2022, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-emergency-event-tracking-report-ag-geneina-west-darfur-update-30> (accessed October 19, 2023).

Following the initial attacks in late April, almost all these IDP sites along the A5 road were destroyed. New gathering sites emerged, notably in al-Zahra girls' boarding school and in the alleyways of residential areas, only to be targeted and destroyed in subsequent waves of attacks in May and June (see Section VII box on Al-Zahra girls' boarding school).

The events of 2023 described in this report mirrored the previous attacks in El Geneina in 2019 and 2021, and indicate the deliberate targeting of displaced communities in the city. Arab community representatives in 2021 had called for the removal of IDP sites from El Geneina, saying Massalit fighters were living inside them (See Section I on Background).

The timeline presented in this section draws on witness interviews and on human rights activists' notes and messages written or exchanged during and after the events.¹⁴¹

April 24 to 28

The attacks occurred in several phases, the first starting on April 24 and continuing through April 28.

On April 24, the RSF and allied militias attacked the neighborhoods of al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Mansoura, and al-Tadhamun, according to witnesses and residents.¹⁴²

An activist said that on April 24, he collected the bodies of civilians killed earlier in the day inside a gathering site in the government's Labor Office.¹⁴³ With a group of volunteers, he collected 31 bodies, including of 8 women and 4 children, "with gunshot wounds, some to the chest or stomach, some to the legs..." from throughout the building, he said.¹⁴⁴

On April 25, there were widespread attacks on at least 5 neighborhoods and 12 IDP camps and sites, three human rights monitors said.¹⁴⁵ Marajan, a 37-year-old man, said that

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; ^{and} Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023; and Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

¹⁴⁵ Mansour said the neighborhoods of al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, and al-Tadhamun came under attack, as did the IDP sites at the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Sudanese Red Crescent. Jamal Abdallah Khamis said assailants attacked the

morning he woke to the sound of gunshots and saw RSF and allied Arab militias attack several sites for displaced persons in al-Jamarek. Within minutes, there was a trail of smoke “from the Council of Zakat office and Imam al-Kazem school [to] the Salah al-Din school and all the IDPs gathering sites.”¹⁴⁶

Aisha, 52, said her 20-year-old son and her 30-year-old brother were killed in an attack by the RSF on the Ministry of Education gathering site, where nearly 300 families, including hers, were living at the time. Eight others were said to have been wounded in the attack. This was the first of at least two RSF attacks on that site in the span of two weeks, Aisha said.¹⁴⁷

Fatin, a 40-year-old day worker, survived an attack on Abu Zar camp. Men in RSF uniform and civilian clothes were shouting “*Nuba! Nuba! Nuba!*”—an ethnic slur—while shooting at children, older people, and women, she said.¹⁴⁸

After targeting the offices of the El Geneina locality administration in al-Majliss, assailants continued onto al-Majliss mosque next door, killing five displaced persons, including one child and one woman, said Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a human rights monitor, whose colleague went to the mosque to document the killings.¹⁴⁹

Yasin Adam Ahmad, a man in his mid-30s, was shot in the neck and killed on April 25, while he and a group of children and women were running by al-Qadima school, which was burning at the time, said Muna, Yasin’s sister-in-law who was with him at the time.¹⁵⁰

neighborhoods of al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, and al-Ghabat that day, as well as the Abu Zar IDP camp, and the gathering sites at al-Farouq school, al-Safwa school, part of al-Qadima school, the judiciary mosque, and offices of El Geneina locality administration, setting them on fire. Aqeel said the IDP sites at the Ministry of Education building, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Plans, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Dar Masalit school were also burned. Both Jamal Abdallah Khamis and Aqeel said the El Geneina locality offices were attacked that day. Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N’Djamena, July 20, 2023; Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; and Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, N’Djamena, August 1, 2023.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights interview with Aisha, Chad, July 26, 2023. Satellite imagery analysed by Human Rights Watch shows the site burned between April 25 and April 28.

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatin, 40, day worker, Chad, July 25, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Muna, teacher, Chad, June 1, 2023.

On April 27, the RSF and allied militias attacked six neighborhoods, targeting at least seven gathering sites.¹⁵¹ In one, on al-Burhan square, human rights monitor Mansour said he found the bodies of seven men.¹⁵²



Incendiary damage to al-Burhan square, an IDP gathering site in El Geneina in late April 2023. © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)



Incendiary damage to al-Burhan square, an IDP gathering site in El Geneina. © May 1, 2023, Roots for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations

¹⁵¹ The neighborhoods included al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Majliss, al-Tadhamun, and al-Thawra; gathering sites included the al Imam al-Kazem, al-Tikari, a-Zahra, and *Dar*Massalit schools, as well as El Geneina girls' secondary school; al-Burhan square, the central library office, the development planning office, and the offices of the Ministries of Education, Social Affairs, Youth and Sport, and Urban Planning. Human Rights Watch interviews with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023; and Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.



Incendiary damage to the Dar Massalit school, an IDP gathering site in El Geneina. © May 1, 2023, Roots for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations

“More than 20 RSF [fighters] came in,” said Zainab, 15, who sheltered at what she called the Child Protection gathering point:

We were seven or so [women and girls] in the room and my father. They started beating my father. My mother said: ‘Don’t beat him!’ They shot my father in the chest and my mother in the throat... They told everyone to leave, and then they burned it [the site].¹⁵³

Satellite imagery corroborates witness accounts and attests to the scale of the destruction. Imagery recorded on April 25 shows the first signs of arson concentrated on an IDP gathering site around al-Farouq school. By April 30, widespread and apparently deliberate fires had affected almost all IDP sites located along and near the A5 road, including the Abu Zar camp.

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Zainab, Chad, July 30, 2023.



Satellite imagery recorded on April 30 showing the burning of IDP gathering sites along the A5 road in the center of El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan. Image © 2024 Planet Labs PBC

A video posted to the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) on April 30 and verified by Human Rights Watch shows the aftermath of the burning of the Imam al-Kazem school gathering point, an 8,000 square-meter compound in al-Majliss.¹⁵⁴ Most of the structures on this site have been burned to the ground, and smoke is still visibly rising from the charred remains of what appears to be furniture and other flammable objects. Fire damage is already visible on satellite imagery dated April 28. No damage is visible on satellite imagery dated April 25.

After the heavy destruction of these early days, local peace talks led to a ceasefire on May 1, but sporadic attacks continued.¹⁵⁵



Incendiary damage to the Imam al-Kazem school, an IDP gathering site in El Geneina. © May 1, 2023, Roots for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations

¹⁵⁴ @BSonblast post to X (formerly known as Twitter), April 29, 2023, <https://twitter.com/BSonblast/status/1652507542818537474> (accessed April 29, 2024).

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023, and Ismat, Chad, July 26, 2023.

May 12 to 14

Starting on May 12, there occurred three days of heavy, continuous attacks on neighborhoods and IDP sites, centering on the neighborhoods of al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, and al-Mansoura, which were attacked every day through May 14.¹⁵⁶ The areas of al-Ghabat and al-Jabal were also targeted on May 13.

Aqeel, an activist who volunteered at makeshift clinics established after the conflict started, said that on May 12 the clinics received people injured in the RSF and allied militia attacks on the Gilani and al-Hashab camps located in al-Ghabat, as well as bodies of people killed in these attacks. He said he saw 80 injured people arriving from the two camps at the Ingaz clinic, and 27 bodies being brought there. “All [had] gunshot wounds, most in the stomach and back and neck... [they were] mostly young men,” Aqeel said.¹⁵⁷

Satellite imagery recorded on May 17 shows several IDP sites affected by fire in al-Jamarek. An image from June 29 shows all the sites destroyed by fire. The eastern part of the city was also affected, with several pockets of structures destroyed by fire in Krinding IDP camp.

¹⁵⁶ The sites attacked included the gathering sites at al-Qadima, al-Tijaria, and al-Zahra schools; at the specialized hospital and the family and child protection unit offices (May 12); and at the Sudan Open University Center, al-Qadima school, and al-Zahra girl's boarding school (May 14).

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, human rights activist, Chad, July 23, 2023; and executive members of El Juzur, Chad, July 30, 2023.



Satellite imagery comparison between April 30 and June 29, 2023, shows the burning of two IDP gathering sites in al-Jamarek neighborhood in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan. Image © 2024 Planet Labs PBC

May 21 to 27

A lull from May 15 through 20 gave way to renewed large-scale attacks by RSF and militia targeting al-Jamarek on May 21.¹⁵⁸ The forces burned three gathering points and killed people.¹⁵⁹

By that time, Massalit fighters from the Sudanese Alliance and the self-defense groups had fallen back to six neighborhoods abutting the A5 road, with the General Secretariat of the Government as their stronghold, according to Jamal Abdallah Khamis, the rights monitor.¹⁶⁰ On May 24, assailants carried out another wave of attacks, targeting at least four IDP locations as well as six neighborhoods and the governor's office, according to monitors.¹⁶¹ On May 25, they targeted at least three gathering sites and two neighborhood blocks.¹⁶² On May 27, they attacked six neighborhoods.¹⁶³

June 6 to 14

After a quiet spell from May 28, attacks started again on June 6. RSF forces targeted at least six neighborhoods and four IDP sites on June 7.¹⁶⁴

Yousra, 27, described the attack on al-Gandoul center, which was hosting around 200 people, including many Massalit activists and their families. She said 30 RSF fighters entered the building:

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁵⁹ These included the Ministry of Agriculture, and Hujaj and al-Jabal school n°5 gathering points. Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023, and Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁶⁰ These neighborhoods were al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Thawra, and al-Zuhur, as well as parts of Abu Zar and al-Jabal. Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁶¹ This included the IDP sites of Abu Zar; al-Faruq, al-Safwa, and al-Kifa schools; and the neighborhoods of al-Jabal, al-Madaress, al-Mansoura, al-Thawra and al-Zuhur, as well as parts of al-Jabal. Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; and Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁶² These were the gathering sites at al-Tijaria school, the El Geneina Girls' Secondary school, and the Education Training Center, and blocks 15 and 16 of al-Jabal. Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.

¹⁶³ These were al-Buhaira, al-Jabal blocks 2 and 5, al-Jamarek, al-Tadhamun, al-Thawra, and al-Zuhur.

¹⁶⁴ The neighborhoods were al-Buhaira, al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Thawra area, al-Tadhamun and al-Zuhur. The gathering sites attacked were at al-Gandoul Center, al-Thawra school, and al-Jabal schools n°2 and 5. Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023, and Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.

[They] started shooting, and beating, and looting. I saw at least 30 people get killed as they were fleeing. They weren't distinguishing between women, children, men. As they entered, we started [climbing] over the wall. We fled to Zahra [boarding school] gathering point but when we got there, there were mortar attacks coming.¹⁶⁵

Mansour, 23, was also present. He said the attack started in the early morning and was led by Musa Angir, a commander of Tamazuj (see Section XIII sub-section on Tamazuj). Some attackers wore RSF uniforms while others were in plainclothes, covering their faces. "We were attacked from the southeast direction... It was a heavy attack and those who were unable to leave... were killed inside the center," Mansour said.¹⁶⁶ He knew four activists who were killed on that occasion.¹⁶⁷

Besides these ground offensives, residents described shelling on gathering sites during the week of June 7 to June 14, including on three IDP sites in schools, including al-Zahra girls' boarding school (see Section VII box on Al-Zahra girls' boarding school).¹⁶⁸

On June 7-8, attacks resumed on the neighborhoods that had been targeted on May 27, a monitor said.¹⁶⁹ On June 9-10, at least five neighborhoods and one gathering site were attacked. On June 12, four neighborhoods and another gathering site were attacked.¹⁷⁰

June 14 saw the culmination of this wave of attacks, leading to the collapse of the defense of nine neighborhoods still held by Massalit armed groups, concomitant with the killing of the governor.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Yousra, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023, text message correspondence, March 24, 2024.

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch text message correspondence with Mansour, Chad, March 24, 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Besides al-Zahra girls' boarding school, al-Qadima and al-Tijaria schools were also shelled. Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁷⁰ On June 9-10, attacks focused on the neighborhoods of al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Thawra, al-Tadhamun, and al-Zuhur, including at the gathering site of al-Atig mosque (see section VII sub-section on Unlawful Killings). On June 12, forces targeted al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Mansoura, and al-Tadhamun. The Ardeba mosque, another IDP gathering site, also came under attack during those days. Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁷¹ Jamal Abdallah Khamis said assaults that day reached the neighborhoods of al-Ghabat, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Mansura, al-Thawra, al-Tadhamun, al-Zuhur, Abu Zar, and Dunkey 13. Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

By the end of June, all the IDP gathering sites had been burned down, with the exception of the new site inside al-Zahra girls' boarding school, satellite imagery showed.

V. Mass Exodus: June 14

On June 14, the areas of the town held until then by Massalit armed groups and sheltering the Massalit population in central El Geneina collapsed against an ultimate wave of attacks by the RSF, Tamazuj, and militia forces, enabling these forces to establish control over the city. A mass exodus ensued, starting the morning of June 14 and spiraling after the killing of the governor, Khamis Abbakar, later that day. The RSF and allied forces targeted the crowds trying to flee the city, which were mainly civilian, but in which fighters were also present.

On the evening of June 14, a dense column, kilometers long, of civilians and fighters from majority non-Arab neighborhoods, attempted a mass exodus toward the suburb of Ardamata to the north where, people hoped, the presence of a SAF garrison would deter further attacks.¹⁷²

Proceeding extremely slowly overnight, the convoy came under attack at sunrise on June 15, when the RSF and its allies opened fire from many locations along the crowd's route. Witnesses described fighters going on a rampage, summarily executing and indiscriminately killing a vast number of civilians. The RSF forces killed and wounded people who were in vehicles, ran over civilians on foot, and shot at hundreds of people who tried to swim across the Kajja, a seasonal river that flows through the city. They chased people through side streets and in places of refuge, killing women, men, and children either as they tried to flee or execution-style.

Throughout June 15 and in the following days, the RSF and allied militias went from house to house in the neighborhoods they newly controlled, allegedly searching for men and weapons, killing and abusing Massalit people, and expelling large groups of vulnerable civilians from their homes. The forces, joined by Arab civilians, continued to pursue civilians along the 20-kilometer-long route to Chad, carrying out further mass killings, beatings, and widespread pillage. Of the 2,600 people who interviewees said they had

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interviews with Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023; Anwar, 29, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023; Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023; Fadhel, Chad, July 24, 2023; Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023; and Kareem, former civil servant, July 30, 2023.

seen being killed or dead, 547 were killed on June 14 and June 15 alone; and 283 people who interviewees saw being wounded, occurred over these two days.

Tens of thousands of people arrived in Adré, Chad, in the days following June 14, including around 1,400 with serious injuries.¹⁷³ By July 27, 179,000 new refugees had arrived in Adré, the vast majority from El Geneina.¹⁷⁴

Collapse of Massalit Defenses

June 14 marked the culmination of a week in which the RSF and allied militias carried out among the most intense wave of attacks on Massalit-held neighborhoods, witnesses said.¹⁷⁵ That day, attacking forces penetrated nine neighborhoods in the center of El Geneina, attacking the General Secretariat from the south and the southwest.¹⁷⁶ About 250 vehicles were



A video uploaded on June 14, 2023, shows a man who appears to be an Arab militia member walking through downtown El Geneina and passing by dead bodies. “There’s no one left here, not even dogs. Here they are, they’ve become speedbumps on the street. Here are the Nubas.... Here are the dirty dogs,” says the person holding the camera. © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)

¹⁷³ MSF data on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁷⁴ In early June, Chad hosted few refugees. On July 8, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that roughly 36,000 refugees had arrived in Chad since mid-June. But given delays in registration in the face of this mass influx of refugees, the actual number was already likely much greater. On July 7, UNICEF reported the presence of over 63,000 refugees in Chad; by July 27, it reported over 179,000. OCHA, “Chad Humanitarian Update June 2023,” Relief Web, July 8, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/chad-humanitarian-update-june-2023> (accessed April 23, 2024); IOM, “Chad-Sudan crisis response: Flash update 5,” Relief Web, June 3, 2023, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/chad-sudan-crisis-response-flash-update-5-3-june-2023> (accessed April 23, 2024); UNICEF, “Chad Humanitarian Flash Update No. 12,” Relief Web, July 7, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/unicef-chad-humanitarian-flash-update-no-12-refugees-7-july-2023> (accessed April 23, 2024); UNICEF, “Chad Humanitarian Flash Update No. 15,” July 28, 2023, [https://www.unicef.org/media/143601/file/Chad-Humanitarian-Flash-Update-No.15-\(Refugees-from-Sudan\)-28-July-2023.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/143601/file/Chad-Humanitarian-Flash-Update-No.15-(Refugees-from-Sudan)-28-July-2023.pdf) (accessed April 23, 2024).

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Samir, policeman who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023, and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ The neighborhoods were al-Ghabat, al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, al-Mansoura, al-Thawra, al-Tadhamun, al-Zuhur, Abu Zar, and Dunkey 13. Human Rights Watch interviews with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July

involved in the attacks, including from the RSF, allied militias, and Tamazuj, said a former policeman and fighter from a Massalit self-defense group.¹⁷⁷ After almost running out of ammunition, the Massalit forces were forced to withdraw, another fighter said.¹⁷⁸

“We suggested attacking the RSF to get ammunition, or opening the road to Chad,” said the coordinator of one of the Massalit self-defense groups. “We talked to the governor, he refused, [saying] he had an agreement with the RSF that neither side [neither the RSF nor the Massalit armed groups] would attack the other.”¹⁷⁹

Thousands of people started to flee that morning. Interviewees said the RSF and allied militias opened fire on fleeing civilians on El Geneina’s western outskirts, on and near the A5 road linking the city to Chad.¹⁸⁰

Mustafa, a civil servant, was among thousands of civilians fleeing through al-Hashab neighborhood in that direction. They were blocked by the heavy buildup of RSF and allied forces along the way.¹⁸¹ Further west, near the Central Reserve Police (CRP) headquarters, Sudanese Alliance fighters were advising civilians to turn back because of the heavy RSF presence, Mustafa said. Two other witnesses also turned back after hearing reports of shooting by the RSF and allied forces on the city’s western outskirts.¹⁸²

Latifa, a 25-year-old student, was injured by the RSF and allied militias around midday on June 14 in al-Mansoura. She said: “There were so many people in the streets [of al-Hashab area of al-Mansoura], kids, women, old people, men.... Arabs and the RSF... on the road... opened fire on us and shot me in the left foot. I saw 20 people get killed.” On her way to al-Salam while injured, she counted 200 bodies before she stopped counting, Latifa said.¹⁸³

23, 2023; Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Samir, policeman who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Haroun, Sudanese Alliance fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023, and Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023.

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023, and Kareem, former civil servant, July 22, 2023.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interviews with Mohsina, humanitarian worker, Chad, July 22, 2023, and Anwar, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁸³ Human Rights interview with Latifa, student, Chad, July 26, 2023.

Another civilian, 38-year-old Tariq, also said he saw many dead people while running past the RSF headquarters, from where he said forces were firing at civilians.¹⁸⁴

The Killing of the Governor

Khamis Abbakar, by virtue of his position as governor of West Darfur and his role as the head of the Sudanese Alliance, was the de facto civilian and military leader in majority-Massalit neighborhoods.

On June 14, Abbakar was sheltering in the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) compound—evacuated by UN staff weeks earlier—across the street from his office, which had been bombed. “His area was under siege,” said Zeina, a government official.¹⁸⁵ That day, in an interview with al-Hadath TV, Abbakar said: “Civilians now are being killed in a very indiscriminate way and in large numbers... we have a large number of injured people who haven’t found treatment.” He warned that “there [is] nowhere for [the people of El Geneina] to go,” and called on the international community to directly intervene to protect civilians “and save those who are left” from the “genocide in this area.”¹⁸⁶

Interviewees close to the governor told Human Rights Watch that Abbakar appeared to be holding out hope for negotiations.¹⁸⁷ In the afternoon, he went to the CRP headquarters on the western edges of El Geneina, reportedly to secure the CRP’s support to evacuate the wounded to Chad (see Section XIV on Government Forces’ Inability or Unwillingness to Protect).¹⁸⁸ There, he was detained by the RSF, according to one of his advisers.¹⁸⁹ A video first published on X (formerly known as Twitter) at 6:18 p.m. on June 14, the location of which was confirmed by Human Rights Watch, showed Abbakar in RSF custody at the

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Tariq, 38, daily laborer, Chad, July 24, 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ “ومقتله اعتقاله من ساعات قبل الحدث مع مقابلة في دارفور غرب والي قاله ما شاهد,” June 14, 2023, video clip, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnlT-eTgdkU> (accessed April 23, 2023).

¹⁸⁷ Aqeel said the governor told him on June 9 that he would try to obtain medication from Chad. Jamal Abdallah Khamis said he met the governor on June 10 to discuss the dire situation in the clinics, and that the Abbakar suggested that the CRP would assist in moving medication. Jamal said he told the governor that many people distrusted the CRP because of its reported involvement in attacks on June 9, alongside the RSF and its allied militias. Jamal said the governor waved off these concerns. Human Rights Watch interviews with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023, and Aqeel, human rights activist, N’Djamena, July 20, 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N’Djamena, July 20, 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023.

force's headquarters and in the presence of the RSF's West Darfur commander, Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah.¹⁹⁰

In the evening, news started to circulate that Abbakar had been killed. At 10:04 p.m., the first video appeared on a well-known pro-SAF Telegram channel showing a body that appears to be that of Abbakar lying motionless on the ground with visible wounds. Human Rights Watch discovered five different videos uploaded to Telegram and X (formerly known as Twitter) between June 14 and 15 showing what appears to be the body of the governor. In two videos, the governor's body is dressed and is surrounded by a small number of people. A second body is seen next to the governor, which Human Rights Watch was unable to identify. In two later videos posted to Telegram, Abbakar's body has been stripped to its underwear. A large crowd is surrounding the body and throwing rocks at it, and also desecrating the body using other forms of mutilation, including slowly driving over it with a white Toyota pick-up truck. Human Rights Watch was not able to determine the location of these videos.

After the conflict broke out on April 24, many civilians had found refuge in the strongholds of Massalit armed groups, around the General Secretariat and the governor's house. Abbakar's killing left his forces in disarray and civilians feeling even more vulnerable and served as the final trigger of the mass exodus of both the Massalit forces and the Massalit community from the city.

Fleeing to Ardamata

On the evening of June 14, after the governor was killed, dense crowds of people from 13 Massalit-held areas converged on the center of El Geneina around the central road near the General Secretariat and the governor's house, and in the neighborhoods of al-Ghabat, al-Jamarek, and al-Madaress.¹⁹¹

Samir, a Massalit fighter, said he heard that a meeting was held between commanders of the self-defense groups and the Sudanese Alliance, and the commander and members of

¹⁹⁰ Bilal Adam (@BilalAdam_) post to X (formerly known as Twitter), June 14, 2023, https://twitter.com/BilalAdam_/status/1669016373719097344 (accessed April 23, 2023); Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Samir, policeman who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023.

the SAF unit deployed in central El Geneina, to discuss the way forward. A majority of commanders in the meeting agreed to move their forces and their families to Ardamata, the suburb of El Geneina, seven kilometers northeast from the General Secretariat, that hosted a SAF garrison. Some attendees reportedly objected that the plan was unsafe.¹⁹²

Mousa, a lawyer, was in a house roughly 400 meters from the governor's residence. Around 6 p.m., he heard that the two tanks and three armored personnel carriers stationed nearby were soon to leave. "Whoever is willing to go, we are leaving at 8 o'clock. You should follow us," one of the soldiers said.¹⁹³

Word of the fighters' decision to move spread through the crowd, witnesses said. A vast number of civilians tagged along for fear of being targeted should they go west to Chad; people hoped the SAF garrison would provide protection.¹⁹⁴ The convoy set off from al-Jamarek and al-Mansoura shortly after sunset.¹⁹⁵

The Crowd and its Armed Escort

Proceeding overnight, the crowd stretched for kilometers.¹⁹⁶ Witnesses described extremely restricted movement in many places, at times near a standstill, due to the crowd's density. Movement was also hampered by barricades that had been erected throughout the town since April.¹⁹⁷ Hassan Zakaria Ismail, a nurse, said two armored vehicles from the SAF led the convoy, followed by six "technicals" (pickups mounted with Dushkas or heavy machine guns) from the Massalit armed groups, then three armored vehicles in the middle of the convoy, each cluster separated by crowds of civilians.¹⁹⁸ Fighters from the Sudanese Alliance were reportedly covering the back of the convoy.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Samir, policeman who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023.

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023; Anwar, 29, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023; Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview with Human Rights Watch interview with Fadhel, Chad, July 24, 2023; Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023; and Kareem, former civil servant, July 30, 2023.

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Mustafa, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Ahmad, Massalit fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023; Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Taher, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.



A depiction of the convoy to Ardamata based on descriptions from witnesses, given to an artist. © Private

“It was the whole of El Geneina. I have never seen something like this,” Mustafa said.²⁰⁰ There were hundreds of civilian vehicles, Saif, 17, recalled. “Some people carried others on their backs, [some were] on vehicles, some on donkey carts. There was a truck carrying many older people. The rest were [uninjured] civilians, mostly women and children,”²⁰¹ Jamal Abdallah Khamis, the rights monitor, said. People pushed injured people in wheelbarrows.²⁰² Civilians brought along goods—food, valuables, donkeys.²⁰³

Witnesses estimated the number of people in the crowd at anywhere from over 5,000 people to tens of thousands.²⁰⁴ “Women [were] losing their children,” Taher, a medical worker, said.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁰² Human Rights Watch interviews with Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

²⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Taher, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

²⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023; and Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Taher, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

The vast majority of people were unarmed civilians, but witnesses said there were also many people with guns— at least 1,000, according to Adnan, the Sudanese Alliance fighter, who was carrying his rifle at the time of the events.²⁰⁶ The weapons were small, “AK47s, M16, and machine guns,” said Saif. Ammunition was in dire supply and “[we] had only enough... to provide coverage for the [unarmed] civilians to pass,” recalled Idris, a retired SAF officer who had joined a Massalit self-defense group.²⁰⁷

The Convoy’s Route Through RSF-controlled Areas

Overnight the convoy moved north through neighborhoods held by the RSF and its allies, amid intense tension and sporadic abuses.

The column had to cross al-Shati, an ethnically mixed area where many Arab people lived, as well as al-Nasseem and al-Salam, two mostly Arab neighborhoods.

During the night the convoy split, with one section, led by the two armored vehicles, heading north along the parallel Ardeba road, and a second cluster of vehicles and six Dushka-mounted “technicals” remained on the A5.²⁰⁸ In the prevailing confusion, the crowd also split.²⁰⁹

There were many armed Arab forces in both uniform and civilian clothes along the A5 road, witnesses said.²¹⁰ “Some [were] up in the houses, including some snipers, and some [were] on the road,” Saif recalled.²¹¹ Along with residents, these forces also stopped people to rob and harass them, in particular between al-Nasseem, al-Shati, and El Geneina Hospital, witnesses said.²¹²

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Adnan, Chad, July 22, 2023; Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023, and Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, July 27, 2023.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Taher, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

²⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023, and Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Anwar, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Tariq, 38, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²¹² Human Rights Watch interviews with Anwar, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023; and Tariq, 38, Chad, July 27, 2023.

VI. Climax of the Campaign: June 15 Massacre and its Aftermath

Ambush and Massacre at Dawn

The killings began at dawn on June 15, in the middle of El Geneina. The conditions under which the first shots were fired remain unclear. Shooting broke out in the neighborhoods of al-Shati and al-Nasseem, on the A5 road north of El Geneina hospital, along the Kajja river.²¹³ RSF and Tamazuj forces, accompanied by militias, exchanged fire with the Massalit fighters in the convoy using assault rifles and heavy machine guns. At the same time, they also shot indiscriminately at civilians in the convoy.²¹⁴ They forced people into the river where many women and children, under fire, drowned while trying to swim across.

Before the shooting started, some members of the RSF initially appeared to be trying to screen the passage of people. Two witnesses described RSF checkpoints on the A5 road at al-Shati bridge, where forces stopped the crowd around 5.30 a.m.²¹⁵ Mousa recalled:

Armed personnel, some in RSF uniform ... said they would allow only women and children to go... We heard [them] say ‘We don’t want any man to go!’... They said they would allow the SAF tanks and the armored vehicles to pass.²¹⁶

Hisham, a former government employee, said he was further north on the A5, near the Ministry of Animal Resources, when the road was blocked from the front, the back, and the western side.²¹⁷

It appears to be at that point that the situation escalated.

²¹³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Haroun, Sudanese Alliance fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023, and Fatin, Chad, July 25, 2023.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Kareema, Chad, July 26, 2023, and Abdelhadi, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; Idris, retired SAF officer who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023; Idris identified one RSF gunman at a checkpoint as a retired SAF soldier.

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023.



A depiction of the June 15 massacre based on descriptions from witnesses, given to an artist. © Private.

Karima, 26, who was in al-Shati just north of El Geneina hospital, said that shooting started after the crowd had stopped moving.²¹⁸ Hassan Zakaria Ismail, the nurse, and Khaled, a driver, were near al-Shati graveyard when the attack started. “The six [Dushka-mounted vehicles] were too far in front of us. We had no protection,” Hassan said, “and that’s when Arabs came from al-Nasseem and Um Duwein.”²¹⁹

Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a human rights monitor, was also near the graveyard and was taken aback when shots were fired, even as he saw eight RSF personnel in the column apparently trying to separate men and women and to gather weapons. “Collect your arms, collect your arms!” he recalled hearing them say. “We were surprised that a group from the west side and the south side opened fire on us.”²²⁰

The situation suddenly turned into an all-out shootout in which assailants shot at fighters and civilians alike.

²¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Karima, Chad, July 30, 2023.

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 27, 2023.

“Everyone started running, including older people, women, and children,” said Suhaila, a 16-year-old girl who was injured when bullets hit her vehicle.²²¹ Nurse Hassan said RSF and Arab gunmen came out of places of hiding in houses and near mango trees immediately after the first shots were fired.²²² Adnan, a Sudanese Alliance fighter who was in al-Nasseem, said the forces manning checkpoints started “firing at people escaping from the area.”²²³

The Massalit fighters shot back. “Both sides were shooting. There was shooting from all over,” said Saif, who was near El Geneina hospital.²²⁴ But “of the people walking in the crowd... [who] had weapons... almost no one had bullets left. They ran out [of ammunition],” Omar recalled, and assailants “started by targeting” them, so they were killed quickly. He said the six Dushka-mounted vehicles in the convoy opened fire at assailants.²²⁵ It appears that the vehicles managed to pass following an exchange of fire.²²⁶

Amer, 66, a community leader from al-Shati, believed that it was residents of al-Nasseem who were manning the checkpoint near the market by the Ministry of Animal Resources, from which his section of the crowd was shot at:

They opened random fire on us... many of them with Dushkas... 40 people, civilians, were killed in front of me... women, men and children. And three donkeys, I saw them being killed.”²²⁷

Dalal, 26, a local aid worker, was walking in the column on al-Jamarek road with her family of nine, when they came under fire. Gunmen in civilian dress shot and killed her two brothers, Waleed, 28, and Ahmed, 30, and injured her 59-year-old mother in the right thigh and on the left buttock, she said.²²⁸

²²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Suhaila, 16, Chad, July 26, 2023.

²²² Human Rights Watch interview with Khaled, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Adnan, Sudanese Alliance fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²²⁵ Najib said 64 of his forces were killed and 160 were injured during the June 15 events. Human Rights Watch interview with Najib, Massalit fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Omar, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²²⁷ Amer later participated in the collection of the bodies. Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Dalal, local aid worker, July 24, 2023.

Though people may have been killed in crossfire, witnesses described the large-scale, methodical targeting of civilians by the RSF and allied militias. Assaultants opened fire on women and children running, shot people in vehicles at close range, and shot people they had arrested.

A group of assaultants on motorbikes, on foot, and in cars shot at close range at the car of Hassan Zakaria Ismail and Khaled, killing 38-year-old medical assistant Maki Khamis, and injuring two other men, one in the back and the other in the right knee.²²⁹ Khaled, the driver, sped away down a side street. “While I was escaping, I saw RSF vehicles running over many people,” he said. “I saw them shoot seven people, men, women, and children. I saw a woman get shot with her baby on her back and they both died.”²³⁰



A photo taken a day after the June 15, 2023 massacre, shows at least seven bodies on a street in El Geneina, Sudan. © 2023 AFP via Getty Images

²²⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Omar, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023, and Khaled, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Khaled, Chad, July 29, 2023.

Maka, 25, also a nurse, was in another vehicle with nine injured people and three medical staff, further south in the central market, when “RSF and Arabs” surrounded them:²³¹

The armed men made us get out... and started shooting ... at the car. We started to run. They shot one of the injured in front of me. Another, [who] had two broken legs, he couldn't get out of the vehicle, so he died as it burned.

RSF forces in al-Nasseem attacked the crowded van in which 40-year-old Mubina was travelling, killing around 10 to 15 people in it, including her 3-year-old grandson, who she said was shot in the side and died immediately. Mubina herself was shot in her left hand but escaped to al-Ghabat. “I still had my grandson on my back... When I reached there, I left his body on the ground.”²³²

Sixteen-year-old Suhaila was shot in the arm while she was in a car. She said assailants went from vehicle to vehicle, killing passengers:²³³

Armed forces stopped the car in front of us, shot the people inside, and then shot up the vehicle. It was a Landcruiser. I don't know how many people were inside, but [there were] no fighters, as far as I could see.

The same with the vehicle behind us: they stopped it and shot the people inside, and then they shot at it with incendiary bullets and that made it go up in flames and burn.

They came to our vehicle and asked: ‘Is this your vehicle?’ and then they started taking out some of the people [who were] in the car with us. [They] shot some [of them] and were taking others, maybe to arrest them. It was chaos, so we don't know what happened to everyone, but we were many in the car.

²³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Maka, nurse, Chad, July 28, 2023.

²³² Human Rights Watch interview with Mubina, 40, housewife, Chad, July 26, 2023.

²³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Suhaila, 16, Chad, July 26, 2023.



A video taken at the market in downtown El Geneina shows bodies scattered around the streets. © 2023 AFP

Suhaila was shot in the arm and her sister’s son was injured in the foot (see Section X on Grave Violations Against Children). As they escaped, they could see the forces shoot at their car, killing all remaining passengers.²³⁴

There was a lot of shooting near El Geneina hospital and the river, said Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, a civil society representative who founded an organization providing services to sexual violence survivors. “We tried to get out of the vehicle to safety ... [when] ... armed men in civilian clothes standing on the road opened fire.” The victims were all known to Zahra Khamis Ibrahim: a 17-year-old girl named Fatma, a 95-year-old woman, and a 28-year-old woman.²³⁵ She also recognized two of the gunmen, a local Arab shop owner and another resident of Tamma ethnicity.

When the shootout started, Dana, a 33-year-old teacher, ran toward al-Shati, near the Ministry of Animal Resources. RSF forces stopped her and her group of women:

One [man] said, ‘We can capture your governor and kill him!’ This was a threat to all of us Massalit people, since the governor was Massalit. They said, ‘If you have weapons, you need to lay them down in front of us.’ We said we didn’t have any and tried to leave. One guy, in RSF uniform, came up to another group of RSF [men] and said, ‘I need guns to shoot these

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Suhaila, 16, Chad, July 26, 2023.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023.

women.’ We were all women, but he wanted to shoot us. A guy gave him a big gun. We started running when he got the gun. He shot Hawa [a woman in the group] in the back and me in the right arm. I heard the other then cheering. One guy said, ‘He killed two! He killed two!’²³⁶

People Shot in the River

Hundreds of civilians ran toward the Kajja river, which flows roughly 250 meters east of the A5 road, only to come under fire again from the RSF and militias. Many civilians were shot and killed or drowned in the deep waters.

Jamal Abdallah Khamis, the rights monitor, saw hundreds of people jump into the river, while a group of gunmen wearing RSF uniforms, *Komplet*, and *Kadamul* roughly 200 meters away under a tree near al-Hadath market, “opened fire on the people with machine guns and rifles, including Duskhas.”²³⁷ He said:

Some people were shot before entering the water... Some were injured outside the water... Some people were already injured when they got in, and the water carried them away. Some were shot inside the water.²³⁸

From a house near the river where Adib, a lawyer, was hiding, he could see that:

There were hundreds [of people]... Those who didn’t know how to swim, the children, they sank. There was shooting into the water while [people] were in it. Even those running to the *wadi* [river] ...the janjaweed were shooting them.²³⁹

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Dana, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023.



A depiction of the river where many civilians were shot and killed or drowned in the deep waters when the RSF and militias opened fire on them on June 15. This was based on the description from a witness, given to an artist. © Private

Hisham, the former government employee, swam across the river and saw children being swept away. He helped rescue a girl of around 10, and a boy of around 11 or 12. “People were crying... for help..., and the water was so deep, it was difficult for us to rescue [people].... It was a very, very difficult experience.”²⁴⁰

Adib said shooting was mainly coming from near the hospital, but that some of the assailants were firing from Um Duwein, on the eastern bank of the river, using Dushkas and rifles.²⁴¹ Hisham said the shots came from the west, north and south, especially west of the A5, around the Ministry of Animal Resources and al-Shati graveyard.²⁴²

Yaseen, a 50-year-old farmer, was shot by a man in RSF clothing and then crossed the river with many women and children near the emergency unit building of the El Geneina hospital: “We could barely swim, and we lost all of our belongings as we crossed,” he said. Forces in RSF uniform near the hospital opened fire with rifles and Dushkas:

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023. Hisham said two of his cousins, a 16-year-old boy and a 21-year-old man, as well as his 37-year-old uncle, have been missing since that day.

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023.

[They] were shooting at us as we were swimming. I heard them shouting ‘You are *Nubas*! You should be killed!’ They opened fire on all of us, not just the men...²⁴³

Dana, the teacher, said she believed vehicles of the RSF and militias were deliberately trying to force people to the river.²⁴⁴

After crossing, civilians walking north on the eastern shore also came under heavy shooting from Um Duwein as they reached Ardamata, recalled Hisham. From their base in Ardamata, SAF soldiers shot back to protect civilians, he said.²⁴⁵

Shooting inside El Geneina in the Immediate Aftermath

After the column fell apart, civilians fled through side streets in large numbers, only to be relentlessly and repeatedly ambushed by the RSF and militias. Witnesses described them shooting at crowds in the neighborhoods of al-Burhan square, al-Imtidad, al-Kifah, al-Mansoura, al-Nahda, al-Nasr, al-Nasseem, and al-Salam, as well as near the General Secretariat of the Government, and through N’djamena road.

Ismat, 52, said she ran north, crossing the bridge located on the southern side of al-Nasr neighborhood, where she found the road blocked by forces in *Kaptani* and turbans. “They were yelling ‘Go back! Return!’ and when we didn’t turn around fast enough, they started shooting. I saw them shoot and kill at least 10 men,” she said.²⁴⁶

In al-Nasseem, there was “an ambush on every corner of the road with gunmen firing on the crowds,” said Ramzi, who was injured as he fled through an alternate road.²⁴⁷ Arab men armed with rifles and machine guns shot him and thereafter gathered him and around nine other men at a rainwater pond, he said. They tortured Ramzi and the other men, forced them to bring injured and dead people to the pond, and eventually shot at them:

²⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Yaseen, 50, farmer, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Dana, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁴⁶ Human Rights interview with Ismat, Chad, July 26, 2023.

²⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Ramzi, 43, laborer, Chad, July 25, 2023.



A depiction of civilians fleeing through side streets in large numbers, only to be relentlessly and repeatedly ambushed by the RSF and militias. Based on the description from a witness, given to an artist. © Private

There was a pool of dirty water. They threw [us] inside there. At this point, many died inside..., and they tortured [us]... There was blood in the water, it was contaminated ... When we were inside, they forced us to drink it and to keep our heads [under] the water. If you [lifted] your head, you would be beaten... with sticks... They asked for your tribe. That's the question they were asking everybody... if you said you were Massalit, you were tortured more... They would say: 'Is this your land? Is this your land?' ... When we were in the water, they opened fire on us....²⁴⁸

Except for Ramzi and one other person, the rest of the 20 people who were at the pond at this stage were killed, he said.²⁴⁹

Tariq also fled to al-Madaress, where he said RSF forces in vehicles fired at him and other people in the street, killing four on the spot. Assailants even killed four donkeys, he said. Seven men then approached Tariq's group:²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Ramzi, 43, laborer, Chad, July 25, 2023.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ramzi, 43, laborer, Chad, July 25, 2023.

²⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Tariq, 38, Chad, July 27, 2023.

They dragged us outside and beat us. One said, ‘You are *toro boro*’ Another asked, ‘What tribe are you? Are you Massalit?’ I said I had no weapons.²⁵¹

Hatim, a community leader, saw a member of the RSF approach a horse carriage carrying an injured man and an older, sick man.²⁵² The gunman “grabbed the man with the broken leg and snapped it further and the bone popped out... Then he hit the man on the head with a big stick and it looked to me like he killed him,” Hatim said.

Adnan, the Sudanese Alliance fighter, said he saw a member of the RSF kill 14 people on al-Hurriya bridge linking al-Salam and al-Nahda neighborhoods. One of six RSF members at a nearby checkpoint approached the victims, unarmed civilians carrying luggage, “and killed them from up close with his weapon... All of the 14 killed were men but two women were [also] injured,” Adnan said.²⁵³

The Search for Massalit Men and Weapons, and Looting: June 15 to June 18

The majority of Massalit fighters left El Geneina on June 15 after the massacre, said Yahya, the government adviser.²⁵⁴ But the RSF and allied militias continued searching through El Geneina for Massalit men and weapons, and carrying out killings and other abuses.

Ayman said the killing in his neighborhood of al-Salam, west of the El-Geneina market, went on from sunrise until 9 p.m. on June 15. Around 9.30 a.m., he ventured out and saw bodies in front of his house. Later, he helped collect 11 dead, most of them young men, he said. The perpetrators were “Arab youth, some of them our neighbors,” whom Ayman recognized.²⁵⁵

Assailants pursued people into houses and other places of refuge. Dalal, 26, said they brought their injured mother to a house where 12 people were already hiding. Minutes later, five fighters came in:

²⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tariq, 38, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Hatim, community leader, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Adnan, Sudanese Alliance fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ayman, university employee, Chad, July 27, 2023.

They grabbed all the young men [in our group] and bound their hands behind their backs with ropes or ties of some kind, and pushed them outside onto the ground right by the door, and shot each of them in the head. As they did it, they were saying: ‘You are Massalit!’ ‘You killed our people!’ ‘You are not Muslims!’

Hajar, 39, recalled that on the morning of June 15 in al-Mansoura, gunmen “surrounded the area [of al-Mansoura], banged on the doors of people’s homes... even... climbed over people’s walls, yelling at us to get out. They said, ‘We will kill you if you don’t get out!’ and ‘Bring the weapons and the gold!’”²⁵⁶ Karima, also in al-Mansoura, said that twice in the late morning, groups of RSF forces and men wearing *Kaptani* entered the house where she was hiding with other women, and asked for men and weapons. The second time, one of the men took her to a side room, slapped her, and raped her three times at gunpoint.²⁵⁷

Men trying to elude capture were shot, said Nasir:

I saw three guys who were wearing *abayas* and *niqab* [women’s outfits covering the face] ... to pretend to be women and escape. But Arabs who were patrolling, some in *Kaptania* with *Kadamul* and some in RSF uniforms, saw them and ripped off their *niqabs*. When they saw they were men, they shot them.²⁵⁸

Hatim, a community leader, said he hid in a hut in the Khab area for two days after the massacre, observing his surroundings with binoculars through holes in the wall.²⁵⁹ On June 17, around midday, he saw a man wearing *Kaptani* and a turban stop an unarmed man in civilian clothes, aged around 19 to 20, and shoot him in the arm. Then, a man in RSF uniform told the perpetrator to shoot the young man again. Hatim said the shooter replied, “No, I need to slit his throat because he is *toro boro* (rebel),” and then he slit the young man’s throat.

²⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Hajar, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Karima, Chad, July 30, 2023.

²⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023.

²⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hatim, community leader, Chad, July 23, 2023.

Shula was stopped on June 17 by a gunman wearing civilian clothes and a *Kadamul*. She recalled:

He said, ‘Hoy, hoy, hoy, what tribe are you?’ I replied ‘Bargo.’ Then he said, ‘If you were Massalit, we decided that we don’t want to leave any alive, not even the children.’²⁶⁰

Evicting Massalit Residents Who Remained

The RSF and militias evicted thousands of people who, starting early in the morning of June 15, had sought safety in the Sheikh Musa Islamic Complex, a large building near the market, three witnesses said.²⁶¹

Tariq, 38, was among them. The civilians sent a sheikh to the RSF “to say that no attack should happen on that building because the people living there were poor and homeless,” he recalled. Tariq said vehicles then returned with the sheikh, carrying many RSF personnel in uniform and other men in *Kaptani*, some of whom had “white” skin and spoke “strange” Arabic. The light-skinned men searched all the men in the mosque and, with the RSF forces, separated them from women and children, Tariq said. Then they beat Tariq and other younger men “for an hour... with sticks and pipes,” stealing their phones and money. Tariq said that after that, “They let us all leave and the white guys started yelling ‘You should leave for Chad!’” Tariq, like the other civilians, was forced to abandon his belongings.²⁶²

Salman was at the mosque of the complex on June 16, preparing to pray, when “RSF and Janjaweed” arrived from all directions. “They threatened us, they told us to leave this location directly [and go to] Chad ... leaving behind us all our possessions,” he said. Salman recalled a man in RSF uniform taunting him, “Go to Chad! Where is your governor? ... We killed him!”²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Shula, former government employee, Chad, July 21, 2023. Echoing this, Yahya, the government advisor, recalled hearing RSF forces in al-Shati telling local Fellata people, “We are not asking anything of you Fellatas. We don’t have a problem with you. But we are telling you not to keep any Massalits in your homes.” Human Rights Watch interview with Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023; Tariq, 38, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Tariq, 38, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

By June 18, there were 3,000 people in the mosque, including children and women from the neighborhoods of al-Jamarek and al-Mansoura, said Mohammed, who went there that day. “They were being forced to leave the area toward Chad by the RSF and militias,” he said.²⁶⁴

Abuses Against Civilians Fleeing to Chad

Witnesses described how the RSF, militias, and local Arab people attacked the tens of thousands of civilians fleeing to Chad on June 14 and in the following days.²⁶⁵ These forces pursued, ambushed, abused, and looted people—overwhelmingly Massalit—who were running for their lives on a roughly 20-kilometer trek, largely without food or water.

Scores of interviewees depicted the desperate exodus. “I walked all the way without shoes,” said Wahida, a medical worker. “You need shoes to be safe... I couldn’t run.”²⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch verified three videos uploaded to Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter) between June 14 and 17 showing large groups of people walking and, in one case, running, toward the Chad border.²⁶⁷ One of the videos, published to Facebook by Al Jazeera on June 14 and geolocated by Human Rights Watch to just west of El Geneina, shows hundreds, if not thousands, leaving the city.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023; OCHA, Chad Humanitarian Update, Relief Web, July 8, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/chad-humanitarian-update-june-2023> (accessed April 24, 2024).

²⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Wahida, medical worker, Chad, July 30, 2023.

²⁶⁷ Bakre (@bak4194) post to X (formerly known as Twitter), June 17, 2023, <https://twitter.com/bak4194/status/1669963404264480768> (accessed April 24, 2024); “فيديو بثه ناشطون يظهر عملية نزوح جماعي” June 14, 2023, video clip, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/AJA.Sudan/videos/3076062756028160> (accessed April 24, 2024); “Forcefully displacement in El-Geneina. Janjaweed militias destabilized securities situation against innocents and worst crimes of atrocities..” June 15, 2023, video clip, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/greece.greece.75/videos/1708237062948481> (accessed April 24, 2024).

²⁶⁸ “فيديو بثه ناشطون يظهر عملية نزوح جماعي لمواطنين من مدينة الجنينة بولاية غرب دارفور جراء أحداث العنف الدامية التي تشهدها المدينة منذ أيام #فيديو” June 14, 2023, video clip, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/AJA.Sudan/videos/3076062756028160> (accessed April 24, 2024).



Video uploaded to X on June 15, 2023 shows scores of people walking west of El Geneina © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)



Scores of civilians flee El Geneina to Chad, June 2023. © 2023 user via Facebook

Some witnesses said they were stopped up to 10 times in a row in the bush or at approximately 10 checkpoints controlled by RSF and Arab gunmen on the A5 road linking El Geneina to Adré.²⁶⁹

“They established so many checkpoints. So many in front of you,” recalled Salman, 64, the former senior government official. “Arab women had their own checkpoints. And children did as well. And people on motorbikes, and so on, had their checkpoints.”²⁷⁰

Some witnesses said they were questioned by RSF and militia forces at checkpoints in a manner suggesting the forces were from El Geneina and trying to intercept specific Massalit figures before they reached Chad (see Section VII sub-section on Targeting of Prominent Massalit Leaders and Local Government Officials).

Others said that at checkpoints they recognized El Geneina residents and members of the RSF from the city. Zeina, a former senior government official, said she identified an RSF resident of al-Madaress at the Adikong checkpoint.²⁷¹ “We will not allow you to carry your things to Chad,” she said an RSF member told her, before robbing her of her belongings. Samir, a fighter, said he recognized a classmate among the group of RSF forces that surrounded his group on the Jalabi mountain.²⁷²



A video shows children wave and shout insults at a crowd of people fleeing west in the direction of the border with Chad. June 2023. © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)

²⁶⁹ Human Rights interviews with Anwar, former government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023, and Ismat, Chad, July 26, 2023. By 24 June, there were 15 checkpoints on the main road, said Hisham, including 5-7 checkpoints run by militias, while the rest were run by a mix of RSF and militia forces. Human Rights Watch interview with Hisham, former government employee, Chad, July 24, 2023. Amin said there were 15 checkpoints on July 10. Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, Chad, June 3, 2023.

²⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, July 29, 2023.

²⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Samir, fighter, Chad, July 2023.



A depiction of the RSF, militias, and local Arab people pursuing, ambushing, abusing, and looting the belongings of people—overwhelmingly Massalit—who ran for their lives toward Chad in mid-June 2023. Based on the description from Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a survivor, given to an artist. © Private

Assailants subjected civilians to killings, beatings, whippings, mock executions, and other forms of ill-treatment, as well as looting and extortion. Some asked victims for information about the locations of weapons, fighters, and prominent Massalit individuals.

They asked people about their tribe, trying to identify Massalit people, and used ethnic slurs such as “*Nuba*,” “*Zurga*,” and “*Ambayat*.” Some said that Massalit people should leave the area, which was now “*Dar Arab*,” or the land of Arabs. Others said they would not let Massalit people get away.

Two fighters said the RSF and allied militias on the road summarily executed captured fighters or subjected them to other abuses.²⁷³

At checkpoints, assailants robbed Salman’s group not only of their possessions such as “mobiles, money, some mats, plastic sheets and so on,” but also “certificates, identity

²⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Gammar, child soldier, Chad, July 25, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

cards, national IDs, etc.,” Salman said. “[T]hey collected them and threw them away... for us to be refugees forever.”²⁷⁴

Massalit fighters also fled the city during this period and clashed with RSF and allied militia forces positioned on the road. Muneer said he was among a group of around 300 fighters in 7 vehicles who tried to secure the road for civilians. His group clashed repeatedly with RSF and militias on the western outskirts of El Geneina near Baba Nusa village, before eventually running out of ammunition.²⁷⁵



The MSF hospital in Adré, Chad, where 1,222 injured people arrived over 10 days in June 2023, more than 90 percent with recent bullet injuries.
© 2023 Belkis Wille/Human Rights Watch

Over the course of 10 days between June 14 and 24, 1,222 injured people arrived at the hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors Without Borders) in Adré, Chad.²⁷⁶ Over 90 percent had recent bullet injuries, including 28 children under 15, and 99 women, 62 of whom were pregnant.²⁷⁷

Witness accounts and statements suggest varied motivations among the perpetrators. Some, such as those who said, “*Nuba*, you don’t have land here! You should leave,” seemed to want to push people to Chad and to leave the city. Others who used ethnic slurs, as they shot at crowds or carried out summary executions, seem to have targeted people for killings on an ethnic basis. In some cases, the RSF and allied militias were looking for prominent Massalit figures (see Section VII sub-section on Targeting of Prominent Massalit Leaders and Local Government Officials). Finally, some appeared

²⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with a humanitarian source, N’djamena, July 20, 2023.

²⁷⁷ Other injuries were due to stabbings, beatings, and some falls. Human Rights Watch interview with staffer at MSF hospital, Chad, July 25, 2023.

motivated by a desire for revenge or for financial rewards, as assailants extorted their victims.

Ultimately large numbers of Massalit civilians, including infants and older children, women, injured and older people, were killed.

Killings and Attempted Killings

Civilians were killed on the road as the result of both indiscriminate shooting on crowds of civilians and deliberate summary killings. Men, including adolescent boys, were particular targets, though women, children, and older people were also killed in apparently large numbers. Witnesses overwhelmingly described the area separating El Geneina from Chad—the road and the bush—as littered with bodies of apparent civilians.

Mousa, a lawyer, said that at checkpoints forces would open fire on the crowd and that “some people would fall, and the rest of the group would have to stop.” He described several such incidents. In one of them, Arab gunmen shot to stop his group near the Ranga mountain on June 15 and then suddenly a man wearing *Komplet* “shot everybody in front of [me],” Mousa said.²⁷⁸

Nafisa, a medical worker who fled around June 17 and was traveling with a group of about 18 families, or 80 people, said RSF and allied forces killed three or four people from the group at every checkpoint on the road. She described how RSF men shot and killed three 15 to 16-year-old girls when “they tried to take [the girls] away from our group [and] the girls refused.” Only 30 of the group made it to Chad. “Some were shot on the way, some had injuries and couldn’t make it, some [were] weak because of lack of food,” Nafisa said.²⁷⁹

Two witnesses said they saw men from a group of around 50 RSF fighters throw two carriages of the kind drawn by horses or donkeys, each carrying one or two injured people, into a “big, deep” pit. “The family members of the wounded people were screaming not to push them in, but [the RSF] opened fire, so we all started running,” Anwar said. At another checkpoint, a car equipped with Dushkas blocked the way and opened fire on civilians,

²⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nafisa, medical worker, Chad, July 30, 2023.

killing a six-month-old baby carried by his mother. “[The mother] started crying and one of the RSF men with [a] stick said to her, ‘If you keep crying, we will kill your other baby,’” Anwar recalled.²⁸⁰

Jamal Abdallah Khamis said that the same day, he was fleeing alongside a large crowd of civilians accompanied by four Sudanese Alliance vehicles when this convoy came under attack near Shukri, an Arab settlement around 15 kilometers west of El Geneina. RSF forces on the A5 road attacked from the south, while militia members in civilian clothes and turbans attacked from the north and the west. “They opened random fire on the crowd,” killing tens of people in front of Jamal. He said the victims were all civilians and included women and children.²⁸¹

Jamal ran away. A nine-year-old boy “was running after me and trying to catch me. When he did, I fell, because I was tired too. I told him, ‘You have to run.’” The two hid behind trees, as did some others, all adult men except the 9-year-old and a 16-year-old boy. A group of eight or nine gunmen in RSF uniforms found them and gathered them in a group. Jamal described what happened then:

They started beating us, torturing us... with whips and the stocks of their rifles... [and] iron sticks. ... They lashed the [nine-year-old] boy and he was crying loudly. At that point they ordered us to lie down... facing the ground, and they beat us... That child stood up, and there was shooting. I don’t know how he was shot, but I found him dead.²⁸²

The RSF eventually let the rest of the group go.

That same day, Suhaila “saw at least 20 boys have their throats slit” at various checkpoints along the way. She was helping an injured man walk, but forces killed him and shot and injured her in the head.

²⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Anwar, former government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.



“They lashed the [nine-year-old] boy and he was crying loudly... [He] stood up, and there was shooting... I found him dead.” Based on the description from Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a survivor, given to an artist. © Private

Some witnesses described gunmen at checkpoints separating out men and taking them to unknown locations. Mousa, the lawyer, said when his group reached Ranga mountain, Arab people at a checkpoint selected “men randomly, took them aside, and then asked the [rest of the] group to go.”²⁸³

RSF forces summarily executed disarmed Massalit fighters, according to two fighters who were on the road that day.²⁸⁴ Gammar, 16, a child soldier of the Sudanese Alliance previously injured in fighting, escaped El Geneina on June 14 with a group of fighters. Armed men wearing *Kaptani* and shawls summarily executed more than 30 from his group near Shukri and the Ranga Mountain.²⁸⁵ “After [the fighters] put down their arms, they opened fire and killed them,” Gammar said. Muneer, the policemen who joined the Massalit self-defense forces, said RSF and Arab militias surrounded and disarmed his group, which had run out of ammunition, before stabbing and shooting to death 17 or 18 of them.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

²⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

²⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Gammar, child soldier, Chad, July 25, 2023.

²⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

Torture, Ill-treatment, and Looting

Witnesses reported widespread beating, whipping, and other forms of torture and ill-treatment, including mock executions, by RSF and militia forces along the way. Local Arab people also abused fleeing civilians. Assailants extorted money, gold, and possessions. Some interrogated victims.

Two hours after encountering the RSF forces who killed the nine-year-old boy, Jamal Abdallah Khamis and his group came across other gunmen, some in RSF uniform, who beat and whipped the 16-year-old boy, shot around him, and tied a rope around his neck to terrorize him. They demanded he tell them about the locations of people in hiding and of weapons and said, “Get out *Zurga*, get out *Ambayat*.” Jamal himself was later subjected to another mock execution.²⁸⁷



A depiction of RSF and militias extorting money, gold and possessions from civilians fleeing to Chad and interrogating them. Based on the description from Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a survivor, given to an artist. © Private

²⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

Hajar, 39, said that on June 15, when she was fleeing with thousands of others, men in RSF uniforms stopped her, her 15-year-old son, and a group of 8 boys he knew, all roughly the same age.²⁸⁸ The forces forced the boys to strip and lie on the ground, Hajar said. She recalled:

One man put a knife above the head of my son and told him to get up and walk over to look at a row of bodies lying on the side of the road. My son walked over, and then the guy with the knife said to him, ‘Now all you need to do is cut the throats of your friends.’ He and the other boys started yelling and saying they couldn’t do that. At that moment, a Landcruiser came, and the fighters turned to talk to the men in the car, and we all ran away.²⁸⁹

Showing a cut on his left ear, Anwar said that at each of the nine checkpoints he encountered, fleeing civilians were beaten with sticks and knives. Kawthar, 36, a local aid worker, said a man in RSF uniform and a teenager—both armed—beat her and her 62-year-old father with their guns near Baba Nusa village on June 15, causing significant bleeding on her father’s head, and breaking one of her teeth.²⁹⁰ Salman, the former senior government official, said six gunmen in civilian clothes who controlled the checkpoint by Ranga village whipped and then raped four women from his group near a pond during the night on June 16.²⁹¹

Arab villagers participated in the abuse, said Asiya, a 60-year-old woman. Many men, some in uniform, and women, stopped her group near the Arab settlement of Shukri on June 15.²⁹² The Arab women “were beating... with sticks... all the women who were fleeing ... singing and cheering as they did so... I don’t know how many times they beat me.” Meanwhile, the Arab men grabbed the men from the crowd, threw them to the ground, and beat them with sticks, Asiya said. The villagers also looted money and gold. Asiya suffered a head injury and was hospitalized for four days at Adré hospital.

²⁸⁸ Hajar said that before this encounter, men had attempted to separate her from her son, and she had resisted. Human Rights Watch interview with Hajar, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hajar, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Kawthar, local aid worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

²⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

²⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Asiya, Chad, July 27, 2023.

Ethnic Targeting

Assailants used ethnic slurs against people fleeing, said they wanted them out of Sudan, or that they would kill Massalit people.

Shula, 35, who is from the Bargo tribe, said that in mid-June, at one of the checkpoints on the road, two young men told her, “If you were Massalit, we would not let you leave. The Massalit will not come home. But you are okay because you are Bargo.”²⁹³

Mousa, the lawyer, said that on two occasions, Arab militias humiliated people from his group by forcing them to say “*Dar Arab! Dar Arab,*” or used racist language, such as “*Nubas! Allah Akbar! The area has been liberated from the Massalit, it’s great. There is no Dar Massalit. There is no Dar Andoka [land of the Massalit Sultan]!*”

Latifa, a student aged 25, said the people at the checkpoints on June 20 said to her and her group, “You are *Nuba!*” and “You are *Nawabi!*” and “*Nuba*, you don’t have land here! You should leave!” and “From now on, you don’t have land here.”²⁹⁴ Hisham, who fled El Geneina on June 24, recalled people at checkpoints saying, “We have liberated this area. We don’t want to see the owners of the land anymore! We are the owners of the land!” Hisham said that the people at checkpoints would beat men with long hair—a style favored by Massalit fighters—saying, “These are the owners of the land, and they will fight us one day.”²⁹⁵

Bodies Everywhere

Residents and survivors describe anguish over seeing large numbers of bodies on the streets of El Geneina in the aftermath of the June 15 massacre. Residents helped collect the bodies and arrange burials. Witnesses described instances of gunmen shooting at residents to prevent burials. (See Section VIII on Counting and Burying the Dead).

Many dead people were scattered near the A5 road, where the bulk of the massacre occurred. Adib, a lawyer, said that throughout June 15 he saw gunmen shoot at people trying to collect bodies near the river.²⁹⁶ At dusk, the shooting abated and he ventured out

²⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Shula, former government employee, Chad, July 21, 2023.

²⁹⁴ Human Rights interview with Latifa, student, Chad, July 26, 2023.

²⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Hisham, former civil servant, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023.

with non-Massalit neighbors, who began to move the bodies. “There was a big number of killed. It was terrible,” Adib said. He described the sight: “The dead bodies... The vehicles that people had been using... And the food: the beans, the flour that women had been carrying, had all been thrown on the road.” Adib said the 35 dead people he saw were “all civilians, including children and women ... scattered about in a very short space... along... the west of al-Shati graveyard on the main road.”²⁹⁷

Mohsina, a humanitarian worker, found the body of a woman who had been shot in the stomach near the Imam al-Kazem gathering point and then the bodies of a boy and girl, aged around 8 or 9. “I checked under the cloth covering them because I wanted to know if they were my kids,” she said. Continuing to al-Zahra girls’ boarding school gathering point, she counted 18 dead men, women, and children, she said. Later in al-Mansoura, she said some forces stopped her and said, “You are Massalit! You are a *Kumurud* mother! You are looking for your rebel husband!”²⁹⁸

The smell of death “was all around the area” separating al-Zuhur from al-Thawra on June 17, said Shula, who recalled seeing 20 bodies.

Many interviewees said they saw many dead bodies on the road to Chad, attesting to a large scale of killings.²⁹⁹ “I fainted at some point because of the horror of all the bodies,” said 39-year-old Hajar.³⁰⁰

Sarah, a humanitarian aid worker, said that she saw an open pit with an estimated 200 bodies between the villages of Baba Nusa and Adikong on June 14.³⁰¹ Salman described seeing many corpses on a side road north of a petrol station in Ranga village, and along the main road between Ranga and Shukri village. One man had been killed driving his horse cart, Salman said, roughly 500 meters from a checkpoint, and “there were also many dead bodies around [the cart]. It seems they had all been aboard.”

²⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023.

²⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohsina, humanitarian worker, Chad, July 22, 2023.

²⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023; Adnan, Sudanese Alliance fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023; Hamid, Chad, July 23, 2023; Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; Hatim, community leader, Chad, July 23, 2023; Amina, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Taher, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023; and Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Hajar, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Sarah, humanitarian aid worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

Two witnesses said they saw dead men with their hands tied behind their backs.³⁰² In the bed of the Kajja river—by then dry—along the border between Sudan and Chad near the Beida and Atia villages, there were many dead bodies decomposing, said Taher, a medical assistant, who shared photos he took. He believed these were people who had been carried by the waters after having drowned or been shot in the stampede in El Geneina in the early hours of June 15.³⁰³

³⁰² Human Rights Watch interviews with Hamid, Chad, July 23, 2023, and Salman, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

³⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Taher, medical assistant, Chad, July 28, 2023.

VII. Abuses Committed by RSF Forces and Allied Militias (April 24-June 14)

The mass killings that began on June 14 marked the culmination of a campaign of abuses that started on April 24, when the RSF and allied militias began their offensives on majority-Massalit neighborhoods. Throughout the seven weeks leading to June 14, these forces committed widespread killings, sexual violence, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment. They targeted Massalit leaders, did not spare children from serious abuses including unlawful killings, and sought to deprive Massalit and non-Arab civilians of their means to continue to live in their communities.

Unlawful Killings and Shootings

The RSF and allied militias committed widespread killings of civilians, shooting civilians in the streets or in places of refuge, sometimes execution-style. The vast majority of the victims appeared to have been men, but women, adolescent boys, younger children, and older people were not spared.

RSF and allied militias shot people who sheltered in their homes or in other buildings, including mosques and gathering points of IDPs. They fired from inside buildings and checkpoints, while patrolling the streets or attacking neighborhoods, on foot and in vehicles. They targeted those fetching water and those trying to tend to the injured and the dead. Many of the victims said they had no idea why they were targeted in the streets, since they were in civilian clothes and were not carrying weapons. The RSF and allied militias also shot indiscriminately into crowds.

In addition to these deliberating killings, civilians were also killed in crossfire in the context of fighting between the RSF and allied militia on the one hand, and Massalit armed groups on the other.

Prior to the June 15 killings, one of the most lethal incidents during the first seven weeks occurred on May 12, when dozens of gunmen in civilian dress riding RSF vehicles entered al-Atig mosque in al-Thawra neighborhood and killed and injured dozens of civilians.

The Scale of Targeted Civilian Killings in El Geneina

The number of people killed during the violence in El Geneina may never be fully known, but by all accounts, the scale of the targeted killings of the predominantly Massalit civilian population in the city reached astonishing levels.

The overwhelming majority of the people Human Rights Watch interviewed said they saw people being killed or injured, or that they saw dead bodies, both in El Geneina and as they fled the city.

Each interviewee gave Human Rights Watch an estimate of the number of dead men, women, children or unidentified people they had seen in El Geneina between April 24 and June 27.³⁰⁴ While it is impossible to accurately account for duplication in these estimates, Human Rights Watch has cumulated and rounded down to the nearest tenth place the numbers of dead and injured these witnesses described seeing. These estimates add up to over 2,600 dead people that interviewees saw who appeared to have been killed and included at least 600 identified as men and 140 as women. Interviewees also spoke of witnessing around 210 children and 20 older people killed. Interviewees identified an approximately 460 others as injured, including around 130 men, 120 women, and 50 children.³⁰⁵

Doctors in clinics also provided shocking figures. Sadaqa and Ingaz makeshift clinics together reported 4,215 dead and 9,275 injured at their clinics between April 24 and June 14, although whether all these people died or were injured as a direct result of

³⁰⁴ These totals were derived from both non-Arab and Arab interviewees sharing accounts of death or injury of victims in interviews. Where possible, victims' names were collected and checked against other testimonies. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine the proportion of those killed who were fighters. Included in the final total are testimonies with firsthand accounts of witnessing the dead or injured. Secondhand accounts were included when interviewees were speaking of their family members or when their testimony could be corroborated, for example when discussing the killing of human rights defenders and lawyers. To prevent double counting, aggregate numbers from clinics, those participating in burials, and those participating in fighting were not included in the total and are reported separately.

³⁰⁵ Ethnicity is not disaggregated from the total due to a lack of consistent data. While in some cases witnesses knew the ethnicity of victims, they were more often unable to specify. In some cases, victims were targeted on suspicion of being Massalit, although their ethnicity was not confirmed. In other cases, non-Massalit people were targeted for being presumed Massalit or for protecting Massalit people.

the violence is not clear.³⁰⁶ A doctor who oversaw four makeshift clinics in al-Jamarek, including Ingaz, reported taking in 3,201 injured people between April 24 and June 10.³⁰⁷

As of July 23, 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that 2,357 injured Sudanese refugees had arrived in eastern Chad, 78 percent of them with gunshot wounds, since the beginning of the conflict.³⁰⁸

In August and September 2023, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) conducted three cross-sectional surveys of refugee populations in camps in Eastern Chad. The surveys covered retrospective mortality in each camp, comparing the pre- and post-crisis time periods in each camp. Violent deaths reported within each camp were disproportionately from people originating from El Geneina, according to the descriptive data. Between the three camps, there were 167 violent deaths reported by households from El Geneina representing 6,918 people or 2.4 percent of the people surveyed from the city. Violence appears to have been targeted toward men. There was a 23-fold increase in the male mortality rate in the camp mainly hosting refugees from El Geneina between January 2023 and August, while the mortality of women increased 11-fold.³⁰⁹ Gunshot wounds were the main cause of violent deaths.

The survey found that killings and injuries by gunfire occurred through the period of fighting. Many people were killed throughout late April, May, and early June, with killings peaking on June 15 (see Section VI on Climax of the Campaign: June 15 Massacre and its Aftermath).

³⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Amir, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023, and an El Geneina student, July 29, 2023. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine the proportion of those killed who were fighters.

³⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine the proportion of those killed who were fighters.

³⁰⁸ “Analysis of the Humanitarian and Health Crisis in Eastern Chad Linked to the Influx of Refugees and Returnees Following the Armed Conflict in Sudan, N’Djamena, Chad,” Relief Web, July 27, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/chad/analysis-humanitarian-and-health-crisis-eastern-chad-linked-influx-refugees-and-returnees-following-armed-conflict-sudan-ndjamena-chad-july-27-2023-presentation> (accessed April 24, 2024).

³⁰⁹ MSF, “Cross-sectional retrospective mortality, nutrition and measles vaccination coverage surveys among Sudanese refugees and Chadian returnees in Toumtouma, Ourang and Arkoum camps, Ouaddaï province, Chad August -September 2023,” on file with Human Rights Watch.

Extrajudicial and Summary Executions

The RSF and allied militias actively sought out, attacked, and killed Massalit men, including adolescent boys. They also killed women and younger children.

RSF and allied militia would storm into homes, demanding that occupants hand over men or weapons, before summarily executing many if not all of those sheltering inside, residents said. Kawthar, 36, a local aid worker, said 13 gunmen entered her home in al-Madaress in the afternoon of April 27 and executed 5 male relatives and a neighbor. She recounted the following exchange:³¹⁰

- 'Are you Massalit? ...
- Yes. ...
- Why are you staying here? ...
- This is our home. ...
- Where are the men?'

When Kawthar did not answer, one of the men went outside, found her brother in the yard under a tree, and shot him.³¹¹

Kawthar's 42-year-old brother died on the spot. The men then searched the house, Kawthar said. They found, shot, and killed her uncle, in his 40s; three male cousins, aged 17, 31, and 45; and a neighbor, 25. All were in civilian clothing and none had weapons, she said. She said she recognized one of the armed men, an Arab man around the age of 30, from al-Juweili neighborhood.³¹²

The same day, Khalil, 35, said a group of armed men, one in RSF trousers and the rest in civilian dress, shot four men at his neighbor's house, killing one and injuring the other three with bullet wounds to the head, thigh, leg, and hand. Another man had been injured with a knife wound to the head.³¹³ The gunmen told Khalil they suspected the neighbor of harboring weapons.

³¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Kawthar, local aid worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

³¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Kawthar, local aid worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

³¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Kawthar, local aid worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

³¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, Chad, July 29, 2023.

In other cases, armed men entered homes, executed people, and then looted their homes. This is what happened in early May to the neighbors of Khamisa, 24, who lived in al-Salam.³¹⁴ Four armed men in civilian dress stormed a home where three women and a man, all Bargo, were staying. “After a while, we heard some shooting,” Khamisa recalled. “An hour later or so, we went to check on our neighbors... All of them were dead.” The bodies were lying in the yard, she said.

Al-Atig Mosque Killings

In May, the RSF and allied militias attacked al-Atig mosque, which stands along the A5 road in al-Thawra, and killed many civilians. Human Rights Watch interviewed four people who were at the mosque as it was attacked, or in the immediate aftermath, and who witnessed what was one of the most lethal attacks prior to the June 14-15 exodus and massacre.³¹⁵

Ashraf, 52, said that on the morning of what he thought was May 12, when attacks spilled into al-Thawra, he was with about 20 family members in the compound of the mosque, where his family had found refuge with at least 200 other people.³¹⁶ Armed men in both civilian clothes and RSF uniform entered the neighborhood on foot and in RSF vehicles, and 50 of them entered the mosque.³¹⁷ They started shooting into the crowd, killing eight people, Ashraf said.³¹⁸

People ran for the exits, but the gunmen kept shooting. A bullet grazed Ashraf’s ear. He escaped the compound only to encounter more assailants outside.³¹⁹ One stole Ashraf’s two phones, while others killed four men fleeing the mosque.

³¹⁴ Human Rights interview with Khamisa, Chad, June 4, 2023.

³¹⁵ Witnesses were unable to remember the exact date of the attack, in the context of so many that occurred throughout that month.

³¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ashraf, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Ashraf, Chad, July 24, 2023, and Hussein, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Hussein, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ashraf, Chad, July 24, 2023.

Ashraf said the fighters then separated the people at the mosque into four groups: women and children on one side, adult men in a corner of the yard, older men in a third group, and those injured in the shooting (including Ashraf) in a fourth. Some children got scared and tried to run away, and Ashraf then heard gunshots. Later, he helped carry the bodies of six children.

Ashraf said the fighters forced the four groups to sit on the ground and hold their arms up, and then kicked some people, demanding they hand over weapons. He recalled the fighters saying things such as: “This land doesn’t belong to you, Massalit,” and, “Why are you staying here? We want you to leave!,” and “If you don’t leave, we will kill you.” Amna, 25, said the gunmen beat the women, calling them “*Nuba*,” “Massalit,” and “slaves,” and saying, “We will kill all of you!”³²⁰

More fighters arrived as others left, Ashraf said. Ashraf and Anwar said some of the fighters’ Arabic accents sounded foreign.

The assailants detained the people at the mosque until 5 or 6 p.m., when they left, Ashraf and Amna said. Anwar and a few other neighbors then went to the mosque. “We found 5 people who were dead and 19 men and women who were wounded... They all had bullet wounds to the head, stomach, or back,” he said.

Ashraf said that, in total, 18 people were killed, while 32 were wounded in the attack, including 3 children, a 4-year-old, a 7-year-old, and a 10-year-old.

Killings and Shootings in the Streets and at Checkpoints

The RSF and allied militias opened fire on civilians in the streets and at checkpoints.

At checkpoints, these forces would sometimes shoot civilians at close range. Ahmad, 41, a Massalit fighter, was hiding in an apartment in al-Jamarek, from where he saw an RSF man kill a woman and her two daughters who passed a checkpoint on June 14.³²¹

³²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Amna, Chad, July 30, 2023.

³²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ahmad, Massalit fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023.

Eman, 39, a government employee and senior advisor to the governor of El Geneina, was walking by an RSF checkpoint in al-Salam in early June when she saw the fighters stop a young man in his late teens.³²² “They asked if he was Massalit. He said ‘No,’ then they said ‘Go,’ and he started running. Then [one of the men] at the checkpoint, who wore an RSF uniform... [and] a *Kadamul* shot him.” She did not know if he survived.

Zakaria, 27, said a group of armed men in civilian dress riding Toyota vehicles opened fire on him and his friends on the streets of al-Madaress on a Friday in May. The gunmen killed four of Zakaria’s friends: Naji, 16, Mohammed, 22, Musbah, 28, and Alfadhel, 31.³²³ A bullet hit Zakaria through the right knee. A fifth friend was injured as well. “We fell to the ground and smeared blood on ourselves from our friends’ bodies and lay still to make it look like we were dead ... [for] 30 minutes and didn’t move until they were long gone,” he said.³²⁴ Zakaria said he and his friends were unarmed and in civilian dress at the time of the attack.

Witnesses also described gunmen, some described as “snipers,” methodically firing in the streets at people who were clearly identifiable as civilians not engaging in hostilities.

Maka said her sister was shot in the stomach in early June while walking between al-Madaress and al-Majliss neighborhoods at about 4 p.m.³²⁵ Ismat, 52, was walking through al-Jabal neighborhood at about 7 a.m. on June 12, when someone shot her in the left side of the neck and again through her right side.³²⁶ She raised her arm to protect her face and was shot a third time in the right upper arm.

Adil, 36, a teacher, said armed men shot and killed Hinda (about 22), a woman from his neighborhood, while she was trying to collect the body of one of eight people, including two children, who had been killed in al-Thawra on April 25.³²⁷

³²² Human Rights Watch interview with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Zakaria, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Zakaria, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Maka, nurse, Chad, July 28, 2023.

³²⁶ Human Rights interview with Ismat, Chad, July 26, 2023.

³²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

Some civil volunteers described gunmen shooting at fellow volunteers working to carry the dead and injured (see Section VIII on Counting and Burying the Dead). Sharif, 37, a government employee, was one such volunteer.³²⁸ On May 20, he and others were working in the street in al-Madaress when one of the volunteers, Mansour Adam Abbakar, was shot in the leg, just as he was lifting a victim.

On April 27 Aqeel and four other men were trying to rescue injured neighbors in al-Madaress, when they saw gunmen in civilian dress approaching. Aqeel said his group started running and the armed men opened fire, injuring one of his friends through the right thigh. “I carried him on my back all the way to the clinic,” Aqeel said.³²⁹

Killings and Injuries from the Use of Explosive Weapons

Massalit, Arab, and other non-Arab residents of El Geneina across most neighborhoods described numerous attacks in which explosive weapons such as mortar projectiles and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) were used in densely populated civilian areas, therefore increasing the likelihood of civilian killings and injuries as the result of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. By all accounts, explosive weapons were used in attacks on civilian areas from the start of hostilities. Some interviewees said they experienced so many attacks that, though they remembered the specifics of certain incidents, they could not remember the dates, because of the frequency with which such attacks occurred.

While the use of explosive weapons is not a violation of international humanitarian law, the intentional direction of an attack against civilians with any lethal weapon is prohibited and a war crime, as are intentionally indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. Explosive weapons when used in populated areas heighten concerns of unlawful indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. Attacks involving explosive weapons include attacks that use mortars, rockets, and artillery. Interviewees here generally referred to explosive munitions as “*danna(t)*,” the term commonly used in Sudan to refer to mortars, although it is sometimes used to refer to other types of explosive weapons, including artillery.

³²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Sharif, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N’Djamena, July 20, 2023.

Many civilians were killed by explosive weapons used by the RSF in attacks targeting majority-Massalit neighborhoods and sites hosting displaced Massalit families. For example, witnesses described particularly intense shelling during the offensives in late May and early June.

Hassan Zakaria Ismail, the nurse, also owned two private clinics in the city, and said that on May 21, every single member of at least three families was killed in attacks that used explosive weapons.³³⁰ Aqeel, an activist, said that on June 6, al-Madaress neighborhood was hit repeatedly with mortar shells, which he believed were from the RSF and which he said killed 17 women and children.³³¹ Human Rights Watch was unable to establish those responsible for these attacks.

Eight residents found fragments after attacks that took place in populated residential areas. They described the shapes of the remnants of munitions they saw, describing a cylindrical projectile with fins at the back end, consistent with that of mortar projectiles that the RSF and the SAF are known to possess.³³² Mortars are difficult to target with accuracy and cause blast and fragmentation damage, making them prone to causing indiscriminate harm to civilians and civilian objects when used in populated areas.

Most witnesses presumed that the RSF was behind the attacks in which explosive weapons were used. The RSF was equipped with rockets, mortars, and RPGs, the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan reported in January 2024.³³³ However three interviewees said that Massalit fighters also possessed RPGs, claims corroborated by the UN Panel of Experts (see Section XI on Abuses against Arab Community Members).³³⁴ In addition, at least three said the SAF fired

³³⁰ Arbat, 41, an employee of a medical institution, said it was his home that was hit, though he was not there at the time. Human Rights Watch interviews with Arbat, employee of a medical institution, Chad, July 31, 2023, and Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

³³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

³³² Human Rights Watch interviews with Ahmad, Massalit fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023; Anwar, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; Hajar, Chad, July 24, 2023; Mahmoud, aged 16, Chad, July 24, 2023; Latifa, student, Chad, July 26, 2023; Khater, Chad, July 27, 2023; and an El Geneina student, July 29, 2023.

³³³ UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan, January 15, 2024,” S/AC.47/2024/PE/OC.1, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2087153/N2303752.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2024).

³³⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023, and Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023, and telephone interview with Kazem, April 29, 2023. UN Panel of Experts, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan.”

explosive weapons from its base in Ardamata into the city, following ongoing attacks (see Section XIV on Government Forces' Inability or Unwillingness to Protect).³³⁵

Khater, 44, said an explosive weapon hit the house where he was sheltering in al-Jamarek around May 9, and that it killed four civilian men who were sheltering with him. The house was about 100 meters from the governor's office, which at the time hosted the governor's forces.³³⁶ The next day, another munition hit a location near the National Registration office, about 200 meters from the governor's office, Khater said. He said he saw the bodies of four women killed in the attack.³³⁷

Four days later, another explosive weapon detonated about 60 meters from the governor's office, killing eight civilians, Khater said. He assisted in collecting the bodies. He said he did not hear any outgoing fire from the governor's forces at the time of the attacks.

Al-Zahra Girls' Boarding School

Many civilians were killed in repeated attacks using explosive weapons on the IDP gathering site at al-Zahra girls' boarding school (see Section IV on Escalating Attacks on Massalit Displacement Sites and Neighborhoods: April 24 to June 14). A monitor shared photos he said he took at al-Zahra girl's boarding school showing remnants of 60 and 120mm mortars and RPG-7 warheads.³³⁸ Fighters were present a few hundred meters away – if not closer – from late April until mid-June, however the high density of civilians in the area at the time means the use of weapons in these attacks, which could not be accurately directed at military objects, renders them apparently indiscriminate.

³³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview with a journalist from El Geneina, December 6, 2023.

³³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Khater, Chad, July 27, 2023.

³³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Arbat, employee of a medical institution, Chad, July 31, 2023.

³³⁸ Human Rights Watch text message correspondence with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, January 18, 2024.



Remnants of 60 and 120 mm mortars and RPG-7 warheads, found in al-Zahra girls' boarding school, an IDP gathering site, in June 2023. © 2023 Roots for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations

Al-Zahra girls' boarding school became one of the largest IDP gathering sites in the city in late April, hosting thousands of people fleeing attacks.³³⁹ The site is located around 350 meters from both the government's General Secretariat, where SAF and Sudanese Alliance armored vehicles were deployed, and the governor's house. The area was controlled by Massalit armed groups until the second week of June.³⁴⁰ One journalist from El Geneina said the Sudanese Alliance stored military equipment inside the school.³⁴¹

Satellite imagery shows the first tents appearing in the courtyard of the school in late April. Their numbers increase progressively throughout May and the first half of June until tents cover most of the available space. After mid-June, the number of tents starts to decrease, and none are visible on images from early August.

³³⁹ Media reports suggested that the school also hosted a makeshift clinic to treat wounded people. "230 dead and 350 injured, victims of the El Geneina violence," *Dabanga*, May 02, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/ar/all-news/article/230-قتيلو-350-جريحاً-ضحايا-عنف-الجنينة>. (accessed April 24, 2024).

Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Salam, Chad, June 1, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Samir, policeman who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023. Samir said the closest forces were east of the governor's house, and in Ghabat al-Hashab, west of al-Madaress neighborhood, as well as west of the General Secretariat of the Government.

³⁴¹ Human Rights Watch phone interview with a journalist from El Geneina, December 7, 2023.

The boarding school was shelled repeatedly between late April and June, according to witnesses and monitors. Witnesses said dozens were killed and injured, mostly children and women (see Section VII sub-section on Unlawful Killings).³⁴² A local rights monitor and a Massalit fighter said the RSF was responsible for the shelling, and that its forces shelled from the RSF base west of the city.³⁴³ One witness described shelling consistent with mortar attacks and said it came from the west.³⁴⁴

Amna, a 33-year-old woman, said she spent 40 days at the school and during that time saw many people killed and injured—mostly children and women—as a result of the bombardment. On April 25, she was in the yard when shelling killed three women, two children, and a man, she said.³⁴⁵ Salam, who spent over a month at the site with his family, described two days of heavy shelling on April 27-28, which he said killed at least 35, including at least seven women whom he helped bury.³⁴⁶ His wife Lamya said she saw her grandmother killed, along with two girls, in one of the shelling incidents on al-Zahra girls' boarding school in late April.³⁴⁷

Attacks with explosive weapons on the civilian area where al-Zahra girls' boarding school was located continued in May and June. Injured people with “large blast wounds” came to the Ingaz clinic from al-Zahra girls' boarding school on May 14, said Aqeel, a volunteer there.³⁴⁸ Rania, a 30-year-old woman, said she witnessed two explosive weapon attacks inside the compound of al-Zahra girls' boarding school on May 21, which left 42 people dead, including her sister-in-law: “The people who were killed were men, women, and little kids... Some of the bodies we couldn't find. They were in small pieces.”³⁴⁹

³⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Amna, Chad, May 31, 2023; with Salam, Chad, June 1, 2023.

³⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023; and Samir, policeman who joined a Massalit self-defense group, Chad, July 27, 2023.

³⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Rania, Chad, June 1, 2023.

³⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Amna, Chad, May 31, 2023.

³⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Salam, Chad, June 1, 2023.

³⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Lamya, Chad, June 1, 2023.

³⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

³⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Muna, teacher, Chad, June 1, 2023.

A senior doctor operating in the makeshift clinics recalled an uptick in women and children coming into the clinic in the first weeks of June. The doctor said most had been injured at gathering points around al-Jamarek, in particular al-Zahra girls' boarding school, and that more than 40 percent of the victims were women and children.³⁵⁰ On June 11, the clinic received 105 casualties, all of them children and women from al-Zahra girls' boarding school, he said.³⁵¹

Fatin, a 40-year-old woman sheltering at the school, saw her 6-year-old son Adam and her 14-year old daughter Makboula get injured in shelling at the school on June 13, in an incident which killed 9 and injured many.³⁵² A monitor said that on June 14 he helped bury 25 people, including his uncle, who had been killed in shelling at al-Zahra girls' boarding school that day.³⁵³

Targeted Attacks on Prominent Community Members

RSF and allied militias appear to have targeted prominent Massalit community members. Human Rights Watch interviewed 24 human rights activists, lawyers, government officials, civil servants, intellectuals, and community leaders, who described how they and other prominent Massalit figures were targeted, explicitly or apparently, for their role and work. The attackers carried out extrajudicial killings, unlawful detention, ill-treatment and torture, and sexual violence against many viewed to be prominent Massalits. The homes of these prominent figures were sometimes looted and burned, though they may also have been targeted as a result of their apparent wealth. Most figures were Massalit, but some people of other ethnic identities were also singled out and, in some cases, accused of being pro-Massalit.

Survivors and witnesses recounted how assailants, both militias and RSF, often asked for them by name, seeking their whereabouts.

³⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023.

³⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023.

³⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Fatin, Chad, July 25, 2023.

³⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.

Several sources said that assailants appeared to be following one or more “hit lists.” One such list included seven of the most prominent Massalit traditional leaders, including the Sultan of the Massalit, a prominent religious leader, and figures with the high tribal rank of *Fursha*. An individual who said he was on the list, heard that it circulated on WhatsApp.³⁵⁴ Some interviewees said captors interrogated them with clear knowledge of their personal backgrounds.³⁵⁵ Two interviewees also reported that RSF and militia forces at checkpoints on the road to Chad were looking by name for human rights activists and prominent Massalit people.

Targeting of Prominent Massalit Leaders and Local Government Officials

Prominent political, administrative, and intellectual figures from the Massalit community appear to have been targeted in a seemingly coordinated manner. These included the Sultan of the Massalit, Saad Bahar El Din, and his family members; West Darfur government figures; employees of government institutions; and intellectuals. In at least two cases, this occurred after the victims were denounced by Arab colleagues.

Human Rights Watch interviewed five prominent individuals who were arrested during the seven-week campaign despite what they said were their best efforts to evade detention (see also Section VII on Unlawful Detentions, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment). All said they were explicitly questioned about their work during their detention.

Ibrahim, 36, a former local official, said a group of armed men, some in RSF uniforms, detained him at his home on April 28.³⁵⁶ He was taken to a school in Um Duwein, where his captors interrogated him, including about his work to support accountability efforts for the victims of attacks on the Krinding camp for internally displaced persons in 2019 (see Section I on Background).

Zeina, a former government official, said she was pursued by RSF and militia forces in early May. “There was a very heavy attack on the city. Arabs, Janjaweed jumped into the house

³⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with (name withheld), July 2023.

³⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Azra, May 23, 2023; and interview with Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, N'Djamena, August 1, 2023.

³⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, June 8, 2023.

where I was [in al-Salam]. They had a list and they said, ‘We are looking for [Zeina], the [official],’” she said. The men did not recognize her and so left.

Then, on May 19, two RSF personnel recognized Zeina in al-Zariba neighborhood, she said. They arrested her and took her to the local police station, where she saw four RSF vehicles and many armed men, mostly in RSF uniforms and some in civilian clothes.³⁵⁷ Her captors bound her legs and, seeking to know her identity, “started beating me with their hands on my face to scare me into confessing.” Zeina said her captors killed one man and a boy in front of her in an effort to make her admit her identity (see Section VII sub-section on Unlawful Detentions, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment). She recalled them saying, “Massalit, you killed us! The governor is killing us! You will be our slaves.” Zeina was released later in the night, she said.³⁵⁸

Amer, 66, a prominent community leader from al-Shati, said assailants attacked his house on three separate occasions.³⁵⁹ The first time, on April 24, he was out looking for water, but his wife was at home. The men asked her where her husband was, and she replied that she did not know. They then demanded Amer’s car keys and when his wife refused to hand them over, they beat her with sticks and then looted the family’s possessions and damaged the car. The gunmen threatened to burn down the home, but an Arab neighbor intervened, Amer’s wife told him. During the second attack three days later, the men found Amer’s adult son and threatened him, saying, “We’ll arrest this son, the father will come.” On the third attack, in May, assailants set fire to his house. Amer said the first attack was by Arab militiamen from Um Duwein, some of whom he and his relatives knew, while the other two were by a group that included neighbors.

Bahar El Din, the Sultan of the Massalit, told Human Rights Watch that assailants targeted him, his family, and local leaders. “We are leaders,” he said, “If you eliminate leaders, you win. Arabs and the RSF were searching for me in my own house and other houses, saying they will kill me. But they did not find me.”³⁶⁰ A relative said that a group of Arab and RSF men came to the Sultan’s family’s home mid-June and, when they did not find him, killed

³⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

³⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Jibril, N’djamena, July 28, 2023.

three of his guards. The Sultan's brother was also killed, in circumstances Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm.

Hussein, an activist known for being close to the Sultan, said gunmen also came to his house and threatened to kill his father, saying: “[Hussein] is very close to the leaders including the Sultan, so we want him to lead us to these leaders!”³⁶¹

Targeting of Human Rights Defenders and Lawyers

Human rights defenders were also targeted, possibly because of their perceived prominence in the community and their role in documenting abuses by the RSF and militias.

For years, lawyers in El Geneina have been instrumental in documenting RSF and Arab militia crimes against displaced non-Arab communities, and in advocating for accountability. Some lawyers and human rights defenders had already been threatened prior to the outbreak of fighting in El Geneina.³⁶²

Interviewees said the targeting of these activists ramped up with the onset of the conflict. Mousa, a lawyer, said a close RSF contact warned him on April 23—the eve of the fighting—that attacks on the city by Arab groups were imminent, and advised him to leave his house. The contact told Mousa that “lawyers, community leaders, and activists from the Massalit community will mainly be targeted.”³⁶³

On April 28, the family of Tamer, a human rights defender, informed him that a group of Arab gunmen had come to their house that day asking for Tamer by name.³⁶⁴ When they couldn't find him, the men left without further explanation, Tamer said.

Adib, a 57-year-old lawyer who provided legal aid and served on a committee for the victims of the 2019 attack on Krinding camp, said he and other committee members began

³⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hussein, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023. See, “Violence in Darfur,” Human Rights Watch Submission, November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/violence-west-darfur>.

³⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023.

receiving phone threats on April 24. “They [anonymous callers] called us and threatened us, as [members of the] committee defending the victims.”³⁶⁵

Adib said four lawyers, including one active on human rights issues but not a member of the committee, and at least one witness to the 2019 attacks, were killed during the attacks between late April and June.³⁶⁶ Amin, another lawyer also representing the victims of Krinding, said that one of them, Khamis Arbab Ishaq, “a close colleague ... was killed on May 16.”³⁶⁷

In June, the Darfur Bar Association, a group of Darfuri human rights lawyers, confirmed the killing of the four lawyers.³⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch was not able to corroborate whether these lawyers were targeted and killed as a result of their work.

Besides lawyers, other human rights defenders were also subjected to threats and attacks. While in hiding in El Geneina in May, Azra, a human rights activist, said in a telephone interview with Human Rights Watch:

Armed men from the RSF and Arabs went to a relative’s house and asked about my whereabouts. So I keep moving from house to house, hiding. A friend from the Rizeigat [the Arab tribe from which RSF and militias predominantly mobilize in West Darfur] also told me that the RSF and Arab [militias] have a ‘kill list’ for activists, monitors, and Massalit leaders and that my name is on it. The situation is very bad and there are no safe routes available to Chad or even within Darfur to Nyala or El Fasher.... If I had any chance to leave El Geneina, I would, because I am targeted.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023.

³⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023. The lawyers were Tareq Hassan Al Malik, Khamis Arbab, As Sadig Mohammad Ahmad Haroun, and a fourth who was not member of the commission, named Mohammed Ahmad Kodi.

³⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

³⁶⁸ “DBA: Four lawyers slain in West Darfur ‘deliberately targeted’,” *Dabanga*, June 21, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/dba-four-lawyers-slain-in-west-darfur-deliberately-targeted> (accessed April 23, 2024).

³⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Azra, Chad, May 23, 2023.

Nura, a 28-year-old journalist and human rights activist, was abducted and raped by four men on May 12, including one in RSF uniform, who referred to her activism during the vicious sexual assault. (See section VII sub-section on Rape).

Prominent individuals were tracked down on the route to Chad. Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a human rights lawyer, faced questioning as he fled in a crowd to Adré after the June 15 massacre (see Section V sub-section on Collapse of Massalit Defenses).³⁷⁰ A group of armed men, some in RSF uniform and some in plainclothes, fired around the hole in which Jamal was hiding and told him to come out.³⁷¹

They asked me ‘where is Sheikh Youssouf [a religious and community leader] and where is Idris Janja [a Sudanese Alliance commander]?’ They also asked: ‘Where are your lawyers?’ I told them that I knew [of] both of them, but not where they were and that I didn’t know the lawyers or where they are. They did not know I was a lawyer.³⁷²

They threatened Jamal, saying, “Unless you tell us [about] the people who used to have meetings with the governor—your lawyers, who they are... if you don’t give us this information, we will slaughter you.” Someone from the RSF came and said, “let’s take this person to Kurti [village] checkpoint. We have people from El Geneina there, so they will know [this man], since he lives in El Geneina.”³⁷³

Jamal was then tortured with a mock execution: his captors asked him to lie with his head in the direction of Mecca and, with a boot to his head and knife to his throat, told him to repeat the *shahada* prayer.³⁷⁴

Executive members of El Juzur, a human rights monitoring organization, told Human Rights Watch that besides Jamal, six other members were harassed, tortured, or detained on their

³⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

journeys to Adré. It also documented eight cases of sexual violence perpetrated against activists, including the rapes of five of its members.³⁷⁵

Mousa, a lawyer, said that someone confronted him, recognizing him as a lawyer from El Geneina, at a checkpoint near Jalabi, close to Adikong, which marks the border with Chad.³⁷⁶

Amin, a lawyer and human rights monitor who is Zaghawa—and therefore believed he faced less of a threat on the basis of his ethnicity than his Massalit colleagues—returned to El Geneina in July and realized that he was nevertheless still being targeted, apparently for his work as a lawyer.³⁷⁷ When he arrived in his neighborhood, a relative told him not to spend the night there, explaining that, in his absence, people the relative described as Janjaweed and RSF had come to the neighborhood looking for him, referring to him as “the lawyer [Amin].”³⁷⁸

Human Rights Watch was unable to verify other allegations that the offices of lawyers and legal aid organizations were targeted for their work or as part of broader abuses, including one attack on the El Juzur organization in which an 18-year-old staffer was killed.³⁷⁹

Prominent members of the Massalit community, including lawyers, activists, and former government officials, many of whom had been targeted before fleeing El Geneina, said they continued to feel unsafe even once in Chad, including in Adré and in other areas near the Chad-Sudan border, where they believed they could easily be identified by possible informants.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with executive members of El Juzur, Chad, July 30, 2023.

³⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023;

Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

³⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Youssouf Mohammed, July 30, 2023.

Rape

Human Rights Watch interviewed nine women and a 15-year-old girl from El Geneina who were survivors of rape committed by RSF or Arab militias between April and late June.³⁸¹ Four out of the nine survivors, including the girl, had been raped by multiple men, in one case by up to five.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed four women who had witnessed rape or its immediate aftermath, as well as five service providers, including medical workers, who had supported survivors of sexual violence in El Geneina.

Based on survivors' experiences, incidents they witnessed, and information shared with service providers that included detailed information about where the incidents occurred, Human Rights Watch heard about the cases of 78 survivors who had been raped between April 24 and June 26, 2023, in the city or while fleeing to Chad. Human Rights Watch detailed more findings on sexual violence in El Geneina in an August 2023 report.³⁸² Human Rights Watch documented additional incidents of sexual violence during the violence in Ardamata in November (see Section XII on New Wave of Attacks in the Last Remaining Refuge for Massalit – Ardamata).

However, the full extent of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by the RSF and allied militias during the attacks on El Geneina since late April 2023 is unknown. Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, a civil society representative who founded an organization providing services to sexual violence survivors noted that, as has often been the case in conflict-related rape and other sexual violence in Sudan, concerns about being stigmatized lead many women and girls not to report their attacks, which in turn means the number of survivors is most likely far greater than the number of women and girls who have sought medical services.³⁸³

The survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed all said that attackers referred to their ethnic identity and used ethnic slurs about the Massalit or more generally, non-Arabs. One

³⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, "Darfur: Rapid Support Forces, Allied Militias Rape Dozens," August 17, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/17/darfur-rapid-support-forces-allied-militias-rape-dozens>.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023.

woman said she convinced a group of armed men who wanted to rape her 15-year-old cousin that the cousin was from a prominent Arab family in the neighborhood and that they would be punished if they raped her. The men then left.³⁸⁴

Survivors said that, in any given incident, between one and six armed assailants would rape the victim.

Most groups of assailants included men wearing full or partial RSF uniforms and men in civilian clothes. In many cases, they arrived in RSF-marked vehicles. In four cases, the assailants appear to have specifically targeted certain women with rape, because of their Massalit identity, and, in some instances, because they were known activists. One woman recognized her assailant as an Arab civilian resident of El Geneina.³⁸⁵

Nusra, 28, said eight armed men, two in RSF uniform and six in civilian clothes, entered her family's home in al-Tadhamun on June 8, saying they were looking for men and weapons.³⁸⁶ About 20 people, relatives and neighbors, were sheltering in the house at the time. Nusra said the attackers beat the six men in the house with sticks and plastic pipes. Then, one assailant demanded that everyone hand over their cell phones. The civilians said they had none, but one of the men found Nusra's phone in her bedroom and ordered her to come into the room and show him where she was hiding another phone. She said:

He searched my breasts and down there, but I did not have another phone. He said, 'You have to sacrifice yourself, or we will shoot your brothers....' I said, 'No, kill me and let my brothers and family live, let them go.' I said I would sacrifice my life, but he said, 'We don't kill women.' Then he said I would have to lie down.

Nusra screamed to get her mother's attention and as her mother came running, one of the men shot and wounded her mother in the leg. Another shot narrowly missed Nusra's aunt, who was also trying to protect her. The man then raped Nusra in her bedroom with a gun to her head.

³⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

³⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Iqbal, teacher, Chad, July 29, 2023.

³⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Nusra, Chad, July 21, 2023.

Nura, a 28-year-old journalist and human rights activist who had been posting videos about abuses against the Massalit population in El Geneina, said that on May 12, four men, one of them wearing an RSF uniform jacket, abducted her as she was leaving her home.³⁸⁷ The men blindfolded her and drove her “somewhere outside the city” and put her in a big yard which was surrounded by a wall. There, a woman with a baby, who was also being detained, told Nura that she had been raped by the men who had abducted Nura. Nura said that it became clear the men knew who she was:

[One man] said, ‘Who paid you to be active to say those things online? You are Massalit, you know nothing, you shouldn’t stay in El Geneina.’ Others told me to leave the city and said, ‘You are a slave.’ Then one said, ‘We should rape the *Nuba* women until they give birth to our babies.’ And then two of them raped me. I lost consciousness and woke up again to find myself outside my house at 5 a.m. the next day.

She fled the city later that day.

Only one adult survivor interviewed had received some emergency post-rape care in El Geneina.³⁸⁸ During the peak of the violence there, the RSF and allied militias looted, burned, and severely damaged medical facilities (see Section VII sub-section on Attacks on Medical Clinics) and offices of nongovernmental organizations that provide emotional and psychological care services for survivors of sexual violence. The shutdown of the communication network in El Geneina in mid-May also hampered survivors’ ability to access service providers.

On August 2, following a meeting between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Abdel Raheem Dagalo, Hemedti’s brother and RSF deputy leader, the RSF issued a statement that “assured the RSF’s full cooperation with the UN in investigating any allegations of human rights violations.”³⁸⁹ The

³⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Nura, Chad, July 30, 2023.

³⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nusra, Chad, July 21, 2023.

³⁸⁹ United Nations, “SUDAN: UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict engages with parties to address sexual violence” United Nations press release, August 1, 2023, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/sudan-un-special-representative-on-sexual-violence-in-conflict-engages-with-parties-to-address-sexual-violence/> (accessed April 23, 2024); Rapid Support Forces (@RSFSudan) post to X (formerly known as Twitter), August 2, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1686831688989474816?s=20> (accessed October 16, 2023).

RSF has not publicized any information about any punishment or disciplinary measures taken against its forces in rape cases.

Other Torture, Ill Treatment, Beatings and Stabbings

Rapid Support Forces and allied militias subjected civilians to beatings, whippings, and other types of torture and ill-treatment. These occurred mostly in detention or while people attempted to flee the city on June 15 (see Section VI. on Climax of the Campaign: June 15 and its Aftermath).

In addition to witnessing people being tortured or ill-treated, many interviewees had themselves been abused, often showing researchers the scarring on their bodies where they had been shot, cut, or beaten. Eight interviewees said they were tortured while in RSF detention. All those who were detained said the interrogators tried to extract information and confessions from them. Incidents in which RSF, Arab militias, and even civilians ill-treated people were often accompanied by other serious abuses, including arbitrary detention, sexual violence, and/or looting of property.³⁹⁰

Iqbal, 29, a teacher, said a group of armed men came into her home in al-Jabal early in the conflict, while she was alone with her three children, one of whom she was carrying on her back.³⁹¹ She recognized two of the gunmen as brothers—Arab herders whose father was killed during fighting in 2021. One of them told her, “Because our father was killed, we don’t want any Black people to stay in Sudan.” She said one man, wielding a plastic pipe and a gun, told her to remove her clothes. When she refused, he started beating her all over. He then told her she had to leave the city either for Ardamata or Chad, threatening: “I will burn your house down, don’t return!... If you come back, I will shoot.” Iqbal said he kept beating her as she begged him to give her time to put on her shoes and leave. Her hands started bleeding. During the interview Iqbal had a bandage on her upper left arm, and there were visible scars all over her arms, back, and legs.

³⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023. His wife was beaten during the search for him and subsequent looting of the house. Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, Chad, June 8, 2023. His mother and brother were beaten when they were looking for him after his release from detention.

³⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Iqbal, teacher, Chad, July 29, 2023.

Rubab, a teacher who sheltered in various neighborhoods throughout the conflict, returned home multiple times to try to pick up her belongings.³⁹² One day, two armed men in civilian dress entered the house, which by then had been partially burned, and found the Sudanese Alliance fatigues of her brother-in-law, as well as the police uniform of another relative. The two strangers started beating her head and legs with big sticks, saying, “This is the house of a *Kumurud*, and you are a *Kumurud*’s wife,” before they finally let her go. The beating left a long scar on her leg and a visible wound on her head.

Attacks on Medical Clinics

In at least three instances, the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias attacked clinics, patients, and medical staff, deliberately killing staff and injuring people.

On May 14, with heavy attacks underway in al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, and al-Mansoura, RSF forces attacked a private clinic in al-Mansoura run by a doctor called Mohammed Adam.³⁹³ Jamal Abdallah Khamis watched as the attack unfolded, having been alerted by his colleague Modathir, a fellow rights monitor, who was injured and inside the clinic at the time. Jamal entered shortly after the RSF left. He found 12 dead people, including Modathir, and 5 injured people, all patients and medical staff.

Jamal described how the attackers had used explosive weapons at the clinic’s entrance, before shooting people inside the compound and clinic:

I found someone who was dead right in front of the gate ... a medical worker. Three dead bodies were near the main gate inside the compound, all men. One had bullet wounds in the chest and the other in the head. Inside the compound, I found a medical assistant who had been shot in the head.

I [also] found three injured people in one room, [including] Mohammed Adam, the owner of the clinic, [who was] shot in the leg. There was an old woman lying under the table. She was injured on her mouth and [in her] arm. My colleague Modathir was lying in the corner ... already dead.

³⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

³⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.



Jamal Abdallah Khamis, a human rights monitor, said 12 people were killed in a RSF attack on the Mohammed Adam clinic. Based on the description from Jamal Abdallah Khamis, given to an artist. © Private

There is one room with a pharmacy. When I went inside, I found dead bodies. [The assailants] had thrown medicine on them, all of them. They threw medicine on the dead bodies.³⁹⁴

Jamal was devastated to see how the attackers treated Dr. Adam Zakaria, a well-respected Massalit doctor who worked there: “They shot many bullets into his body and completely destroyed it, so it was so difficult for us to carry him while he was dead.” Another doctor had “smeared blood of the injured people on his body to pretend he was dead.”

A month later, on June 14, the Ingaz and Sadaqa makeshift clinics, which had been treating injured people in the neighborhoods controlled by Massalit armed groups, came under attack and were shelled, even as hundreds of newly injured people continued to stream in. The Sadaqa clinic had relocated its operating theater to the former UNICEF compound in May, and on June 14 also hosted Governor Abbakar. Hassan Zakaria Ismail, the owner of the two clinics and himself a nurse, said they were damaged in attacks that day, forcing those staff and patients who could, to leave.³⁹⁵ Many of the patients and staff who

³⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

³⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

evacuated then found themselves in the Ardamata convoy that came under attack early on June 15. Many of them were killed.

After closing his two clinics and moving patients to the former compound of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Hassan said he and colleagues went to the Central Reserve Police (CRP) base in al-Ghabat to ask for protection. On the way, the RSF blocked the road and attacked them.³⁹⁶

Hassan then called for volunteers to help again move some of the 206 patients receiving treatment in both clinics:

We put 86 injured into a big truck, and some others went into the private vehicles of volunteers, if their families didn't come to get them.... We called the ... movement [the Sudanese Alliance forces of Khamis Abbakar] and asked [them] to transport [the patients] to Ardamata. But they never came to get them....³⁹⁷

The truck took the road to Ardamata, and, following the attack on the large convoy, disappeared. According to Hassan, none of the 86 injured people made it to Chad.³⁹⁸ Three people who were at the Sadaqa clinic said some patients were left behind.³⁹⁹ Jamal Abdallah Khamis recalled going to the Ingaz clinic in the afternoon and found four injured people.⁴⁰⁰ In total, 22 injured people remained at both clinics, in addition to many bodies.⁴⁰¹

People brought more injured individuals to Sadaqa after the evacuations. Ali was among the injured, having been shot in the leg on June 14. He said all the other patients were men, except for one woman who had been injured by mortar.⁴⁰² The next day, around 7

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Amir, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023. He worked at the Sadaqa clinic and said that medical staff and most patients evacuated the clinics on that day. Human Rights Watch interviews with Ali, Chad, July 29, 2023, and Hassan Zakaria Ismail, nurse, Chad, July 29, 2023.

⁴⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with Ali, Chad, July 29, 2023.

a.m., “a group of RSF fighters in uniform came and ordered the women who were taking care of us to get out,” Ali said. The fighters demanded bullets and weapons. He recalled:

We said we don’t have [weapons or bullets]. They said, ‘Your governor gave you weapons and bullets, bring them!’ And then they started shooting at us and killed everyone except me and the woman. They shot me in the right arm, and I slumped over, pretending I was dead. They saw that the woman was still alive, but left her alone.

Another armed group of 7 men in uniform came into the clinic at 5 p.m. One saw that I was alive and came up to me and smashed his hand on my broken leg. I said, ‘Please stop! Just kill me instead!’ They said, ‘We won’t kill you! We want to torture you, *Nuba!* We got rid of most of your family, and no one is here to care for you.’⁴⁰³

Two days later, on the morning of June 17, Rubab, a teacher, entered the Sadaqa clinic searching for any injured, in need of help, pretending to be a looter among “many Arab women” who were there to loot. She found a heavy RSF presence in and around the compound and, “...bodies in the hospital from the last attack ... maybe 26 people lying [there].... ... The RSF were inside the hospital, kicking the bodies... No one could bury them.”⁴⁰⁴

Destruction of Massalit and Other Non-Arab Property and Livelihoods

The actions of the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias and, on occasion civilians, deprived the predominantly Massalit community of El Geneina of shelter, sources of livelihoods, food, and water. The forces looted Massalit homes and businesses, including shops, often burning them down, during their seven-week campaign. They looted and burned the central market and attacked the city’s aid infrastructure, including the health system. Finally, they also impeded civilians’ access to food and water, including by shooting at people who went to collect water. The assailants’ actions not only denied the communities the ability to remain in El Geneina, but also undermined their prospects to return one day.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

Human Rights Watch satellite imagery analysis found that arson was the main cause of destruction in majority-Massalit neighborhoods, particularly in the first seven weeks of the conflict. The pillage, arson, and destruction began from the onset of the fighting and continued long afterward, all but erasing Massalit neighborhoods from the map after the bulk of the community fled in mid-June (see Section IX on Dismantling and Destruction of Neighborhoods).

Food and Water

Interviewees described being attacked and facing other significant obstacles in their efforts to access basic necessities, notably water, food and healthcare, during the seven weeks of attacks.

El Geneina lost its electricity and water supply on April 24. It is unclear how that happened and, if it was deliberate, who was responsible. Interviewees said they saw water stations and water pumps that were not functioning because of the lack of fuel, lack of electricity, or looting and deliberate destruction.⁴⁰⁵

The impact on the civilian population was enormous. Homes lost access to running water. Many put their lives at risk, facing gunfire when they left home to search for necessities. Ibrahim, a 36-year-old former local official, said that soon after April 24, the RSF and allied militias took over the main water station in Dunkey 13 to use as a military base and looted the fuel that helped run the station.⁴⁰⁶ Two interviewees said they believed that either damage or looting of the solar panels from the station had further impeded its functioning.⁴⁰⁷ Ibrahim said RSF and allied forces also took over four of the city's private water points and damaged the pumps at the other three. He and four other people said they saw gunmen in the trees and in tall buildings next to each of the water points.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Jamal Abdallah Khamis, the human rights monitor, said that during a gap in the fighting from April 27 until May 11, he went to two water stations (in al-Jabal blocks 5 and 16) and found they had been burned. Mansour, also a monitor, said he saw solar panels had been looted at another water station, in al-Jamarek, around April 26-27. Human Rights Watch interviews with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023; Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023; Jamal Abdallah Khamis, lawyer and human rights defender, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023, and Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023; Karim, human rights activist, Chad, July 23, 2023; Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Sharif, Chad, July 24, 2023.



Burned millet in the compound of the Ministry of Urban Planning, a gathering site for displaced people in El Geneina. © May 1, 2023, Roots for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations

Satellite imagery reviewed by Human Rights Watch shows that the solar panels of the Disa Water Station began to be removed from April 30. The next available image from May 17 shows that they have all been removed.

As a direct result of the RSF and their allies' widespread looting and burning of shops, many Massalit families had nowhere to buy food from the very first days of the fighting. Interviewees said that after the destruction of the central market, they could only find food at a few locations, including the Ardeba market between al-Salam and al-Shati neighborhoods. Getting there was a risky journey, exposing civilians to fighting or isolated shooters (see Section VII sub-section on Unlawful Killings).⁴⁰⁹ People said they survived for days on staples they had stored up, such as flour, sorghum, and beans.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Amani, Chad, June 4, 2023; Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023; Amina, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Ismat, Chad, July 26, 2023.

⁴¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Lamya, Chad, June 1, 2023, and Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

“It was a really critical situation,” said Jalal, 20, describing the daily reality for his family and many others. “We had to stay under the bed all the time. Even ... drinking water or preparing any food was a challenge.... The shortage of water was a big issue.... We had to stand in long queues for a long time. At the end, maybe you would get water, or maybe not. It was difficult, complicated ... and very dangerous.”⁴¹¹

Some residents were shot, and some killed, when fetching water from wells and water pumps, or on the streets while carrying water. Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain if they had been targeted because they were fetching water or for other reasons.

Rukhaya, a 23-year-old student, described how RSF forces opened fire on her group of six women at a water point in the former compound of the World Food Programme. RSF forces guarding the pump allowed her group to fetch water at first, she said. But then another group of RSF fighters approached in an RSF vehicle:

They started talking with their colleagues: ‘Why are you allowing those *Nubas* to fetch water? You must leave them to die of thirst!’ From there, some of us ran away. I was in the middle of that group. They opened random fire on us—very heavy shooting.

Rukhaya was injured in the right thigh and left knee. The other women helped her escape.

Haram, 33, who lived in al-Salam, said her sister was shot in the leg and killed in late April on a trip to get water. There was no heavy fighting at the time.⁴¹² Haram had seen one of her neighbors being shot dead days earlier, while they were trying to get water at a time of heavy fighting. Ibtisam similarly said she was shot in the hand around 20 meters from a water point while carrying 2 jerrycans of water.⁴¹³

Two witnesses described carrying bodies of people who had been killed apparently while fetching water. Ibrahim, the former government official, said that in late April he went to the Kajja river to recover the bodies of his friend Youssef and other people who he heard

⁴¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, Chad, June 4, 2023.

⁴¹² Human Rights interview with Haram, Chad, June 4, 2023.

⁴¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibtisam, Chad, July 26, 2023.

had been killed while fetching water at a pump that day.⁴¹⁴ When Ibrahim and his group approached, they came under fire from what Ibrahim believed was a “sniper,” forcing them to retreat. He and his group returned at night and collected the bodies of Youssef, two other men, and a woman, who all bore bullet injuries. “The woman had a water bucket.... There was also a water tank that people pull behind a donkey cart,” Ibrahim said. Amer, a community leader, said he similarly helped carry the body of a woman named Naima, who had been shot in the head on June 13 by a waterpoint near El Geneina University.⁴¹⁵

Some families decided it was too dangerous to leave their homes to fetch water or food. Anwar said that his family survived for 50 days off rainwater, beans, and millet.⁴¹⁶ Amer, from al-Shati, said that for two weeks of fighting, he had no access to fresh water, as residents were too worried that RSF forces would shoot civilians at water points.⁴¹⁷ At some point, Amani and her eight children had to survive for two days on 1.5 liters of water.⁴¹⁸

Arab resident Bilqis, 45, highlighted the challenge that some Arab families also faced in accessing food and water. She said her family struggled as they had to spend a lot of money to buy small bottles of water, groceries, and medication.⁴¹⁹ However, in contrast with interviewees from majority-Massalit neighborhoods, other Arab residents said they had access to water points in their areas.⁴²⁰

Health Care

The fighting and violence severely restricted access to health care, especially in majority-Massalit neighborhoods, as patients could only access makeshift clinics such as Ingaz. Many injured people died from preventable deaths.

El Geneina Teaching Hospital, a key healthcare provider especially for Massalit and non-Arab groups, was ransacked on April 26, Tamer, a witness, said. MSF reported that the

⁴¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, Chad, June 8, 2023.

⁴¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Anwar, former government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Amani, Chad, June 4, 2023.

⁴¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Bilqis, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁴²⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Nadia, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Naila, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; and Aziza, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

hospital, the pharmacy, the x-ray facilities, and the blood bank had been looted and that the pediatric department had also been affected by the looting.⁴²¹ The attack led to the closure of the hospital, which only reopened in October.⁴²²

After going to the El Geneina Teaching Hospital, Tamer then went to al-Rahma [clinic] but could not enter because Arab militiamen were looting it.⁴²³

As fighting and attacks picked up again around May 12, Save the Children reported that “three primary healthcare facilities for IDPs, also supported by the international non-governmental organization Save the Children, [had been] looted and emptied of supplies.”⁴²⁴

The makeshift clinics that emerged to treat people in majority-Massalit neighborhoods struggled with supplies. Providing food for patients and staff was also a challenge. By early June, the clinics had run out of medical supplies.⁴²⁵ “On June 9, the medications in our clinic were totally finished, and oxygen [used, for instance, in] surgery had run out. Many of the injured died because we couldn’t treat people or do the surgeries [they] needed,” Aqeel, 33, human rights activist, said.⁴²⁶

In some cases, people were directly prevented from accessing health facilities or receiving care because of their ethnicity.⁴²⁷ Two interviewees witnessed non-Arabs with potentially life-threatening injuries being turned away at the makeshift clinic in al-Nuqba school in the Imtidad neighborhood. Eman, 39, said she saw RSF forces blocking the entrance of the

⁴²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023. MSF, “El Geneina Teaching Hospital, West Darfur: 5 Key Points on the Recent Violence and Humanitarian needs,” May 14, 2023, <https://www.msf-me.org/media-centre/news-and-stories/el-geneina-teaching-hospital-west-darfur-5-key-points-recent-violence> (accessed November 7, 2023).

⁴²² Human Rights Watch interview with Abbas, Tleha village, May 18, 2023. Survivors of previous attacks in El Geneina in 2021 told Human Rights Watch that access to hospitals during or after incidents of violence was also linked to ethnicity: Massalit and other non-Arab groups accessed certain hospitals such as El Geneina Teaching Hospital, while Arabs generally accessed private clinics such as al-Naseem clinic. MSF, “El Geneina Teaching Hospital, West Darfur: 5 Key Points on the Recent Violence and Humanitarian needs,” May 14, 2023, <https://www.msf-me.org/media-centre/news-and-stories/el-geneina-teaching-hospital-west-darfur-5-key-points-recent-violence> (accessed November 7, 2023).

⁴²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023.

⁴²⁴ Save the Children, “Sudan: Armed Groups Occupying Health Facilities, Looting, Cutting off Lifeline for Country’s Children as Numbers in Need Surge,” May 17, 2023, <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/sudan-armed-groups-occupying-health-facilities-looting-cutting-lifeline-country-s-children> (accessed November 7, 2023).

⁴²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N’Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁴²⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023, and Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023.

clinic in early June, telling the family of a man with a bullet wound to his stomach, “No Black people will get medicine here.”⁴²⁸ Nasir, 52, said he tried to take a 12-year-old boy who had been shot in the legs to the same clinic, also in early June, only to be blocked by an armed Arab man Nasir recognized, who said, “This clinic is for Arabs, not for Black people.”⁴²⁹ The boy did not receive proper treatment until he eventually made it to Chad. Human Rights Watch also interviewed a woman who saw a 12-year-old Arab boy dying after being denied medical care in a makeshift clinic in majority-Massalit al-Jamarek (see Section X on Grave Violations Against Children).

Looting and Burning of Homes, the Central Market, and Shops

Homes

The RSF and allied militias pillaged and deliberately burned down people’s homes using benzine and apparent tracer bullets.⁴³⁰ Civilians sometimes joined in the looting.⁴³¹ Assailants used these scorched-earth tactics in areas of El Geneina that had a high proportion of Massalit residents and some of which had been held by Massalit fighters. Satellite imagery reviewed by Human Rights Watch shows they left other parts of the town largely intact.

Most of El Geneina residents whom Human Rights Watch interviewed shared details of looting of homes. In some cases, it was clear the perpetrators targeted the owners of the houses on an ethnic basis. In other cases, opportunistic factors appeared to have played a role: fighters looted empty houses and targeted those that showed signs of wealth.

Haram, 33, said six armed Arab men in civilian dress came into her home in al-Salam in late April:

First, they knocked on the door. When nobody opened... they just shot at it and... entered. They put the guns to our faces and asked, ‘What is your tribe, are you Arab or Massalit?’ We told them that we are Bargo... They stole money, gold, four phones, the television, speakers, and the car. They

⁴²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁴³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Kawthar, local aid worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁴³¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023, and Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

tried to take the refrigerator, but left it when they saw it was too heavy. Our car tire was flat. They threatened my brother, demanding that he fill the tire with air. They took it [the car] and left.⁴³²

Najwa, 25, was at her neighbor's home in al-Imtidad in the first month of the conflict when RSF forces shot the door and broke in, joined by Arabs from the neighborhood:⁴³³

Because she [the neighbor] is Massalit, they asked her, 'Where do you get all this nice stuff?' Because she is Massalit, they took everything.... They took the television, fridge, washing machine, rugs, sofa, chairs, the beds, tables....

The looters carried the loot in a large truck, Najwa said.⁴³⁴ Others whose homes were robbed said the RSF and allied militias used trucks, cars, motorbikes, horses, and donkeys to haul away the loot.

Many who fled attacks and later returned found that their valuables, furniture, and other property were gone. Iqbal said her home had been so thoroughly ransacked, that "everything had been taken, even my mattress."⁴³⁵

The RSF and allied militias often burned down buildings, mainly houses, often after stealing their contents.

On April 24, armed men came to the home of Dalal in al-Jabal and demanded that her family leave, threatening to kill her brother if they refused. After the gunmen stole the family's car, Dalal and her family fled on foot. They returned the next day to find their house had been looted and burned.

Rubab, the teacher, visited her home after fleeing the area in late April, only to find it had been partially burned down. Inside, she said she "found some Arab men and women

⁴³² Human Rights interview with Haram, Chad, June 4, 2023.

⁴³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023.

⁴³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023.

⁴³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Iqbal, teacher, Chad, July 29, 2023.

looting, one had some petrol and a match. So, I pretended it wasn't my house and that I was a looter. I grabbed some of my things. One woman asked: 'Did you find anything?' I said yes. She asked, 'Good things?' I said yes."⁴³⁶

Bilqis, 45, said that on April 24, armed Arab men in plainclothes riding Toyota Landcruisers went door to door in her neighborhood, saying they were looking for men and weapons.⁴³⁷ She described how more than 15 "Arab men" broke into her house:

One of them told me, 'If you want to protect your safety and your children, give us the keys to the car.' ... Then they asked about weapons. One of them searched the room and found my 16-year-old son [who] ... is tall.... He put the gun to his head....The man said to me, 'You are hiding a soldier? We will kill him!' I begged him not to and told them to take everything. They took everything—all the money, the jewelry, the car—and then they left.

She said that some armed Arabs even looted an Arab home in her area.

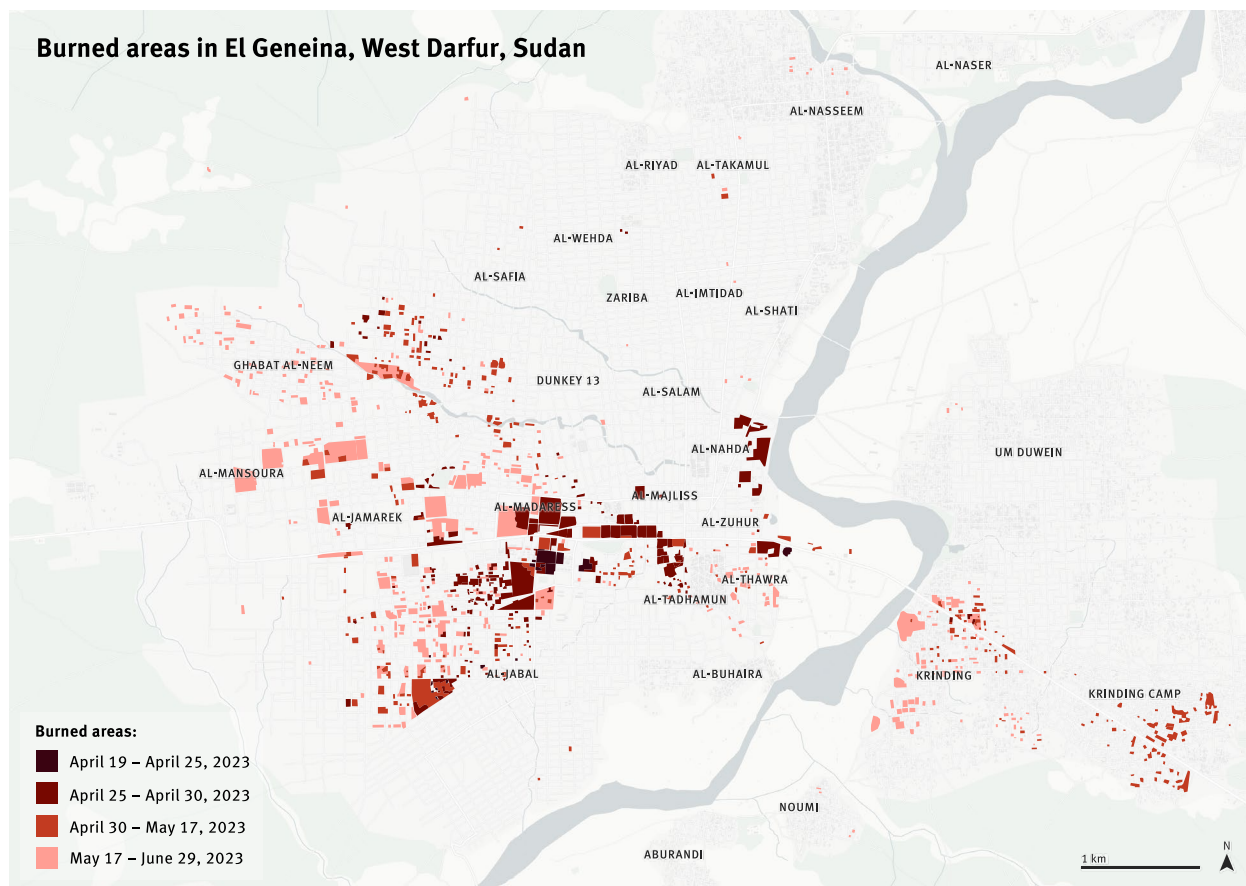
Some people were shot and killed during lootings of homes. For instance, 20-year-old Jalal said armed men on May 28 shot and killed his Bargo neighbor, Mohammed Abdallah, 27, in his home in al-Salam after he protested their demand to hand over gold and his car keys.⁴³⁸

Satellite imagery shows how, at the onset of the conflict, the assailants primarily burned down the town's IDP camps and gathering sites (see Section IV on Escalating Attacks on Massalit Displacement Sites and Neighborhoods: April 24 to June 14) and some residential areas in western al-Jabal. From mid-May, as fighting was taking place, the destruction expanded to residential areas located in the western and southern parts of the city. Satellite imagery recorded on May 17 shows additional burned houses west of the Dunkey 13 water treatment plant, as well as in the western part of al-Jabal. In the first two weeks of June, destruction by fire spread around different neighborhoods such as al- Jabal, al-Jamarek, Krinding, al-Tadhamun, and al-Thawra, according to satellite imagery and fire detection data.

⁴³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Bilqis, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁴³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Jalal, Chad, June 4, 2023.



Map of the burned areas from April 19 to June 29, 2023 in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan. Analysis and graphics © Human Rights Watch

Central Market and Shops

The central market in al-Nahda had been the main commercial hub for West Darfur and the border areas of eastern Chad, boasting shops and traders from different communities—chiefly from non-Arab groups—as well as from Chad and other countries.

Many interviewees saw armed men looting private shops and El Geneina’s central market and described seeing much of the market reduced to ashes from around April 27 onward. In effect, the looters robbed the community not only of a key source of income but also of food and other essential supplies.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023.

On April 27, at about 9:30 a.m., Ibrahim, who owned a fabric store in the market, saw a group of about 20 armed men, some in RSF uniforms, loot at least 8 shops, loading the goods onto four-wheel drive vehicles, horses, and *tuktuks*.⁴⁴⁰ The looters shot two of Ibrahim's cousins, both traders in the market. "When they were done," Ibrahim said, "they set shops on fire including ours."⁴⁴¹ According to Aqeel, the forces continued looting the market through the next day.⁴⁴²

Eman, 39, the senior advisor to Abbakar, said she saw seven men in RSF uniforms, including some with fair skin (see Section III sub-section on Other Militias and Alleged Foreign Fighters) loot bags of sugar from her brother's stall in the market and carry the bags away to three RSF vehicles.⁴⁴³

Elsewhere, several interviewees also said forces looted their shops, which were often located by their homes.⁴⁴⁴ Abdullah, 21, said four men in RSF uniforms looted his family shop on April 24 and then broke into his adjoining house, where they shot Abdullah in the leg as he tried to escape. He showed researchers a long scar on his lower right calf.⁴⁴⁵

Satellite imagery confirms the destruction of El Geneina central market as of April 30. Human Rights Watch also verified and geolocated two videos posted to TikTok and Facebook on April 29 and 30, which show the aftermath of the burning of the market.⁴⁴⁶ The videos show burned and destroyed market stalls and produce strewn across the ground.

⁴⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, Chad, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, Chad, June 8, 2023. On the same day, Adil said he saw a crowd of armed men looting the central market. Human Rights Watch interview with Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

⁴⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁴⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023, and Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdullah, nurse, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁴⁶ Abdal Kahihamatemh (@abdalkahihamatemh) post to TikTok, April 29, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@abdalkanihamatemh/video/7227407473924148486> (accessed April 23, 2024); Abdal Kahihamatemh (@abdalkahihamatemh) post to TikTok, April 29, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@abdalkanihamatemh/video/7227401365717323013> (accessed April 23, 2024).

On the Route to Chad Before June 14

Early into the conflict, the roads leading to Chad fell under the control of the RSF and allied militias. These forces manned checkpoints, sometimes jointly. Survivors who escaped to Chad before June 14 said the men at checkpoints sometimes explicitly profiled those who were fleeing on an ethnic basis, looking for Massalit people.⁴⁴⁷ Najwa recalled hearing at one checkpoint, forces asking the driver of the vehicle she was in, “Are there any Massalit in this car?,” and the driver answering, “No they are from different tribes—Fur, Zaghawa, Bargo—but there are no Massalit in this car.”⁴⁴⁸

Hafsa, 42, was fleeing El Geneina with her family and colleagues on April 28, when she said that two men on a motorbike—one in civilian dress and the other in RSF uniform—carrying a rifle opened fire on their car near Kurti village, to force the vehicle to stop.⁴⁴⁹ One of the assailants demanded, “Why didn’t you stop? Are you carrying *Nubas* from El Geneina to the outside?” As the men escalated the threats, the driver gave them money to be allowed to drive away.

Those fleeing the city during the first seven weeks of the campaign said that armed men and, in some cases, Arab families including women and children, robbed them, wielding guns and sticks, sometimes beating them.⁴⁵⁰ Armed men had set up checkpoints along the road to Chad, where they demanded bribes from the drivers in exchange for passage.⁴⁵¹

Looting of Humanitarian Facilities

From the onset of the conflict, aid organizations experienced widespread looting of their premises and supplies.

⁴⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023; Sharif, Chad, July 24, 2023; and Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, Chad, August 1, 2023.

⁴⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Najwa, Chad, June 6, 2023.

⁴⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hafsa, former employee of an international aid organization, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁴⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Hafsa, former employee of an international aid organization, Chad, July 30, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview with Ashraf, Chad, July 24, 2023.

⁴⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Widad, Chad, June 4, 2023, and Amina, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

Residents said the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias took control of the World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse in al-Jamarek on April 26, which contained significant food supplies, and that the RSF subsequently set up a presence in the building, controlling access to it. Interviewees said that after the RSF broke into the warehouse, residents from across communities of El Geneina participated in further looting, in some cases selling those goods to shop owners.⁴⁵²

On May 3, the Norwegian Refugee Council said its guesthouse and offices had been looted.⁴⁵³ On May 4, it was the MSF office.⁴⁵⁴

Abdulahman, 41, a senior employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, said that in late May, as he and colleagues were driving through the city in two vehicles marked with their institution's logo, four men, two in RSF uniforms, stopped them and confiscated their vehicles.⁴⁵⁵

Unlawful Detentions, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment

Rapid Support Forces and allied militias unlawfully detained and arrested people largely from the Massalit community. The RSF and its allies held people in both formal facilities,

⁴⁵² Human Rights Watch interviews with Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023; Karim, human rights activist, Chad, July 23, 2023; Abbas, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023. "Sudan: A journalist from Darfur for al-Haddath: All the World Food Programme warehouses in West Darfur were looted," *Sudan Akhbar*, April 26, 2023, <https://www.sudanakhbar.com/1378936>; Hatim Elmadani (@HatimElmadani), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), April 27, 2023, <https://twitter.com/HatimElmadani/status/1651339702824312834> (accessed April 24, 2024); Nusaiba Mohamed (@NusaibaMohamed3), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), April 27, 2023, <https://twitter.com/NusaibaMohamed3/status/1651361650056867847> (accessed April 24, 2024); Mark Snoeck (@marksnoeck) post to X (formerly known as Twitter), June 13, 2023, <https://twitter.com/marksnoeck/status/1668688956173459485> (accessed April 24, 2024); "The commander of the Rapid Support Forces in Sudan Mohamed Dagalo said that he is ready to hold negotiations with the army commander, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan on the condition of a ceasefire," *Al Sharq News*, April 29, 2023, <https://nabd.com/s/118778218-c59857/> (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁴⁵³ Norwegian Refugee Council, "Civilians Caught in Fighting, Mass Looting of Aid," May 3, 2023, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/april/sudan-civilians-killed/> (accessed November 7, 2023).

⁴⁵⁴ MSF, "MSF shaken and appalled by looting of its premises in Sudan," May 23, 2023, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.ca/msf-shaken-and-appalled-by-looting-of-its-premises-in-sudan/> (accessed November 7, 2023).

⁴⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulrahman, senior employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

such as police stations, and informal sites, such as schools and homes.⁴⁵⁶

Human Rights Watch interviewed eight individuals who had been apprehended by the RSF and allied militias between April 28 and July 21, including a 17-year-old boy and two women. The captors subjected those detained to torture and inhumane and degrading punishment, reportedly electrocuting one detainee. They raped one woman in detention. Interviewees were detained for up to 11 days. Two were released after an Arab resident and an RSF member respectively vouched that they were not fighters.

Many of those detained were prominent members of the Massalit community (see Section VII sub-section on Targeted Attacks on Prominent Community Members).⁴⁵⁷ All interviewees said the assailants interrogated them, demanding information about their relations with prominent officials, about their human rights work, about Massalit fighters, or about their role within the Massalit fighting forces.

Zeina, a former senior government official, was picked up on the street on May 18 by RSF fighters and taken to a police station in al-Zariba neighborhood (see Section VII sub-section on Targeted Attacks on Prominent Community Members). There she was tortured and made to watch the forces stab a man and a boy to death:

They brought two men, one in his 30s and the other about 15. We were in the same room. There was someone who was wearing his rifle with many magazines in the front, and he looked like a random person. He had broken glass, a broken tea glass. He came and [with the glass stabbed] the man in his 30s in his eye. The man's eye was bleeding. And with the other boy, they stabbed him in his abdomen with a knife.... They insulted them, saying, 'You belong to the governor!' and 'We will kill all Massalit!' and 'The

⁴⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, July 29, 2023. Zeina was held in al-Zariba neighborhood police station. Human Rights Watch interview with Faheem, former government employee, Chad, July 28, 2023. Faheem was held in al-Riyadh police station. Eman said the Um al-Khura/Juburuna neighborhood school was used as a detention facility and that she heard cries coming from it and saw two RSF forces coming out of it. Human Rights Watch interview with Eman, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁵⁷ Five were prominent members of the Massalit community or former soldiers who their captors said were detained because of their role in the community (see Section VII sub-section on Targeted Attacks on Prominent Community Members). Among the others, one was a Zaghawa former government official who his captors accused of being pro-Massalit. Two Massalit people, a man and a boy, said forces detained them on the presumption that they were fighters, solely because they had been injured. All said they were not fighters and had not taken up arms against the RSF and allied militias.

government is going to be our government!’... They told me, ‘We will do the same to you if you do not confess.’

The man bled to death, and later, so did the boy, Zeina said.⁴⁵⁸

Ibrahim, a 36-year-old non-Arab former government official, said about 20 armed men in civilian clothes and partial RSF uniform arrived at his family’s house on April 28, where they assaulted him. “They started mistreating me in front of my family, including by beating me up with the butts of their guns and whips,” he said. “They asked me to lie on the ground and they tied me up with ropes behind my back.”⁴⁵⁹

The assailants then took Ibrahim to a primary school in Um Duwein neighborhood they were using as a base.

The treatment was really bad. The humiliations, the insults, the beatings. They beat me with the butts of their guns and whips, insulted me, and demanded information about the whereabouts of Governor Abbakar and where Massalits were storing weapons. They called me a slave and a traitor who should be killed.⁴⁶⁰

Ibrahim overheard some guards arguing that they should kill him, while others said they should not. He was released the next day. Fearing for his life, he hid in the city before fleeing to Chad.⁴⁶¹

The RSF and allied militias continued to detain and ill-treat civilians after the June 15 exodus and massacre. Human Rights Watch interviewed five people who were detained or had knowledge of their loved ones having been detained as they hid in the town or fled towards Chad between June 15 and June 22. One other person was detained in July. Two RSF members detained Malik, aged 17, on June 15 as he fled El Geneina with his mother (see Section X on Grave Violations Against Children). Malik had previously been

⁴⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ibrahim, former local official, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

injured. He was held by RSF and militia forces for 11 days, during which he was verbally and physically mistreated and deprived of food.⁴⁶² He recalled:

I was sure they would kill me, but instead they grabbed me and put me in their vehicle and drove me to a house where they stored their guns ... There was another group of young men there already being detained. They beat us with plastic pipes and sticks. They put a knife to my neck and said, 'You are *Kumurud*!' I said I was not *Kumurud*, I was a peaceful person, but they said, 'You have a bullet wound, so you are *Kumurud*.' They didn't feed me, but a neighbor ... was sneaking up food and water for me over the wall.⁴⁶³

Malik said his health deteriorated and that eventually, "One guy picked me out, took me to the door and drove me to Ardeba market. He said, 'You are sick. You should go.'"

Faheem, 45, a former government employee, said that on June 18 or 19, a former Arab colleague recognized him in a market in Riyadh neighborhood, and immediately reported his presence to a checkpoint nearby.⁴⁶⁴ Within minutes, a group of armed men, one in an RSF uniform and the others in civilian dress, approached Faheem and told him he was wanted for questioning at a nearby police station, he said. They interrogated Faheem about his tribe, accusing him of being a *Kumurud* leader and of sharing the GPS coordinates of RSF and allied militias movements by radio with Massalit sources. "They told me to get into a container, but I refused," Faheem said. "Then the three guys pushed me, I refused. They threatened to shoot me. They pushed me into the container and locked the door, leaving me alone." They held Faheem for five hours in the container, the floor of which was covered in blood.⁴⁶⁵

Faheem's captors tried to extort him. An Arab man at the facility told him, "If you stay here until nightfall, they will kill you." Faheem saw this as an attempt to get him to say he was a fighter. One guard demanded a bribe of 1.5 million Sudanese Pounds (roughly US\$1,655) to facilitate Faheem's release. An Arab acquaintance intervened and secured his release,

⁴⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Malik, Chad, July 25, 2023.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Faheem, former government employee, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

then warned him, “These guys are targeting many of your leaders, tell your people to hide and not go out in public.”⁴⁶⁶

RSF and allied militias also arrested some people on the road to Chad and brought them back for detention to El Geneina.

Mustafa, 38, a former civil servant, said his father and uncle were among a group of four Massalit men arrested on June 22 by RSF forces (including two RSF officials they knew) in Adikong, the Sudanese village on the border with Chad on the A5 road.⁴⁶⁷ Mustafa’s father was a prominent community leader, an *Umda*. The RSF had reportedly been following the group. After being violently intercepted, the four detainees were taken back to El Geneina. Mustafa said, “They put them in two different rooms. Abdelqayum [one of the detainees] was put in a separate room from the others.” Three of the men, including Mustafa’s father and uncle, were subsequently released, but Abdelqayum was killed. Yousef, a teacher, said that in early July he found Abdelqayum’s body, legs and hands cut off, alongside 10 other bodies with the same mutilations near an RSF checkpoint by al-Ribat school in al-Salam neighborhood.⁴⁶⁸

Omar, a former soldier, was detained in El Geneina in July. He said that about seven guards, including one who appeared to be more senior, beat him with sticks and whips and kicked him while he was blindfolded. They interrogated him, asking whether he was a soldier and was informing on RSF positions. “I told them I am not a soldier and one said, ‘You are Black, we don’t care about your tribe, you are all the same.’”⁴⁶⁹ The guards also subjected him to electric shocks to his head, Omar said. A member of the RSF who knew Omar secured his release after a day.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Sharif, Chad, July 24, 2023, who witnessed the arrest; Yousef, teacher, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁴⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Yousef, teacher, Chad, July 23, 2023; Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁴⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Omar, former soldier, Chad, July 29, 2023.

⁴⁷⁰ In addition to these cases, Mousa, the lawyer, said his brother-in-law was arrested on the road to Chad. Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.



The RSF detained and interrogated Omar (pseudonym) in June 2023, torturing him with sticks, whips and electric shocks, saying: “You are Black, we don’t care about your tribe, you are all the same.” © 2023 Jean-Baptiste Gallopin/Human Rights Watch

VIII. Counting and Burying the Dead

From the onset of the El Geneina conflict and mass killings in late April, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias repeatedly prevented burials. They threatened pallbearers and mourners, and at times opened fire on them. As a result, some families were forced to bury their loved ones inside their homes and volunteers buried the dead under cover of darkness. Bodies often remained in the streets for weeks.

At great risk to their lives, neighborhood volunteer groups, some coordinating with clinics, and the Sudanese Red Crescent successfully buried many victims.



New graves in al-Ghabat cemetery, El Geneina. © 2023 Roots for Human Rights and Monitoring Violations

Human Rights Watch interviewed 10 people who described their involvement in, or witnessing, the burials, between them, of about 3,900 people in El Geneina between April 24 and June 15.⁴⁷¹ Human Rights Watch was unable to determine the proportion of those killed who were fighters. In late June, after most of the Massalit population had fled the city, the RSF, in collaboration with the local Arab leadership, created a committee to manage burials, using mass graves dug throughout El Geneina and along the roads leading out of the city.

Interviewees described burials at five cemeteries in the city, and said at least six distinct new mass grave sites appeared during the conflict. Human Rights Watch analyzed satellite imagery showing a significant increase in the number of graves in six cemeteries from April 19 to June 29, 2023.

Burials Before June 14

Neighborhood Volunteer Groups

Beginning on April 24, community members formed neighborhood volunteer groups to collect and bury bodies in al-Ghabat, al-Shati, and al-Zariba cemeteries.⁴⁷² Abdelrahim, a community leader, said that on that day he and his group buried 32 people killed in the initial attack by RSF and allied militias on al-Jabal neighborhood.⁴⁷³ Adil helped carry to al-Ghabat cemetery the remains of eight people, including two children, killed in al-Thawra on April 25. They were laid to rest in a single mass grave alongside 15 other bodies another team had gathered.⁴⁷⁴ With other volunteers, Zaki, a government official, collected the remains of around 50 dead people in the following week, burying them in al-Ghabat, al-Shati, and al-Zariba cemeteries.⁴⁷⁵

On April 24, Mohammed's volunteer group approached an RSF major at a checkpoint to ask for permission to collect bodies, but Mohammed said the major refused.⁴⁷⁶ Five days

⁴⁷¹ The 10 individuals were involved in separate groups that participated or witnessed in burials, which aids in preventing double counting casualties. Burials took place in existing cemeteries in El Geneina and on the outskirts of the city, and some in new mass graves.

⁴⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Zaki, government official, Chad, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁷³ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Abderahim, community leader, May 16, 2023.

⁴⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Adil, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

⁴⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Zaki, government official, Chad, June 8, 2023.

⁴⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

later, the RSF commander for West Darfur, Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah, granted the group a meeting at which he reportedly said the bodies decomposing in the street were having an impact on all communities, and that he would grant permission to Mohammed's group to collect and bury bodies.⁴⁷⁷ Mohammed and his team thereafter buried around 40 people.

On May 14, following attacks by the RSF on al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, and al-Mansoura, Mansour said he helped bury 80 bodies in al-Ghabat cemetery. The volunteers worked after dark to avoid being shot, using axes and shovels to dig graves where they deposited the remains of men, women, and children with bullet injuries to the head and chest. Each grave, marked with a brick, held 20 people.⁴⁷⁸ New rows of graves in the northwestern part of the cemetery are visible in the comparison of satellite imagery from April 19 to May 17. Tires erected into the soil to delineate the cemetery's boundaries were moved to make space for the new graves.

Volunteers Coordinating with Clinics

The clinics played an important role in community efforts to count the dead. Volunteers coordinated with clinics to bury those who died there or who were brought in dead. One of them said volunteers did not differentiate between the remains of Arabs and non-Arabs, collecting all for burial.⁴⁷⁹

Mousa, a lawyer, was one of 50 volunteers who would come to the makeshift Ingaz and Sadaqa clinics to collect the dead after sunset, after staff had registered the identities of the victims. The identification process was challenging. "People used to come [and] if they recognized the bodies, they would write their names and put a label on the body," he said.⁴⁸⁰

Aqeel went to Ingaz clinic in al-Jamarek on April 27 and learned there were 231 bodies and more than 400 people injured there that day. Working from 9 p.m. until midnight, his group buried the dead in al-Ghabat cemetery.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.

⁴⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁴⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

Vehicles with headlights would have made an easy target for the RSF, so Mousa's group would go to al-Ghabat cemetery on donkey and horse carts. Like Mansour's group, they dug holes with shovels and axes by moonlight, burying up to 25 in a single grave. On April 28, they interred 10 bodies in one grave, 17 in a second, 24 in a third, and, in a fourth, 6 children who had died of measles. In total, Mousa's team buried 69 people that day.⁴⁸¹

The Sudanese Red Crescent

The Sudanese Red Crescent (SRC) also reached out to the RSF and allied militias to facilitate the collection and burial of bodies in areas these forces controlled. "We will not allow you to collect them, they have to stay here until they smell," a low-ranking RSF official reportedly responded on April 29 when Ihsan, an SRC employee, and his colleagues contacted the RSF.⁴⁸² Ihsan said RSF officers later granted permission, saying it was a "humanitarian issue."⁴⁸³

But the RSF set conditions, Ihsan said, including that the bodies of Arabs be collected first.⁴⁸⁴ Souleiman, another SRC employee, said the RSF prevented them from collecting the remains of non-Arabs, saying: "They are animals, and animals must eat them."⁴⁸⁵

Even with this permission, SRC staff continued to face intimidation and threats. Ihsan said when he and his colleagues were collecting the dead, Musa Angir, a Tamazuj commander, threatened them at a checkpoint littered with bodies (see Section XIII RSF, Tamazuj and Arab Community Leaders in Positions of Command).⁴⁸⁶

Abdulrahman, an SRC worker, said he and his colleagues started picking up bodies on April 24. He recalled:

We picked up bodies from al-Jamarek and al-Buhaira area where there is a gathering point. We collected 15 Massalit bodies, most of men and women

⁴⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁴⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with Souleiman, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

and five children, most with bullet injuries to the head, who were lying in the streets.

‘Fifteen days later, we started getting random calls to collect bodies. We collected about 26, some... were already decomposing.’⁴⁸⁷

His SRC team buried them in al-Thawra Cemetery. Satellite imagery comparison from April 19 to June 5 shows new graves in the northern part of the cemetery.

Abdulrahman said he and members of his team stopped working because the office of the Red Crescent was burned down in early May, and four men—two in RSF uniforms—stopped and confiscated two marked Red Crescent vehicles towards the end of the month.⁴⁸⁸ He said the RSF came to the homes of some staff members, demanding that the team return to the work of disposing of bodies.

Abdulrahman said that on June 13 he and other Red Crescent staff drove the length of the city to assess the conditions. He said, “I counted 2,000 bodies [along the main road], most of which were already decomposing, before I stopped counting. We said we couldn’t clear them under these conditions.”

Burials after June 14

The Sudanese Red Crescent and independent neighborhood volunteer groups who conducted burials of the victims of the mass killings that started on June 14 provided another glimpse of scale of the abuses.

Volunteers buried people in graveyards where they could. Mansour said that on June 14, he helped inter 25 people in al-Ghabat cemetery, and saw several other groups burying people at the same time.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulrahman, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁸⁸ Abderrahman said the guard of the office described to him how it was RSF forces who burned down the office. Human Rights Watch interview with Abdulrahman, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023.

Residents of al-Nasseem, north al-Shati, mid al-Shati, and south al-Shati, participated in the collection and burial of those killed during the attack on the convoy attempting to flee the city, said Khalil, 35. He believed the dead in the area to be in the “tens or even hundreds.” He said that 16 bodies were found in the river near May Bridge and buried on the riverbank.⁴⁹⁰ Around 45 bodies were buried in al-Shati cemetery on June 15, said Souleiman, an employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent.⁴⁹¹

On June 16, Amer, the community leader from al-Shati, attended a funeral of 67 people at a mosque at the junction near the Ministry of Animal Resources, where RSF and Arab militias had opened fire on the convoy of people. He said the dead, who included the 40 people whose killings he witnessed, were laid to rest in a grave dug with construction equipment on the eastern side of al-Bayteri graveyard.⁴⁹²

In al-Salam, Nasir, 52, said he helped collect 82 bodies, “most [with] gunshot wounds to the head and chest,” while forces were “roaming the streets.” He saw the bodies of nine other men, who he said were shot while passing his house.⁴⁹³

On June 15, Souleiman from the SRC helped prepare the bodies of nine people who had been shot in al-Imtidad. While collecting them, he was threatened by members of Arab militias, who told him not to provide assistance to injured people he found. “If you give them first aid, we will come to kill all of them,” Souleiman was told.⁴⁹⁴

Mass Graves

A week after the June 15 massacre, and despite efforts by residents, many bodies remained strewn across El Geneina. The RSF and its allied forces had by then established firm control over the city. Together with newly appointed local authorities and at least one key Arab tribal leader, the RSF coordinated a citywide campaign to collect and bury the bodies. It enlisted the Sudanese Red Crescent and other volunteers, who performed their grim duties in a coercive environment. The volunteers, who worked in fear, described a process

⁴⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Khalil, Chad, July 29, 2023.

⁴⁹¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Souleiman, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁴⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁴⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with Souleiman, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

in which the bodies were disposed of in mass graves without apparent efforts to establish and record their identities. Human Rights Watch interviewed two survivors of massacres who described being left for dead in informal mass body disposal sites.⁴⁹⁵

After June 15, Joma'a Barakallah, RSF commander for West Darfur, and al-Tijani Karshoum, the newly appointed governor of West Darfur, established a committee to collect and bury bodies, which was led by Khalil Hamid Dogorsho and chaired by *Amir* Massar Abdelrahman Assil, the leader of the Native Administration for Arab tribes in West Darfur (see Section XIII on RSF, Tamazuj and Arab Community Leaders in Positions of Command).⁴⁹⁶ Afif, a local official until the change in local administration, believed the goal was to “clean the area from the massacre....They don't want [aid] organizations to enter El Geneina and see the dead bodies.”⁴⁹⁷

The committee approached the Sudanese Red Crescent and told its staff to resume their work collecting the dead, giving them the former National Congress Party Office to use as their new office.⁴⁹⁸ A video analyzed by Human Rights Watch and uploaded to the RSF Telegram channel on July 2, 2023, shows RSF commander Joma'a Barakallah with people wearing Red Crescent vests in El Geneina.⁴⁹⁹

Abdelhamid volunteered to assist the Sudanese Red Crescent on June 21 and 22.⁵⁰⁰ The first day, there were two groups of volunteers collecting bodies in al-Madaress and al-Tijaria girls school. Using shovels and plastic sheets, the first group gathered the remains of 28 people, while the second group with Abdelhamid collected the bodies of three children, three men, and three women, who all had gunshot wounds. They used a private truck to transport the dead to al-Ghabat cemetery, where they were met by Arab tribal leaders, including *Amir* Hafiz Hassan (see Section XIII on RSF, Tamazuj and Arab Community Leaders in Positions of Command), who were in contact with members of the

⁴⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Osman, Chad, July 25, 2023, and Muhsin, daily laborer, Chad, July 25, 2023.

⁴⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023, and Osama, human rights defender, Kampala, August 13, 2023.

⁴⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁴⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Abdulrahman, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023, and Nasir, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁴⁹⁹ Rapid Support Forces (@RSFSudan), post to Telegram channel, July 2, 2023, <https://t.me/RSFSudan/4809> (accessed April 19, 2024).

⁵⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023.

committee coordinating burial efforts. The Arab tribal leaders prevented the team from carrying out the funerals in al-Ghabat cemetery, saying, “We do not want mass graves.”⁵⁰¹

After the Arab tribal leaders turned the volunteers away, Abdelhamid and his group transported some of the bodies to the western edge of the city.⁵⁰² The 16 volunteers, under the escort of four RSF members, took the remains 2 kilometers northwest of the Central Reserve Police (CRP) headquarters for burial. There, Abdelhamid said, they placed all the bodies in a pre-existing hole one meter deep and three meters long and covered them with branches. “Don’t share this information with Radio Dabanga!,” a popular English-language radio on Sudanese affairs, Abdelhamid recalled one of the RSF guards saying.

On June 22, Abdelhamid’s group collected 50 bodies and buried them near the same location. Abdelhamid said they also collected 45 bodies in al-Zuhur, many of which had been decomposing for several days and remained unburied because of ongoing attacks. During the process, he said, the RSF again threatened volunteers not to provide first aid to injured people they encountered.⁵⁰³

Rubab, a teacher, returned to El Geneina in early July and said she saw people asking the committee for help in removing bodies from makeshift graves in their homes, where many had been buried, because graveyards were not safe.⁵⁰⁴ Amina, 45, said bodies remained unburied throughout the city on July 12, when she briefly returned to El Geneina to collect her belongings; some were being eaten by dogs.⁵⁰⁵

Human Rights Watch was unable to establish how many mass graves have emerged in El Geneina since June 2023 and how many bodies they hold.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023.

⁵⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁵⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Amina, government employee, Chad, July 23, 2023.

The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS) said it received credible reports of at least 13 new mass grave sites after the violence in El Geneina.⁵⁰⁶ A UN report published in July 2023 said the bodies of at least 87 ethnic Massalit people and others allegedly killed in June by the RSF and allied militias were buried in a mass grave to the northwest of El Geneina in an open area called al-Turab al-Ahmar (Red Soil).⁵⁰⁷ The location matches the area northwest of the CRP headquarters described by Abdelhamid. Human Rights Watch reviewed satellite imagery from June 21 showing numerous trucks, pickups, and excavators across this area. Human Rights Watch also heard from a witness who said he saw a mass body disposal site by a bridge in al-Jamarek along a north-south road, but was unable to corroborate the claims.⁵⁰⁸

Survivors of attempted killings also told Human Rights Watch how forces, thinking they were dead, nearly buried them or brought them to mass body disposal sites.

Thirty-year-old Osman, a herder, was shot in the head, chest, and wrist on June 15, as he fled towards Chad. He was left on the ground close to the headquarters of the Sudanese-Chadian Joint Force (also on the western edge of the city, roughly one kilometer southeast of the CRP headquarters), and said most of the injured around him died. Days later, five RSF members arrived in an ambulance along with 12 detainees—all men—and five excavators. The detainees began digging graves, burying two to three bodies in each. When they lifted Osman, they noticed he was still alive. The RSF transported him in an ambulance to Kurti village, where he stayed for seven days. He later fled to Chad.⁵⁰⁹

Muhsin, 43, said he was brought to a body disposal site on Leria mountain, on the northern outskirts of El Geneina, alongside others who had been shot with him when the convoy to Ardamata was attacked on June 15 (see Section VI on Climax of the Campaign: June 15 Massacre and its Aftermath). When the attackers thought Muhsin and those around him had all died, they put them in a truck:

⁵⁰⁶ United Nations, “SRSG for Sudan and Head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes Remarks to the Security Council on 13 September 2023,” September 13, 2023, <https://unitams.unmissions.org/en/srsg-sudan-and-head-unitams-volker-perthes-remarks-security-council-13-september-2023> (accessed April 29, 2024).

⁵⁰⁷ United Nations, “Sudan: At least 87 buried in mass grave in Darfur as Rapid Support Forces deny victims decent burials | OHCHR”, July 13, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/sudan-least-87-buried-mass-grave-darfur-rapid-support-forces-deny-victims> (accessed November 22, 2023).

⁵⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Yousef, teacher, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁵⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Osman, Chad, July 25, 2023.

They threw me down in the vehicle and they dropped dead bodies on top of me. They put many on top of me. It was very heavy because it was somewhere around five people and I heard them say ‘No, don’t put more! Don’t put more like that.’

The perpetrators collected other dead bodies from the area and piled them over Muhsin, then drove to Leria mountain, where they dumped Muhsin and the bodies. He heard them say, “Make sure all of them are dead,” before opening fire on the bodies again. Muhsin was shot in the leg. He lost consciousness and awoke the next morning, where he discovered another older man had also survived. From there, the two walked toward Ardamata.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Muhsin, daily laborer, Chad, July 25, 2023.

IX. Dismantling and Destruction of Neighborhoods

After the mass exodus of the Massalit and other non-Arab populations in mid-June, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias demolished the civilian property in residential neighborhoods, severely undermining the ability of those communities to return to El Geneina.

From June 21 onwards, Human Rights Watch documented, largely through satellite imagery analysis, new patterns of widespread destruction in al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, and Krinding neighborhoods, including both the dismantling of rooftops and the razing of entire neighborhoods and camps using heavy machinery.

An image from June 25 shows excavators and bulldozers progressively demolishing areas north of al-Jamarek and Abu Zar camp. A video uploaded to the RSF's YouTube channel on July 3, and verified and geolocated by Human Rights Watch, shows two bulldozers parked in the center of El Geneina.⁵¹¹

In Abu Zar camp, which RSF and allied militias previously targeted in April 2021, areas that were burned in late April 2023 were completely razed, and rooftops in the rest of the camp were largely dismantled.

An area just north of al-Ghabat cemetery that had experienced pockets of destruction by fire prior to June 16 was largely razed five days later. An excavator visible on satellite imagery on June 25 in this area showed ongoing demolition.

Amin, the lawyer, visited El Geneina on July 10 and observed that large numbers of homes in certain neighborhoods, like al-Jamarek, al-Nahda, and al-Tadhamun, had been burned. He also witnessed the ongoing demolition of the town: "As I was passing, I could see that they are using machines to destroy houses in that area."⁵¹²

⁵¹¹ Rapid Support Forces (@RSFSudan), post to Telegram channel, July 2, 2023, <https://t.me/RSFSudan/4809> (accessed April 19, 2024).

⁵¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

Subsequent images show that demolitions then advanced toward the west and across Ghabat al-Neem camp. The camp, established in 2019, was completely razed by August 12, 2023, satellite imagery shows. The same image shows areas in al-Jabal and the Krinding camp also completely demolished.

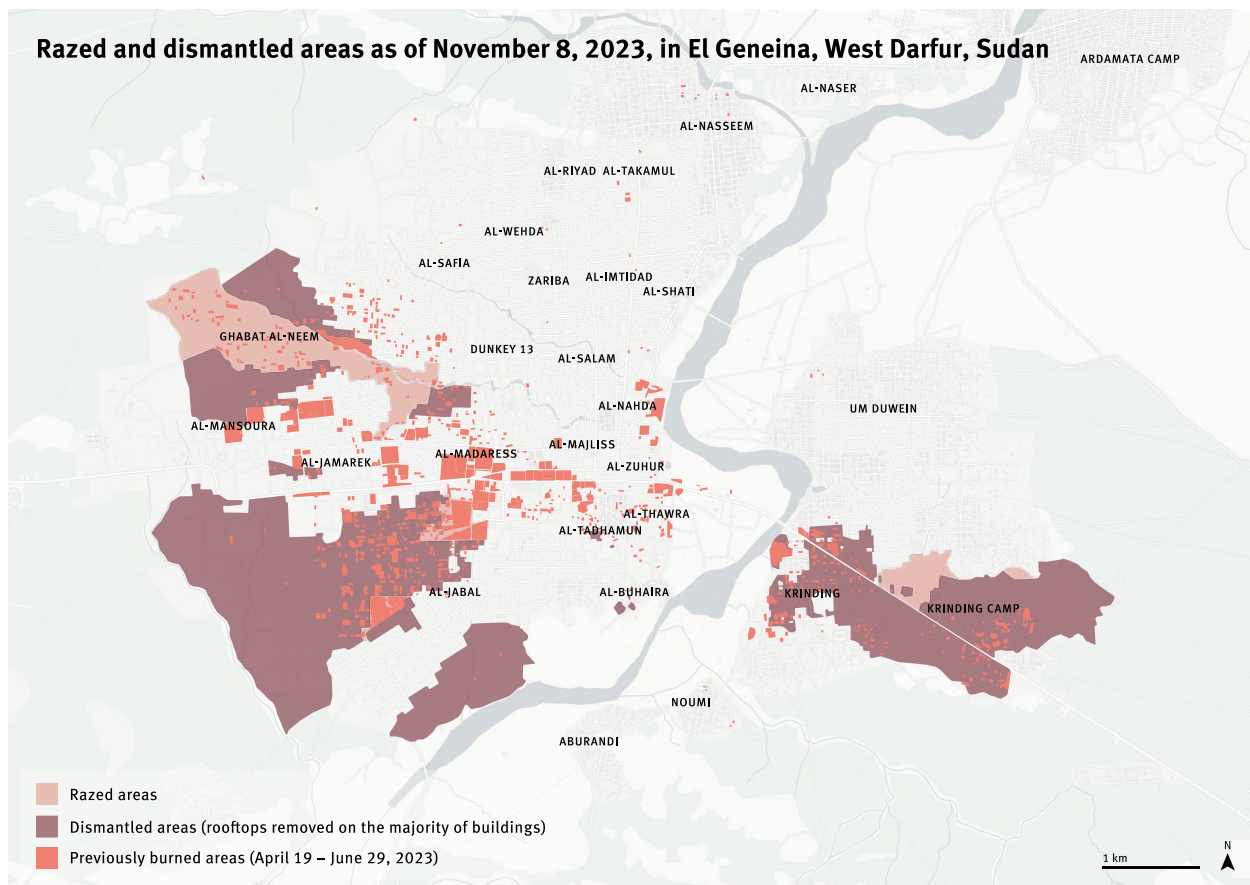


Caption: Satellite image comparison between June 29 and October 12, 2023, shows an area illustrating the complete razing of Ghabat al-Neem camp. All buildings and the fences delimiting residential compounds have been systematically destroyed throughout the camp. Vegetation has started to grow on the former courtyards and paths. Image © Planet Labs PBC.

Satellite imagery also shows the removal of corrugated iron rooftops from most of the buildings in large sections of the city, such as the southernmost part of al-Jabal neighborhood by the Kajja river. This part of al-Jabal had been attacked in early April 2021, but did not show signs of destruction in 2023 until August, when the rooftops were dismantled, leaving only the walls. Similar dismantling can be seen in the whole western part of al-Jabal, which was predominantly Massalit, in the northern parts of al-Jamarek, al-Madaress, and in Krinding, from August to October 2023.



Caption: Satellite image comparison between June 5 and October 12, 2023, shows that rooftops on most of the buildings have been removed in an area illustrative of the destruction in the western part of al-Jabal neighborhood. Image © Planet Labs PBC.



Map of the razed and dismantled areas in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan as of November 8, 2023. Analysis and graphic © Human Rights Watch

A resident who returned to El Geneina from Chad in September described what she saw in her neighborhood of al-Madaress:⁵¹³

Most of the houses of civilians who fled to Adré, they removed all their doors and windows, roofs, they looted everything.

My house and my neighbor's—removed everything, all the doors, and the windows, even the ceramic flooring, they broke it. The fans—11 fans.

⁵¹³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with an aid worker, October 11, 2023.

All the houses are open, you can see into the homes. No house has windows or doors.

Other majority-Massalit neighborhoods as well as mixed neighborhoods were affected, she said, including al-Buhaira, al-Jabal, al-Jamarek, al-Majliss, al-Tadhamun, and al-Zuhur. The witness saw people, including RSF members, “waiting for transportation” to carry the loot.

In November, an aid worker said, “There is nothing left of... the gathering sites... at all, just grass and plants growing.”⁵¹⁴ The areas of al-Jabal and al-Jamarek are off-limits, the aid worker said, adding “no life [is] intended to be there.”

⁵¹⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a humanitarian worker, November 24, 2023.

X. Grave Violations Against Children

Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militias did not spare children in their attacks on the civilian population of El Geneina. Human Rights Watch documented dozens of targeted killings of children, including some babies, and instances of maiming, notably during the exodus from El Geneina on June 15; a case of sexual violence; and abusive detentions of children. Children were also killed and injured in the context of fighting. Several interviewees spoke of the use of children by all fighting forces, including the Massalit self-defense groups. While this section predominantly covers abuses against Massalit children, Arab children were also killed and injured (see Section XI on Abuses against Arab Community Members).

Direct and Indiscriminate Killings

Interviewees told Human Rights Watch of seeing a total of 210 children killed and 50 injured, whom they identified as such because they knew them personally or because of their apparent age. This count includes cases where interviewees witnessed killings and those where they saw bodies afterwards.⁵¹⁵

Children were killed in both targeted and indiscriminate attacks—including in attacks in which heavy explosive weapons were used—as they sought shelter in homes, displacement camps and gathering sites, and as they fled.

When his neighborhood came under attack on June 10, Ashraf, 52, fled to a mosque in al-Thawra.⁵¹⁶ “My daughter, who is 16, grabbed my 7-year-old son, and was running with him on her back.” They were running with a dozen other people. When they passed a checkpoint manned by around 15 RSF men, the fighters opened fire. “One bullet hit my son in the head. My daughter left his body there,” Ashraf said. “My neighbor’s son, who was also seven, was also shot dead.”

⁵¹⁵ These totals were derived from both non-Arab and Arab interviewees sharing accounts of death or injury of victims in interviews. Where possible, victims’ names were collected and checked against other testimonies. To prevent double counting, aggregate numbers from clinics, hospitals, and mass burials were excluded and reported separately.

⁵¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ashraf, Chad, July 24, 2023.

Rubab, a teacher, recounted seeing numerous dead children outside one of the gathering points attacked in late April.⁵¹⁷ “I saw bodies of children in front of al-Buhaira gathering point. There were baby boys. One looked like he was two years old, another like he was three. A boy of about 12 was also lying dead. On the other side of the school, there were four bodies, all boys, they looked about 12,” Rubab said.

Witnesses described multiple incidents of heavy explosive weapons attacks in which children, some just babies, were killed as they sheltered.⁵¹⁸

Dana, 33, a teacher, was at home in al-Madaress with 10 people, mostly relatives, on June 9, when she heard gunfire around 2 p.m.⁵¹⁹ Then she heard a big explosion and saw fire and smoke in her yard. Two relatives, a 16-month-old boy and a 2-year-old boy, were killed. Dana said 9 others were injured in the attack, including 2 girls aged 7 and 10. The 7-year-old showed researchers her injuries. Dana was also injured, with metal fragments in her right upper shoulder, right hip, and left leg.

Two people who sought refuge at al-Zahra girls’ boarding school when the fighting initially broke out (see Section IV on Escalating Attacks on Massalit Displacement Sites and Neighborhoods: April 24 to June 14) described how several children were among the 35 people killed in the area between the end of April and June.⁵²⁰

Many children were also killed as they fled during the June 15 exodus, when the convoy of civilians came under attack on the way to Ardamata, afterwards when people found refuge in buildings, and later, on the road to Chad.

Jamal was hiding in a mosque in al-Salam at about 7.30 a.m. on June 15, when he saw militia kill 3 children, all of whom appeared younger than 14, as they fled. He said the victims had no weapons and “were just trying to hide. [The gunmen] had a checkpoint

⁵¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Mansour, Chad, July 21, 2023, and Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁵¹⁸ Mahmoud witnessed a woman and her baby killed, and three children injured, including himself, by ammunition on June 16. Husniya said at least 7 children in her neighborhood were killed around May 20, due to what she described as artillery fire. Human Rights Watch interviews with Mahmoud, 16, Chad, July 24, 2023, and Husniya, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dana, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

⁵²⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Lamya, Chad, June 1, 2023; and Salam, Chad, June 1, 2023.

nearby and from the checkpoint they were shooting into the crowds and the three kids were killed.”⁵²¹

Nusra, 19, recounted how on June 15, about 15 RSF fighters entered her home, where she was sheltering with 10 other people.⁵²² The fighters opened fire. Two children were shot: a 2-year-old who died from her injuries, and an adolescent boy, who survived. Nusra was injured as well: “I was shot three times, [in the] shoulder, left arm and left hip,” she said.⁵²³ Her injuries were still visible when Human Rights Watch interviewed her.

Malik, a 17-year-old boy who had previously been shot and injured on April 24, was being carried in a wheelbarrow when the convoy to Ardamata came under attack.⁵²⁴ He described the summary execution of 17 people, including 12 children, on June 15:

My mom was pushing me, and we were passing through al-Nasseem when the gunfire started. My mom let go of the wheelbarrow and ran away and I was left in the middle of the street, so I saw what happened next.

We were right by the [Kajja] *wadi* [river]. RSF forces with machine guns and large rifles descended on the street and chased down two women and three men [and] ...12... infants and young children [who] were with them.... Two RSF forces ... grabb[ed] the children from their parents, and as the parents started screaming, the other two RSF forces shot the parents, killing them.

Then they pushed all the children together into a group. They piled up the children and then shot them and threw their bodies into the *wadi*, and then threw their belongings in after them.

Malik was later detained and beaten (see Section VII sub-section on Unlawful Detentions, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment).

⁵²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Faheem, former government employee, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁵²² Human Rights Watch interview with Nusra, Chad, July 21, 2023.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Malik, Chad, July 25, 2023.



Malik, 17, was injured in the leg by a bullet, then survived an attack on a clinic, and witnessed 12 children being killed with their parents. © July 26, 2023 Belkis Wille/Human Rights Watch

Arbat, 41, had been compiling lists of the dead in El Geneina. He said he was stopped and searched by RSF forces at a checkpoint while fleeing in the early hours of June 15.⁵²⁵ An RSF member tried to detain Arbat, who said he began to run away. The RSF forces surrounded his group and started beating them. Arbat said, “There was a woman clutching her crying baby to her chest next to us. One armed guy yelled at her, ‘Why is the baby crying?’ He shot the baby and the baby’s brains splattered all over [the woman].”

“From Ardamata to Chad, I saw more than 45 bodies of children specifically, all boys,” said Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, a civil society representative. “I counted specifically because I wanted to document, and I was looking for my son.” She had been separated from her 17-

⁵²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Arbat, employee of a medical institution, Chad, July 31, 2023.

year-old son, Fatha, on June 14.⁵²⁶ Zahra eventually found out that he had been killed while fleeing El Geneina that night.

Fatha's cousin, Saif, also 17, was with him as they fled El Geneina by car. Saif described how Fatha was executed with a shot to the head, alongside two other young men:⁵²⁷

We were stopped next to Baba Nusa village by a group of five armed men on motorbikes wearing *Kaptania*. They told everyone to lie down on the ground. One said, 'Where are you coming from? You are *Nuba*!' and 'I have ten bullets. I am ready to shoot whoever I want to.'

He started shooting. We were all lying on our stomachs. I was terrified I would get shot. He shot three people in the head: Fatha, as well as Mustafa, who was 17, and Allahadeen, who was 18.

I was crying and crying. I felt so awful.

Although he was injured, Saif continued with two other people. Around 4 kilometers before they reached Baba Nusa, 10 men, some in *Kaptania* and others in RSF uniforms, stopped Saif's group.

They were standing by a vehicle with a Dushka mounted on the back. They beat us, [then told us] to stand up and run. [As] we started running, they started shooting at us. They injured Jamal Abdallah Khamis [aged 17], Ashraf [aged 20], and me. I was hit by a bullet in my left side. We kept running.⁵²⁸

Weeks later, Saif struggled to recount these events. "I don't know how I am doing now," he said. "I don't think I am okay. I am not able to sleep at night, I just keep remembering all the things I saw."⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023.

⁵²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

Maiming and Injuries

Children were injured, at times with life-altering injuries, throughout the violence and as they fled to Chad. Between June 12 and July 9, MSF in Adré treated 58 children under 15 who required surgery for injuries sustained in attacks.⁵³⁰

Malik, the 17-year-old, was shot twice on April 24 when armed men wearing *Kaptania* opened fire on him and other civilians who had sought safety in a mosque in al-Jamarek neighborhood. He said:

I was shot in the upper left hip, two bullets. Sometime later, I am not sure how long after, people came to take us to ... Hassan's hospital. I counted 15 dead bodies as I was leaving to go to the hospital, and there were 8 injured, including me. I stayed in the hospital for almost two months.⁵³¹

When researchers spoke to Malik in late July, he was still unable to walk.

Suhaila was in the convoy to Ardamata on June 15 with her sister and nephew, Mohammed, aged 5, when the RSF and allied militias stopped their car, pulled some people out, and shot some, including Mohammed, who was shot in the right foot.⁵³²

Eight-year-old Sumaya, interviewed with her mother, described how men in RSF uniforms shot her in the arm and her sister, aged 12, in the hand, during the attack on the convoy.⁵³³ First, they shot Sumaya, then, “they beat me and said, ‘Go away, go away!’”

Human Rights Watch met Salma, also 8, while she was convalescing in the Adré hospital. She said that in mid-June, on the road to Chad, two Arab men with guns stopped her family's vehicle, shot her in the left foot as she ran to her father, and then stole the vehicle. “My father carried me on his back until we found a Chadian ambulance,” she said.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁰ MSF data on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁵³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Malik, Chad, July 25, 2023.

⁵³² Human Rights Watch interview with Suhaila, 16, Chad, July 26, 2023.

⁵³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Sumaya, 8, Chad, July 26, 2023.

⁵³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Salma, Chad, July 26, 2023.

Rape

Zainab, aged 15, was sheltering with four other families in al-Madaress neighborhood around June 7-8 when, at about noon, a group of about 20 uniformed RSF forces stormed the house and started beating people with metal rods.⁵³⁵

She showed researchers a large scar on her upper left arm and another on her ear. She said five of the men told everyone in the house to leave and then took her into another room where they each raped her over the course of six hours. “When they finally left, I tried to leave but fell down on the side of the road,” Zainab said. “A man eventually found me and carried me to the Central Reserve Police Station by donkey. I stayed there for 10 days before I was able to flee.”

Abduction, Ill-treatment, and Torture

Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied militia detained and ill-treated children, notably as they tried to flee to safety.⁵³⁶

Zeina, the government official who was detained by RSF personnel, saw guards torture to death a 15-year-old boy at al-Zariba neighborhood police station where she and the boy were detained, and then “stab him in the abdomen with a knife.”⁵³⁷ (See Section VII subsection on Other Torture, Ill Treatment, Beatings and Stabbings).

Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, the civil society representative, went looking for her son Fatha on June 15 after losing contact with him.⁵³⁸ She went to al-Malik, a school in al-Nasseem that she had heard was being used by the RSF as a de facto prison. There, RSF guards let her enter a classroom where they were holding 10 boys and men with their hands bound. Some had visible injuries and she thought the youngest person there was under the age of 10.

⁵³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Zainab, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁵³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, July 29, 2023.

⁵³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Zahra Khamis Ibrahim, civil society representative, Chad, July 21, 2023.

Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers by Fighting Forces

Human Rights Watch received several accounts of children on both sides associated with fighting forces in the conflict. Sudan has a long history of recruitment of children into armed groups.⁵³⁹

In El Geneina, a lawyer reported seeing armed Arab boys, some as young as 11, manning checkpoints in the city during the conflict.⁵⁴⁰

Human Rights Watch interviewed Gammar, 16, who said he had voluntarily joined the Sudanese Alliance in 2021, when he was about 14, and started training with weapons. He said he only joined in fighting when clashes broke out in his neighborhood in April 2023.⁵⁴¹

In late April, just as the fighting began, Rawiya, an Arab resident of al-Madaress who sought refuge in al-Jamarek, observed Massalit fighters, including children who seemed as young as 10, carrying guns. She believed they were among the young people that mobilized at the onset of the fighting in the emergent self-defense groups, following the looting of the police's weapons storage (see Section III sub-section on Massalit Forces).⁵⁴² Fatin, a 33-year-old women's rights activist, said that during the rush to take arms from a police depot in Ardamata on April 26, many children from the Massalit community also took weapons.⁵⁴³

Amin, a lawyer who returned to El Geneina from Chad on July 12, said he saw "underage [boys] carrying arms, along the road. They were Arabs. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old. Some looking [like] 11 years old. And also driving rickshaws, armed."⁵⁴⁴

While neither government forces nor the RSF have been listed by the UN for the recruitment and use of children, four Juba Peace Agreement signatory groups and other armed groups

⁵³⁹ Media also reported on the use of child soldiers in the context of ongoing conflict since April 15, 2023. See "Sudan conflict poses threat of long-term societal harm as recruitment of child soldiers surges," *Arab News*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2365846/middle-east> (accessed October 26, 2023).

⁵⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

⁵⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Gammar, child soldier, Chad, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Rawiya, Chad, May 31, 2023.

⁵⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Rawiya, Chad, May 31, 2023, and Safa, women's rights activist, Nairobi, August 3, 2023.

⁵⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

have appeared on the list.⁵⁴⁵ In May 2023, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) expressed its concern over grave violations against children in the conflict, including recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict.⁵⁴⁶ In June 2023, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reported on the recruitment and use of children aged 9 to 17 by the Sudanese Alliance, the Third Front-Tamazuj, and the SAF, among other groups in West and North Darfur.⁵⁴⁷ Mentioning reports that the RSF was targeting children for recruitment in Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, expressed concern in October 2023 about the increased risk of recruitment and use of children in the Sudan conflict.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁵ Parties listed in Sudan, all non-state parties are: Justice and Equality Movement; Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid; Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi; Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction; and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Malik Agar faction.

⁵⁴⁶ African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, "Urgent Statement: ACERWC's Statement on the Situation of Children in the Republic of Sudan," May 4, 2023, <https://www.acerwc.africa/en/article/statements/acerwcs-statement-situation-children-republic-sudan> (accessed March 19, 2024).

⁵⁴⁷ United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary General: Children and Armed Conflict," S/2023/363, para. 177-190, June 5, 2023, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2023_363.pdf (accessed April 20, 2023).

⁵⁴⁸ United Nations, "Sudan: UN expert warns of child recruitment by armed forces," October 16, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-un-expert-warns-child-recruitment-armed-forces> (accessed April 22, 2024). Media reports had previously noted the alleged recruitment of children by the RSF as part of its deployment of forces to fight for the Saudi Arabia coalition in Yemen. See, "On the Frontline of the Saudi War: Child Soldiers from Darfur," New York Times, December 21, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/28/world/africa/saudi-sudan-yemen-child-fighters.html> (accessed April 22, 2024).

XI. Abuses against Arab Community Members

Human Rights Watch interviewed 38 Arabs from El Geneina who had fled fighting in the city to eastern Chad between April 24 and June 17. Most had left within the first days of the violence.

Interviewees shared accounts of extrajudicial killings by Massalit fighters as well as beatings and looting after the violence erupted. Several witnesses said attackers used racial slurs against Arab communities. Members of Arab communities also reported killings and injuries caused by shelling.

People interviewed by Human Rights Watch knew of 193 Arabs who had been killed and 12 injured during the fighting in El Geneina between April 20 and June 3.⁵⁴⁹

Interviewees from Arab communities described ethnic Massalit forces belonging both to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the governor, Khamis Abakkar, as being involved in the abuses. Two women also said that “Colombians,” a term used in Sudan to describe youth gangs and which in El Geneina refers to gangs of boys and young men primarily from the Massalit community, were involved. Other Arab interviewees said “Colombians” have attacked and targeted Arab-majority areas.⁵⁵⁰

Killings of Arab Civilians

Arab interviewees said SAF and Massalit fighters killed Arab civilians during the conflict. They also pointed to the killings of Arab people in the lead-up to the outbreak of conflict on April 24 as a factor in the mobilization of Arab people.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ These totals were derived from interviewees sharing accounts of death or injury of Arab victims in interviews. Where possible, victims’ names were collected and checked against other testimonies. These numbers are likely incomplete as in many cases, interviewees were unable to identify the ethnicity of victims. Where interviewees were unable to determine the ethnicity of victims, we have included those numbers only in the final estimate of killed and injured and not in the final disaggregated by ethnicity. To prevent double counting, aggregate numbers from clinics, hospitals, and mass burials were excluded and reported separately. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine the proportion of those killed who were fighters.

⁵⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Habab, N’Djamena, July 30, 2023, and Bilqis, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁵⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Aziza, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Husniya, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; and Tariq, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

On April 10, 2023, five days before fighting broke out in Khartoum, a gunman allegedly belonging to the Sudanese Alliance killed a 12-year-old Arab boy in El Geneina. The Sudanese Alliance denied involvement in the incident. The boy's family members said they would avenge his killing, prompting then-deputy governor Karshoum to visit the family and pledge to investigate the crime and bring the perpetrators to justice.⁵⁵²

On April 20, two relatives said Mohammed Issa, his brother Hamdan Issa who was a deputy *Umda*, and a friend of theirs were all killed while traveling from al-Jabal to the central market.⁵⁵³ The circumstances of the killings are disputed, and Human Rights Watch was unable to verify details. Neither relative saw the killings, but said witnesses told them that SAF forces had tried to stop the group at a checkpoint outside the governor's office and that the men who were in the car were killed.⁵⁵⁴ Zeina, a former senior government official close to Governor Abbakar, said she witnessed the aftermath of the incident and that the men had been carrying ammunition in their vehicle.⁵⁵⁵ El Geneina residents cited the incident as contributing to tensions in the town prior to the outbreak of fighting on April 24.

Interviewees also witnessed forces kill their relatives and neighbors once the conflict escalated on April 24.

Leila, 25, said that on that day, an armed man on the back of a military vehicle fired with a Dushka in the direction of her home in Um Duwein—a predominantly Arab neighborhood—killing two of her neighbors. She said the vehicle was from the SAF but did not know which forces the gunman belonged to.⁵⁵⁶

Amira, 54, said that on April 25, men in SAF military uniforms came into her area in al-Nasseem with three armored vehicles.⁵⁵⁷ “Are you Arab?” she recalled them asking. When

⁵⁵² “West Darfur declares state of emergency after killing of three people,” *Sudan Tribune*, April 10, 2023, <https://sudantribune.com/article272780/> (accessed April 22, 2024) ; “West Darfur declares state of emergency, imposes dark-to-dusk curfew,” *Darfur 24*, April 10, 2023, <https://www.darfur24.com/en/2023/04/10/west-darfur-declares-state-of-emergency-imposes-dark-to-dusk-curfew/> (accessed April 22, 2024).

⁵⁵³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Husniya, Tleha village, July 25, 2023, and Tariq, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Husniya, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023.

⁵⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Leila, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Amira, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

the family replied yes, Amira said the forces shot her husband. Amira said the forces also shot an Arab couple living next door and cut the legs of another neighbor, killing him as he bled out. The assailants fired multiple rounds from their vehicles into the neighborhood, she said.

Rawiya, an Arab resident in the largely Massalit area of al-Madaress, said that on April 28 she saw three or four Massalit fighters stop a group of three unarmed men in civilian dress with covered faces. Rawiya believed it was “obvious” that the men were Arab. The Massalit fighters questioned the men about their identity and their reason for passing through the area. Rawiya said when one of the Arab men said he was Bargo, a Massalit fighter responded, “Even if you are from that tribe, why are you coming here?” Rawiya continued: “And the guy was explaining he’s not from here and doesn’t know anything. [The fighter asked again] ‘If you are from that tribe, why are you here?’ and then he started to shoot at the man.” Rawiya said the fighters shot again at the bodies to make sure they were dead, then used matches to light the bodies on fire and celebrated, saying the victims “deserved it.”⁵⁵⁸

Lana, an Arab woman, said that on May 15 a “sniper” shot a 12-year-old boy while he was fetching water with his sister. Lana joined a group that desperately tried to rescue the boy in al-Jamarek. She said Massalit fighters at a makeshift clinic stopped them and refused to provide treatment. “Speak [our] dialect! If you don’t speak our dialect, we won’t treat you,” she recalled them saying. The boy died. She believed “he was bleeding internally for hours—his stomach bloated,” she said.⁵⁵⁹

Lana said that in early June, a few days before the governor’s killing, a group of armed Massalit men attacked her area in al-Kifah, an ethnically mixed neighborhood home to Arabs and non-Arabs, including few Massalit people:

At 2 a.m., they started entering homes and looked for Arabs, while looting all the houses. Our checkpoint fired back heavily ... One neighbor ... had a heart attack and died ... around five Arabs [were] killed in their houses.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Rawiya, Chad, May 31, 2023.

⁵⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Lana, N’djamena, July 30, 2023.

⁵⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Lana, N’djamena, July 30, 2023.

Arab community members were also killed by heavy explosive attacks. Human Rights Watch was not able to establish which forces were responsible for these attacks.

Four Arab interviewees said munitions hit their homes and their neighbors' homes on April 24, during widespread attacks across the city.⁵⁶¹ They described incidents occurring in al-Jabal, al-Nasseem, al-Shati, and Um Duwein, killing twelve relatives and neighbors.

A munition pierced through the roof of Amira's house in al-Jabal at 11:30 p.m., killing her grandson who was in the kitchen.⁵⁶² Haifa said her neighborhood of al-Shati came under heavy fire that night and a munition destroyed the home of her neighbor, killing her 35-year-old neighbor, Najwa Goni, and her three young children.⁵⁶³ Haifa said her own 22-year-old brother was killed while praying when a metal fragment hit his stomach.

Four Arab interviewees described other explosive weapons attacks that killed 29 and injured at least 9 other Arab residents around late April.⁵⁶⁴ Haram recalled a particularly deadly attack.⁵⁶⁵ She said a shell ('*danna*') hit the home of her neighbors, trader Adam Mohammed Jumaa and his wife, Mariam. When she went there the next day, she found the building had collapsed. She said 19 people, including, men, women, and children had been killed. "The house was full of bodies," she said.

Six Arab women described explosive weapon attacks killing 14 relatives and neighbors in May in Dunkey 13, al-Jabal, and al-Nasseem.⁵⁶⁶ Fayruz said her two daughters, her brother, and three neighbors were killed in two explosive weapon incidents in early May.⁵⁶⁷ Yara likewise said her brother and aunt were killed and her house in Dunkey 13 collapsed when a munition hit it on May 23.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Bukhaita, 70, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Human Rights Watch interviews with Rayyan, 35, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview, Ruba, 22, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Amira, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Haifa, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁶⁴ Human Rights interviews with Khamisa, Chad, June 4, 2023; Haifa, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Mariam, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; and Nadia, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁶⁵ Human Rights interview with Haram, Chad, June 4, 2023.

⁵⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Fayruz, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Deena, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Noor, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Jenan, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Aaliyah, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; and Yara, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Fayruz, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Yara, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

Looting

Some of the attacks on Arab civilians also involved looting.⁵⁶⁹

In early May, two armed men in SAF uniforms entered a store belonging to Sara, 35, looted it, and burned it down. The assailants killed her brother when he tried to prevent them from looting, Sara said.⁵⁷⁰ One of the men cut her left arm and leg. They also attacked her son, cutting his arm with a knife.

“[There was] no food for us, things got very expensive,” said a 63-year-old woman resident of one of the predominantly Arab blocks in al-Jabal. “We suffered a lot. Massalit people also looted the market and other shops. We found some of the loot Massalit [people] had buried under the ground. They also looted vehicles [from Arabs].”⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tariq, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; Sara, Tleha village, July 25, 2023; and Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023.

⁵⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Sara, Tleha village, July 25, 2023.

⁵⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Habab, N'Djamena, July 30, 2023.

XII. New Wave of Attacks in the Last Remaining Refuge for Massalit - Ardamata

In early November 2023, the RSF and allied militias carried out another wave of widespread abuses, against mostly Massalit civilians who remained in the El Geneina suburb of Ardamata, which hosted the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) garrison and a camp where thousands of civilians fleeing previous violence had sheltered. Human Rights Watch published its investigation into the events on November 26, 2023.⁵⁷²

On November 1, in the wake of a string of battlefield victories by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) against the SAF across Darfur, fighting erupted between the two factions in Ardamata. Clashes continued for three days, and shelling resulted in civilian casualties.

On November 3, negotiations began between Massalit leaders and the RSF, facilitated by the de facto governor Karshoum. Massalit leaders hoped that civilians, in particular those living in Ardamata IDP camp, would be protected in exchange for Massalit fighters surrendering their weapons and not taking part in fighting against the RSF.⁵⁷³

On November 4, the garrison fell to the RSF. Videos dated November 4 from the RSF's official X (formerly known as Twitter) account and geolocated by Human Rights Watch show the RSF deputy commander, Abdel Raheem Hamdan Dagalo, the brother of RSF leader "Hemedti," in Ardamata celebrating with his forces the takeover of the



A militiaman whips and insults men and boys, part of a group of 38 people detained in Ardamata by the RSF and militias in early November 2023. © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)

⁵⁷² Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: New Mass Ethnic Killings, Pillage in Darfur" November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/sudan-new-mass-ethnic-killings-pillage-darfur>.

⁵⁷³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Amani, Chad, November 12, 2023.



Scores of men are made to run across a field near the El Geneina airport under the watch of militiamen, who insult them. © November 2023, User via Facebook

SAF base.⁵⁷⁴ Also present is Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah, the RSF's West Darfur commander.⁵⁷⁵ Abdel Raheem Dagalo subsequently announced the appointment of Barakallah as commander of the 15th military division.⁵⁷⁶

That day, the RSF and allied militias jointly attacked the IDP camp and other residential areas. Survivors said the RSF and allied forces shot at fleeing civilians and executed people in their homes and shelters, and in the streets.⁵⁷⁷ Survivors said the assailants insulted Massalit people and in some instances said they wanted to "kill Massalit."⁵⁷⁸ They killed primarily Massalit men, but some from non-Arab groups, notably Tama and Eringa people, were also killed and injured.⁵⁷⁹

The assailants unlawfully detained hundreds of men and children and ill-treated some.⁵⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch analyzed 8 videos and images posted on social media that show RSF personnel detaining over 200 men and boys in

Ardamata. One video shows the fighters beating a group of men.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁴ Rapid Support Forces (@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), "From within the 15th Infantry Division, El Geneina, the second commander of the Rapid Support Forces, stresses the security and protection of citizens and calls on organizations to provide humanitarian aid to civilians," November 4, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1720882520441389069> (accessed April 22, 2024).

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ "RSF 'captures West Darfur capital—poised to advance on North Darfur and Kordofan'," *Dabanga*, November 6, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/rsf-capture-west-darfur-capital-poised-to-advance-on-north-darfur-and-kordofan> (accessed April 22, 2024).

⁵⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interviews with three survivors, November 12, and November 13, 2023.

⁵⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a survivor, November 11, 2023.

⁵⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a survivor, November 11, 2023.

⁵⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interviews with three survivors, November 12, and November 13, 2023.

⁵⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: New Mass Ethnic Killings, Pillage in Darfur, November 26, 2023," November 26, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/sudan-new-mass-ethnic-killings-pillage-darfur>.

The assailants also carried out widespread looting and burned down residential areas in the IDP camp. Satellite imagery of the camp recorded from November 5 to 7 and analyzed by Human Rights Watch shows signs of looting and arson damage, with fire visible around the camp's cemetery.⁵⁸²

Local rights monitors who interviewed survivors arriving in Chad estimated the death toll of mainly civilians at between 1,300 and 2,000, including dozens killed on the road to Chad.

The fall of the SAF garrison and attacks on Ardamata further cemented the control of the RSF and allied militias over El Geneina, and all of West Darfur, and removed the last remaining place of refuge for Massalit communities near El Geneina.



RSF fighters open fire on a group of five unarmed men in civilian clothes, killing two on the spot, in Ardamata. © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)



Militiaman and RSF fighters stand next to men detained at the airport east of Ardamata in November 2023. © 2023 Private

⁵⁸² Ibid.

Deliberate Attacks on Massalit Towns, Villages, and Civilians in Other Parts of West Darfur

The widespread and systematic abuses in El Geneina as part of attacks against non-Arab civilians, primarily Massalit, documented in this report, have been replicated across West Darfur since the onset of fighting in Khartoum in April 2023.

The attacks include similar patterns of serious violations, taking the form of coordinated, large-scale attacks by the RSF and allied militias, deliberately targeting Massalit civilian men and sometimes boys for killings, and injuring and killing children and women. The RSF and allied militias also pillaged and destroyed civilian property owned by Massalit communities. The attacks sometimes lasted for days, resulting in the forcible displacement of tens of thousands of civilians.

Between April and July attackers burned down, in some cases completely, at least seven towns in the state, including Gokor, Habilla Kanari, Mejmere, Misterei, Molle, Murnei, and Sirba.

On May 28, 2023, thousands of RSF and allied militia fighters attacked the town of Misterei, summarily executing at least 28 ethnic Massalit people and killing and injuring dozens of other civilians. The assailants targeted men in particular, killing them in their homes, in the streets, or in their hiding places in a school complex in the town, and injured members of Massalit self-defense forces. They also fired on fleeing residents, killing and injuring women and children. Local officials said 97



Fires over Murnei, a West Darfur town attacked in June 2023 by the RSF and allied militias. © 2023 User via X (formerly known as Twitter)

people were later confirmed to have been killed, including self-defense force members. Human Rights Watch recorded the killing of at least 40 civilians, including a woman, and injuries to 14 civilians, including 5 women and 4 children.

Throughout the day, the attackers looted residents' property, stealing livestock, seeds, money, gold, mobile phones, and furniture. They set houses and the market on fire as they progressed through the town, forcing thousands of residents to flee across the border to Chad.

In mid-to-late June, the RSF and allied militias turned on civilians in Murnei, in West Darfur's Kereinik locality, having already demanded that residents hand over arms the RSF believed they were storing. The RSF and allied militias then attacked Murnei, killing residents as they fled the town, and carrying out widespread looting. The RSF and allied militias burned down the town on June 27. A resident who later returned to Murnei described increasing numbers of Arab militiamen occupying the town in the days and weeks that followed.

In the last week of July, RSF and allied militias burned down most residential areas of Sirba, a town 40 kilometers north of El Geneina, following several days of attacks on civilians in the town; active fires were visible over the town from July 27.⁵⁸³ Local groups reported that at least 200 people were killed, and thousands forced to flee toward neighboring villages or into Chad.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ Human Rights Watch, "Sudan: New Attacks in Darfur," August 4, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/04/sudan-new-attacks-darfur>; OCHA, "Sudan Humanitarian Update, (7 August 2023)," August 7, 2023, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/card/iF3UnFifww/> (accessed September 11, 2023); Caitlin N. Howarth, et. Al., "Sudan Observatory: Sirba, West Darfur, 24 July– 30 July, 2023" Sudan Conflict Observatory, August 2 2023, <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/33bda16ddba44a39562705offa85119/data> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁸⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Sudan Humanitarian Update (7 August 2023)," August 7, 2023, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/card/iF3UnFifww/> (accessed September 11, 2023); "Tragic Stories from Sirba as West Darfur Violence Spreads," *Dabanga*, August 1, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/tragic-stories-from-sirba-as-violence-west-darfur-spreads> (accessed September 11, 2023)

XIII. RSF, Tamazuj and Arab Community Leaders in Positions of Command

Rapid Support Forces

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) denied involvement in the fighting and abuses in El Geneina, framing the violence as a tribal conflict, and implicitly denied collaborating with militias. In a statement on May 13, 2023, the RSF said:

Our forces in West Darfur state have maintained their positions, following with great concern the developments of the tribal conflict in the state. They have also continued to monitor all the violations committed by the coup forces to add more fuel to the fire of tribal strife. We renew our call to the civil administrations, notables, youth, and resistance committees in West Darfur to renounce violence and stop tribal fighting immediately to avoid more bloodshed.⁵⁸⁵

In a statement from July 15, 2023, responding to a Human Rights Watch report outlining widespread RSF abuses in Misterei, the RSF reiterated its denials. It described events in West Darfur as “a purely tribal conflict,” in which the RSF “were not a party,” claiming that “there are no militias allied with the Rapid Support Forces in Darfur or other regions,” and that “most of the unruly Arab groups are affiliated to SAF Military Intelligence.”⁵⁸⁶

Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, “Hemedti”

As top commander of the RSF, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as “Hemedti,” bears primary command responsibility over RSF abuses documented in this report.

Hemedti has led the RSF since 2013, playing the dominant role in shaping the force’s dramatic expansion into a military force rivalling the military (see Section I on

⁵⁸⁵ Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), May 13, 2023, <https://twitter.com/rsfsudan/status/1657325295332999169> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁸⁶ Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), May 13, 2023, <https://twitter.com/rsfsudan/status/1680256857821069312> (accessed April 23, 2024).

Background).⁵⁸⁷ It is under his leadership that the RSF continued to recruit among Arab communities of West Darfur and integrated the Tamazuj armed groups into its ranks (see Section III sub-section on RSF, Militias, Tamazuj).

Gen. Abdel Raheem Hamdan Dagalo

Gen. Abdel Raheem Dagalo, Hemedti's brother and deputy commander of the RSF, shares command responsibility for the abuses committed by the RSF in Ardamata in November 2023.

A video published by the RSF on November 4 attests to Abdel Raheem Dagalo's presence in Ardamata at the time of the abuses. He subsequently appointed Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah as commander of the 15th Division (see Section XII on New Wave of Attacks in the Last Remaining Refuge for Massalit - Ardamata). The UN Panel of Experts found that Abdel Raheem Dagalo had "supervised" the operation to capture key Darfur cities in October-November 2023, including Ardamata.⁵⁸⁸



Screengrab from a video shows deputy RSF commander Abdel Raheem Hamdan Dagalo (center left) and General Joma'a Barakallah (center right) celebrating the RSF takeover of the SAF base in Ardamata in November 2023. © RSFSudan on X (formerly known as Twitter)

⁵⁸⁷ Jérôme Tubiana, "Remote-Control Breakdown, Sudanese Paramilitary Forces and Pro-Government Militias," Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan *HSBA Issue Brief*, April 2017, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/HSBA-IB-27-Sudanese-paramilitary-forces.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁸⁸ UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan, "Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan," S/2024/65, January 15, 2024, <https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2105266/n2400564.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2024).

The United States in September 2023 imposed an assets freeze on Abdel Raheem Dagalo for his leadership of the RSF and the RSF's involvement "in acts of violence and human rights abuses, including the massacre of civilians, ethnic killings, and use of sexual violence" (see Section XV on Regional and International Response).⁵⁸⁹ Canada imposed an assets freeze on Abdel Raheem Dagalo on April 15, 2024.⁵⁹⁰

Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah

Gen. Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah, commander of the RSF's West Darfur Sector since as early as November 2022, bears command responsibility for abuses committed by the RSF in West Darfur, including El Geneina, during the main period covered in this report.⁵⁹¹

On April 28, five days into the violence, Barakallah posted a video on X (formerly known as Twitter) in which he said he was in El Geneina.⁵⁹² Amin, a lawyer who fled El Geneina to Chad on May 28, said that on his way out of the city he saw Barakallah, surrounded by vehicles and soldiers, on the A5 main road south of the RSF headquarters, attesting to Barakallah's presence in the city during the conflict.⁵⁹³ Reuters identified five witnesses who "described seeing him with his forces, issuing instructions, at different times and places during the assault on the Massalit between April and June."⁵⁹⁴ One witness placed him around the al-Hojaj camp for displaced persons (IDP), which was destroyed by fire;

⁵⁸⁹ US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Sanctions Sudanese Paramilitary Leader", September 6, 2023, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1712> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁹⁰ Government of Canada, "Backgrounder: Sudan Sanctions," April 15, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2024/04/backgrounder--sudan-sanctions.html> (accessed April 19, 2024).

⁵⁹¹ Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), June 19, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1670709125133508608> (accessed April 23, 2024); "جانب من زيارته قائد قطاع" "غرب دارفور لمحلية سربا وحدة كندبي #قوات الدعم السريع" Video Clip, YouTube, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230403200614/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4hN1HGUGwg>; Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), March 20, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1637566751880642562> (accessed April 23, 2024); Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), April 3, 2023, <https://twitter.com/rsfsudan/status/1642979428887134210> (accessed April 23, 2024). Previously, as of June 18, 2022, Barakallah served as RSF commander in North Darfur. "Rapid Support Commander: (We will amputate the hand of every thief)," *Kush News*, April 23, 2024, <https://kushnews.net/2022/06/331499> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁹² Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), April 28, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1651963937557028865> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, July 21, 2023.

⁵⁹⁴ "The Sudanese commanders waging war on the Masalit," Reuters, December 28, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-politics-darfur-violence/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

three others said he was “overseeing” the shelling of the area of al-Jamarek around the governor’s compound.⁵⁹⁵

Rami, a former high ranking government official said Barakallah helped lead mobilization of fighters in El Geneina and distribute weapons in Abrukni, Shakawaya, Shukri, and Um Duwein.⁵⁹⁶ Rami said he witnessed RSF forces driving weapons towards these areas.

Videos circulated on June 14, 2023, show Barakallah escorting West Darfur governor Khamis Abbakar into a building before he was killed, indicating that Abbakar was in RSF custody shortly before his killing. In the video uploaded to X (formerly known as Twitter) on June 14, 2023, and verified by Human Rights Watch, Barakallah can be seen sheltering Abbakar from a chair being thrown at him by someone in a mixed crowd of gunmen in RSF uniform and civilian clothes at the RSF headquarters.⁵⁹⁷ An analysis of the direction and length of the shadows indicate the video was filmed in the late afternoon on June 14. The video attests to the presence of militia members in premises under RSF control.⁵⁹⁸ The US Treasury sanctioned Barakallah on September 6, 2023, for his role in the death of the governor.⁵⁹⁹ In an audio clip posted on Youtube by the RSF on June 16, 2023, Barakallah denied involvement in gross human rights violations and said his forces had attempted to escort Abbakar safely to Chad but were ambushed by unspecified forces who killed the governor.⁶⁰⁰

Barakallah played a central role in efforts to remove bodies from El Geneina in the aftermath of the massacres in mid-June, and potentially to hide evidence of crimes (see Section VIII sub-section on Mass Graves).⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Rami, former senior government official, July 29, 2023.

⁵⁹⁷ Waleed Hasbu(@waleedtherapy), post on X (formerly known as Twitter), June 14, 2023, <https://twitter.com/waleedtherapy/status/1669028166365585410> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁹⁸ WhatsApp video; منمنصة سودانيات @Sudaniaat, post on X (formerly known as Twitter), June 19, 2023, <https://twitter.com/sudaniaat/status/1670726188308783105> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁵⁹⁹ US State Department, “Actions against Senior Rapid Support Forces Commanders in Sudan,” September 6, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/actions-against-senior-rapid-support-forces-commanders-in-sudan/> (accessed April 22, 2024).

⁶⁰⁰ Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), July 19, 2023, <https://twitter.com/RSFSudan/status/1670709125133508608> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023, and Osama, human rights defender, Kampala, August 13, 2023.



A video posted by RSF's West Darfur commander, General Abdel Rahman Joma'a Barakallah, on April 28, 2023, five days into the violence, and geolocated by Human Rights Watch, attests to his presence in El Geneina near the RSF headquarters © 2023 RSFSudan via X (formerly known as Twitter)

Barakallah subsequently played a prominent role in the administration of local affairs in coordination with Arab tribal leaders. On June 24, 2023, the RSF posted a photo of Barakallah meeting in El Geneina with the Native Administration of West Darfur. An accompanying statement said they discussed “the security and humanitarian conditions in the state,” and that “he stressed the need to combat hate speech and racism and confront the criminals who caused the bloody events that took place in the state, in which hundreds of innocent people were killed and thousands of citizens were displaced.”⁶⁰²

Tamazuj

Members of the Tamazuj armed group were involved in key attacks in El Geneina, including the attack on the convoy to Ardamata on June 15 (see Section III on Forces and Mobilization in the El-Geneina conflict and Section VI Climax of the Campaign: June 15 Massacre and its Aftermath).

Musa Angir

Musa Angir is a commander of the Tamazuj armed group who witnesses identified as playing a leadership role on the ground as fighters carried out atrocities. Mansour, a human rights monitor, said he saw Musa Angir on June 6 direct RSF forces during an attack

⁶⁰² Rapid Support Forces(@RSFSudan), post to X (formerly known as Twitter), June 24, 2023, <https://twitter.com/rsfsudan/status/1672589118503526400> (accessed April 23, 2024).

on al-Gandoul center for displaced persons in al-Thawra, which was hosting around 200 families at the time:

I saw him directing his forces to attack [the] center with weapons, pointing in our direction and saying, ‘I don’t want any shelter center.’ He also directed his forces to burn the center.

Mansour, who managed to escape, said he believed the site had been targeted because it hosted activists. He named four activists who were killed during the attack.⁶⁰³

Ihsan, an employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, said that he saw Angir at a checkpoint littered with bodies, which he said was located on the banks of the Kajja river, in El Geneina’s mostly Arab suburb of Um Duwein:

We passed through the stadium and crossed the valley. As we were going, there was a well. Near that well there were many dead bodies ... no less than 20.... They showed [them to] us: “These are your colleagues, your people. We killed them!” They did that to scare us. [It was] Musa Angir who was on that road.⁶⁰⁴

Reuters identified three other witnesses who saw Angir direct forces during the attacks in El Geneina in 2023.⁶⁰⁵ In 2021 Angir had been charged by Sudan’s prosecutor-general for his involvement in the 2019 attacks on the Krinding camp.⁶⁰⁶

Arab Tribal Leaders

Arab tribal leaders, who in Sudan hold state-sanctioned roles under the Native Administration system, played a key role in mobilizing the militias and coordinating with the RSF.

⁶⁰³ Human Rights Watch remote exchange with Mansour, Chad, March 24, 2024.

⁶⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Ihsan, employee of the Sudanese Red Crescent, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁶⁰⁵ “The Sudanese commanders waging war on the Masalit,” Reuters, December 28, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-politics-darfur-violence/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

The Native Administration is a system of governance formalizing authority to traditional leaders, acknowledging their informal influence among their communities. It is a three-tiered system of *Amirs*, *Umdas*, and paramount chiefs (*nazirs*, *sultans*, *meliks*, and *shartais*).⁶⁰⁷ The Administration rules on disputes, addresses grievances, and allocates and negotiates resources. Native Administration leaders thus play an important role as brokers between their communities and outside entities, including the state, companies, and other organizations.⁶⁰⁸

Tribal leaders traditionally play a role in the mobilization of tribal militias, known as *Faza'* (see Section III sub-section on Arab Militias). Several Arab members of the Native Administration signed a ceasefire agreement with Massalit leaders on May 1, 2023, as they had done with previous reconciliation agreements, attesting to their formal authority over the tribes they represent, and which are involved in fighting.

Amir Massar Abdelrahman Assil

Amir Massar Abdelrahman Assil serves as the leader of the Native Administration of West Darfur and representative of the Rizeigat tribes.⁶⁰⁹ As *Amir*, Massar holds major influence over the Arab tribes and represents them when addressing potential disputes, conflicts, and communication with external entities.⁶¹⁰ Six interviewees including local leaders and human rights monitors identified *Amir* Massar as a key Arab leader responsible for mobilizing fighters and perpetuating violence in El Geneina.⁶¹¹

Amer, a Massalit community leader, said Massar mobilized fighters in El Geneina. On June 14, Amer fled to Ardamata and passed a checkpoint run by men he said were mobilized by Massar's militia.⁶¹² Reuters reported, "A Masalit [sic] tribal leader in El Geneina said he

⁶⁰⁷ Jérôme Tubiana, Victor Tanner, and Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, "Traditional Authorities' Peacemaking Role in Darfur," *United States Institute of Peace*, 2012, <https://files.ethz.ch/isn/155469/PW83.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁰⁸ Audrey Bottjen, "The Native Administration in Peace and Conflict: An Aid Worker's Primer," *The Conflict Sensitivity Facility*, March 31, 2022, <https://csf-sudan.org/the-native-administration-in-peace-and-conflict-an-aid-workers-primer/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁰⁹ El Geneina Facebook Live, <https://web.facebook.com/Elgeneinao/videos/975007877115746/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶¹⁰ El Geneina Facebook Live, <https://web.facebook.com/Elgeneinao/videos/975007877115746/> (accessed April 23, 2024); "The Saudi Ambassador receives a delegation from the native administration in Darfur," *Azza Press*, November 2, 2022, <https://www.azzapress.com/archives/46951> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Yousef, teacher, Chad, July 23, 2023; Rubab, teacher, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁶¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Amer, community leader, Chad, July 27, 2023.

saw [Massar] in a neighborhood called Donki [Dunkey] 13 in mid-June, traveling in a land cruiser and checking on the positions of Arab fighters.” In an interview with Reuters, Massar denied being a militia leader and said he had no link with the RSF.⁶¹³

The UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan reported in January 2024 that “*Amir* Massar Abdurahman Asseel” was “a leader of the Mahamid community based in the western outskirts of El Geneina,” who “facilitated the recruitment of militia to fight alongside the RSF.”⁶¹⁴ It found that militia gathered in “*Amir* Massar’s area, Kaskidik, Kurti, Um Sidera, Dula Laham, Adar, and Shukri” during massive mobilization around El Geneina that started weeks even before April 15 and continued through April 24.⁶¹⁵ The panel said that the RSF established local operational centers in the city’s neighborhoods and that “*Amir* Massar frequently visited some of these headquarters, distributing weapons and coordinating RSF-militia.”

On May 1, 2023, Arab and Massalit leaders from the Native Administration met to sign a ceasefire agreement, which Massar signed in his capacity as representative of the Rizeigat tribes.⁶¹⁶

Massar chaired the committee established in mid-June by RSF commander for West Darfur, Abdel Rahman Joma’a Barakallah, along with the newly appointed governor of West Darfur, al-Tijani Karshoum, and led by Khalil Hamid Dogorsho, to coordinate the collection and burial of bodies.⁶¹⁷

At a press conference held to address violence in El Geneina on August 21, 2023, Massar spoke to the role of the Arab tribes in targeting Massalit people during the conflict.⁶¹⁸ He said the Massalit community had been instigating violence against the Arab community in

⁶¹³ “The Sudanese commanders waging war on the Masalit [sic],” Reuters, December 28, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-politics-darfur-violence/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶¹⁴ UN Panel of Experts, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan,” para. 78.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid para. 78.

⁶¹⁶ Photo of ceasefire agreement on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁶¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Osama, human rights defender, Kampala, August 13, 2023; Human Rights Watch interview with Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶¹⁸ El Geneina Facebook Live, <https://web.facebook.com/Elgeneinao/videos/975007877115746/> (accessed April 23, 2024); “Press enlightenment regarding the events in West Darfur State (El Geneina)” August 21, 2023, video clip, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=975007877115746 (accessed April 29, 2024).

El Geneina for decades and that members of the Massalit community in the SAF started the conflict in El Geneina by providing support to Massalit fighters. He said:

Now we see the Massalit crying about what has happened. Brothers, you have created the problem! You instigated the problem and now you say, ‘They hit me like this, they threw me out, they killed me!’ So long as you are a person who started war, and wants war, and prepares for war, then stay strong and bear the outcomes of war!⁶¹⁹

In an interview with Alhurra News published on December 1, Massar addressed reports of sexual assault, calling them “empty lies.” He went on to say that tribal customs prohibit sexual violence and so it is not possible for members of his tribe to sexually assault Massalit women.⁶²⁰

Amir Hafiz Hassan

Hafiz Hassan is an *Amir* and member of the Native Administration. In interviews he was identified as coordinating with the RSF.⁶²¹ On May 1, 2023, Arab and Massalit leaders from the Native Administration met to sign a ceasefire agreement, which Hassan signed in his capacity as a member of the Native Administration.⁶²² A local official, an activist, and the UN panel of experts all said he was from the Misseriya tribe.⁶²³

A local official said Hassan was involved in coordinating with the RSF, mobilizing fighters, and supplying food to them.⁶²⁴ Abdelhamid, who worked in makeshift clinics in al-Jamarek, said Hassan was among the Arab leaders who prevented volunteers from burying bodies in al-Ghabat cemetery on June 21 (see above).⁶²⁵

⁶¹⁹ Ibid.

⁶²⁰ “Sudanese women describe being gang-raped in ethnically targeted attacks by Arab forces,” Reuters, November 30, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-politics-sexual-violence/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶²¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Jibril, N’ Djamena, July 28, 2023, and Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, N’Djamena, August 1, 2023.

⁶²² Photo of ceasefire agreement on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁶²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023. UN Panel of Experts, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan.”

⁶²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Afif, local official, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Abdelhamid, doctor, Chad, July 22, 2023.

The UN panel of experts identified Hafiz Hassan as one of the key individuals involved in the recruitment of militias to fight alongside the RSF from January to April 2023.⁶²⁶

Other Leaders

Al-Tijani al-Tahir Karshoum

Al-Tijani al-Tahir Karshoum has served as governor of West Darfur State since the killing of Governor Abbakar mid-June 2023, having previously served as deputy governor under Abbakar and head of the powerful state security committee.⁶²⁷ The position of deputy governor was a unique feature of the West Darfur administration, which interviewees said aimed to placate Arab tribes, since a Massalit figure held the governorship.⁶²⁸ Interviewees described tensions between Karshoum and Abbakar prior to the outbreak of conflict.⁶²⁹

The UN panel of experts reported in January 2024 that Karshoum was a leader of the Mahamid community based in al-Jabal and a member of the Gathering of Sudan Liberation Forces, a Juba Peace Agreement signatory armed group, who also “facilitated the recruitment of militia to fight alongside the RSF.”⁶³⁰ They found that militias mobilized along Karshoum’s al-Jabal block, during the massive mobilization around El Geneina that started in the weeks before April 15 and continued through April 24.⁶³¹

Reuters identified four witnesses who said they saw Karshoum with militiamen during attacks by the RSF and allied militias in El Geneina, including during attacks on the governor’s office in June and during the mass exodus on June 15.⁶³² The Darfur Bar

⁶²⁶ UN Panel of Experts, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan.”

⁶²⁷ Al-Tahir Shebinat, July 5, 2022, video clip, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8w2lc4Qloo> (accessed April 23, 2024); “Al-Tijani Karshoum, Deputy Governor of West Darfur,” *Sudan Media*, July 4, 2022, <https://sudamedia.net/13706/> (accessed April 23, 2024); “West Darfur government suspends director general of ministry of finance,” *Darfur 24*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.darfur24.com/en/2023/01/11/west-darfur-govt-suspends-director-general-of-ministry-of-finance/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Amin, lawyer, Chad, June 3, 2023 and July 21, 2023.

⁶²⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Amin, lawyer, Chad, June 3, 2023, and Zeina, former senior government official, Chad, July 29, 2023. In January 2023, Karshoum dismissed the state’s director general of the Ministry of Finance, who was said to have the support of Governor Abbakar, during a visit by Abbakar to Khartoum. “West Darfur government suspends director general of ministry of finance,” *Darfur 24*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.darfur24.com/en/2023/01/11/west-darfur-govt-suspends-director-general-of-ministry-of-finance/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶³⁰ UN Panel of Experts, “Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan,” para. 78.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 78

⁶³² “Sudanese women describe being gang-raped in ethnically targeted attacks by Arab forces,” Reuters, November 30, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/sudan-politics-sexual-violence/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

Association, a group of lawyers, accused Karshoum, alongside Barakallah, of being responsible for the killing of Governor Abbakar.⁶³³ Community leaders in the town of Sirba accused Karshoum of leading the attack on their town in July 2023.⁶³⁴

⁶³³ “Sudanese international community condemn killing of West Darfur Wali, fingers pointed at RSF,” *Dabanga*, June 16, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/182echnica-intl-community-condemn-killing-of-west-darfur-governor-fingers-pointed-at-rsf> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶³⁴ “Army accused of allowing violence to engulf Sirba in West Darfur,” *Dabanga*, July 31, 2023, <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/army-accused-of-allowing-violence-to-engulf-sirba-in-west-darfur> (accessed April 23, 2024).

XIV. Government Forces' Inability or Unwillingness to Protect

In the face of Rapid Support Forces (RSF) attacks, government forces present in El Geneina, including the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Central Reserve Police, a militarized police unit, seemed to be unable and perhaps unwilling to protect civilians.

While people interviewed by Human Rights Watch said government forces had sporadically offered people temporary protection or assistance, overall they did not respond in a coordinated fashion to the widespread attacks from late April to mid-June, and again in November. The SAF, which maintained significant forces at its base at Ardamata, appeared outnumbered and under-resourced to respond to the disastrous events unfolding from late April until mid-June.⁶³⁵ The SAF sent forces into El Geneina from its garrisons twice, suffering significant losses each time. Several interviewees suspected the local CRP leadership of complicity with the RSF, suspicions heightened by the fact that Governor Abbakar was killed shortly after his visit to the CRP headquarters.

This section covers the activities of the SAF and the CRP, but not those of the RSF which, from the beginning of the conflict in El Geneina, led and organized widespread attacks against civilians (see Section VI on Climax of the Campaign: June 15 Massacre and its Aftermath).

Sudanese Armed Forces

On the morning of April 24, SAF forces moved from their Ardamata garrison toward the joint Sudanese-Chadian Joint Force base in al-Jamarek neighborhood.⁶³⁶ An interlocutor of Governor Abbakar said, “[the] *wali* [governor] told me ... he did urge SAF not to move on April 24.”⁶³⁷ On their way back, fighting broke out between these SAF forces and the RSF

⁶³⁵ Satellite imagery analysis shows a significant SAF presence at the Ardamata garrison in this period, with evidence that, as of April 19, the forces had fortified the position, building some trenches on the road toward the airport. The images show armored personnel carriers and several “technicals” (pickups mounted with Dushka or heavy machine guns) at the garrison.

⁶³⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Karim, human rights activist, Chad, July 23, 2023; and Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁶³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

forces near the RSF base in al-Jamarek.⁶³⁸ Interviewees said SAF lost several soldiers in the attack, whose bodies were left unburied for days, and that the RSF captured SAF vehicles.⁶³⁹

The clashes spread into al-Jabal even before the SAF forces retreated, leaving civilians unprotected as the RSF, rapidly joined by large numbers of allied militias, began to attack the neighborhoods of al-Jamarek and al-Jabal.⁶⁴⁰ Many interviewees saw the speed with which the attacks escalated as evidence that the RSF forces' offensive was premeditated.⁶⁴¹ On April 25, the RSF and allied militias attacked majority-Massalit areas again. "The SAF was long gone by then," said a witness.⁶⁴²

In mid-May the SAF sent in a small convoy inside El Geneina to bolster the presence of security forces, but it was ambushed and only part of the convoy reached the governor's house in the city center.⁶⁴³ Muneer, the policeman who joined the Massalit self-defense forces, said, "The first area [they had to cross] was al-Nasseem [a predominantly Arab neighborhood].... They found themselves in an ambush. More than 40 soldiers were killed. The remaining who survived reached us in al-Madaress."⁶⁴⁴

During the critical days in mid-June, the SAF did not stage any intervention to protect civilians. In the June 14 interview with al-Haddath TV, Governor Abbakar before he was killed, said: "We talked a lot with the central government, and the leader of the regional government [of Darfur].... There has been no answer from the regional government or the central government." He responded to a question about the SAF response by saying: "the

⁶³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Adnan, Chad, July 22, 2023; and Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023.

⁶³⁹ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Abderahim, community leader, May 16, 2023. Human Rights Watch interviews with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023, and Karim, human rights activist, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁶⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Tamer, Chad, June 8, 2023; Yahya, former advisor to the governor, Chad, July 23, 2023; Karim, human rights activist, Chad, July 23, 2023; Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023; Adib, lawyer, Chad, July 24, 2023; and Hafsa, former employee of an international aid organization, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Haroun, Sudanese Alliance fighter, Chad, July 22, 2023; Hafsa, former employee of an international aid organization, Chad, July 30, 2023; Marajan, employee of a humanitarian organization, N'Djamena, August 1, 2023; and Aqeel, 33, activist, N'djamena, August 1, 2023.

⁶⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Hafsa, former employee of an international aid organization, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023, and Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁶⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Taher, medical worker, July 28,

[SAF is] 7 km [away]. They can't leave to protect the state. In the [last] 57 days we have not seen the SAF leave from its bases to even protect civilians.”

That evening, after the governor had been killed and as crowds gathered around his office, the SAF unit that was deployed in central El Geneina, together with commanders from the self-defense groups and the Sudanese Alliance, decided to go to Ardamata with their families (see Section V on Mass Exodus: June 14). The plan involved passing through areas such as al-Nasseem and al-Shati that were under the control of the RSF and allied militias. Despite the obvious risks involved, civilians felt they had no choice but to follow the forces, hoping for protection. There were two SAF armored vehicles leading the column, and three armored vehicles further back in the middle of the convoy, though it is unclear if these belonged to the SAF or the Sudanese Alliance.⁶⁴⁵ The SAF vehicles at the front reached Ardamata without fighting and were not present when the column came under attack.

Witnesses described several instances, however, when, in the aftermath of the attack on the convoy, SAF soldiers in the Ardamata base exchanged fire with the forces attacking civilians. Adam was among those who crossed the Kajja river and sought to reach Ardamata along the eastern shore. Nearing Ardamata, his group came under attack from the east:

The SAF soldiers were asking us to cross the river there [westwards again] but we told them it's impossible. We asked them, 'Please help us to stop the shooting coming from the Um Duwein direction!' so they fired very heavily at them, so [the assailants] stopped. With that we managed to reach Ardamata.⁶⁴⁶

Ismail and his group, who fled on June 16, found shelter on the SAF base while running from RSF fire.⁶⁴⁷ He said: “We were waving our hands at the SAF base. Finally, some soldiers saw us and shot at the RSF forces to get the RSF to stop firing at us.... We ran into the canal to hide. The SAF let us into their base and gave us tea.”

⁶⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saif, 17, Chad, July 27, 2023, and Taher, medical worker, Chad, July 28, 2023.

⁶⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Adam, government employee, July 24, 2023.

⁶⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Arbat, employee of a medical institution, Chad, July 31, 2023.

Central Reserve Police

Central Reserve Police (CRP) forces stationed at their headquarters on the western outskirts of the city, near the RSF headquarters, were also largely unable or unwilling to respond to attacks on civilians until mid-June.⁶⁴⁸

Interviewees close to the governor repeatedly mentioned that both in May, and again in the days preceding his killing, the governor tried to deploy the CRP as protection forces. Mustafa, 38, a former civil servant, said he discussed in May with the governor and executive director of the locality about deploying more “neutral” forces, including the CRP and Juba Peace Agreement signatory groups, from northern parts of the state:

The plan was: the northern side of the city is controlled by Arabs, so we have to open al-Rahma clinic for Arabs, and the south is controlled by Massalit so we can open Sultan Tajeddine medical complex there, for the Massalit and non-Arabs. And we need to have humanitarian access. The governor said: ‘I don’t have a problem. This is good. But what about the forces to protect this?’ Our plan was this: the CRP must be the main force to protect these areas. He agreed.⁶⁴⁹

The plans never materialized, reportedly because of delays in the deployment of forces from other Juba Peace Agreement signatory groups and because of new attacks in the town.

In the days preceding June 14, leaders from across communities sought to find a way to guarantee the evacuation of the wounded. A prominent rights activist described his discussions with the governor and the Humanitarian Aid Commissioner during those days:

I met Khamis [the governor] and that was the last time I saw him before he was killed. I told him that in the clinic and operating theater, we have nothing. Doctors are complaining. He said he was negotiating with the CRP,

⁶⁴⁸ The CRP was repeatedly deployed in Khartoum following the 2021 coup to clamp down on protests. The CRP led one of the most lethal days of repression, on January 17, 2022. In 2022 the U.S imposed sanctions on the unit. See Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: Ongoing Clampdown on Peaceful Protesters,” February 3, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/03/sudan-ongoing-clampdown-peaceful-protesters>.

⁶⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

to let them collect the seriously wounded and take them to Chad, and bring back more medication.⁶⁵⁰

But the activist was skeptical of the governor's confidence and believed the CRP leadership was complicit with the RSF. "The CRP never intervened. Their HQ is adjacent to the RSF," the activist said. "The governor said, 'No, no! I am in touch and will go and meet him in person.' I said this was a dangerous route. The governor said, 'My soldiers will take care of it.'"⁶⁵¹

On June 14, the governor went to the CRP headquarters, leading to his capture.⁶⁵² Yahya, a government advisor said he had gone there "because they [the CRP] had a few forces and 25 vehicles, [so] he went to ask them if they could use their vehicles to get civilians out" (see Section V on Mass Exodus: June 14).

Throughout the next 24 hours, following the killing of the governor and the chaos and mayhem that ensued, civilians repeatedly headed toward the CRP headquarters as they tried to flee to safety. The compound on June 15 was surrounded by the RSF and allied militias, said Wahida, a medical worker who went there.⁶⁵³ Interviewees described some instances in which CRP forces sporadically offered civilians temporary shelter during that time, but they otherwise appeared to be unable or unwilling to offer real protection.⁶⁵⁴

A lawyer who fled in a convoy of around 2,000 people on the morning of June 15, said that as they neared the RSF headquarters, a CRP official intervened to protect them from RSF forces and provided temporary shelter at the CRP headquarters:⁶⁵⁵

When we reached there, the captain ordered us to go. There is a big empty compound, it used to be a training camp. We rested there. There were

⁶⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁶⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023.

⁶⁵² Human Rights Watch interviews with Human Rights Watch interview with Aqeel, human rights activist, N'Djamena, July 20, 2023; Muneer, policeman who later joined Massalit self-defense forces, Chad, July 27, 2023; and Mustafa, former civil servant, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Wahida, medical worker, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023, and Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

⁶⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Mousa, lawyer, Chad, July 23, 2023.

people who had spent the night there already. When we got there, we found [a group of] RSF personnel, they had two bags.... They ordered everybody to put their phones, money, knives, ID cards, and any other documents in that bag. And to enter there without anything.

He continued: “We spent half an hour there. Another group arrived. People were just coming. Some CRP members came and told us: ‘For now there is no problem, but there is no other option for you, you have to go to Chad.’”⁶⁵⁶

Mohamed, a teacher, was able to spend a night at the CRP headquarters on June 18, but “they were not neutral, and they were not protecting civilians.... When I was there, I met my classmate, he’s a CRP person. He told me, ‘This place is not safe for you, you have to go and spend the night somewhere [else].’”⁶⁵⁷

Hajar, 39, fled with her 15-year-old son on June 15. “We went together to the Central Reserve Police HQ to beg for water, and we brought with us a wounded man in a wheelbarrow. The Central [Reserve] Police told us to leave. My son said: ‘No, I am too scared they will kill me!’ The police said to me, ‘Cover him and dress him like a girl.’”⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interviewed a child who survived rape and was able to shelter for ten days at the CRP Headquarters. Human Rights Watch interview with Zainab, Chad, July 30, 2023.

⁶⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Mohammed, teacher, Chad, July 22, 2023.

⁶⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Hajar, Chad, July 24, 2023.

XV. Regional and International Response

Despite the magnitude of events documented in this report, the international and regional responses have been shockingly inadequate. The global community has failed to act to prevent further atrocities or to provide an adequate humanitarian response. The inaction pales in comparison to the situation 20 years ago, when global leaders felt morally and legally obliged to act on Darfur.

Initially, little accurate real-time information was available regarding events in El Geneina. International aid staff were evacuated in late April, and local human rights defenders came under attack. The complete communications shutdown that began in mid-May further cut the city off from the world for weeks. Two months into the crisis, public condemnations began to be voiced.

On June 13, 2023, the UN Secretary-General expressed concerns over spiraling violence across Darfur including El Geneina, and the “increasing ethnic dimension of the violence.”⁶⁵⁹

At a closed-door briefing on Sudan at the Security Council on August 9, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, evoked the reports of widespread abuses coming out of West Darfur. “One of the worst chapters of recent history is repeating itself. And it’s beyond horrifying,” she said:

The Security Council, and the entire international community, has a responsibility to demand the parties comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians. We have a responsibility to ensure humanitarian assistance can reach people in dire need.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁹ United Nations, “Secretary-General Deeply Concerned by Reports of Violence across Darfur,” SG/SM/21836, June 13, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21836.doc.htm> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁶⁰ United States Mission to the United Nations, “Remarks by Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield at the UN Security Council Stakeout Following a Briefing on Sudan,” August 9, 2023, <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-at-the-un-security-council-stakeout-following-a-briefing-on-sudan/> (accessed October 19, 2023).

On September 13, five months after the violence started in West Darfur, Volker Perthes, then UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNITAMS, also raised the issue in his last briefing to the Council:

The Massalit community ... has been living in a pervasive fear of being attacked due to their ethnicity following the heinous murder of West Darfur governor and of other Massalit leaders mid-June.⁶⁶¹

Despite these warnings neither the UN Security Council, nor the African Union Peace and Security Council, nor other concerned governments have acted to effectively confront the perpetrators, stem the abuses, or ensure the protection of civilians at risk.

The UN Security Council has been largely paralyzed. On April 29, five days after the attacks started in El Geneina, the council member states condemned the violence, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and “transparent” investigations, but the Security Council was then silent for almost a year until March 2024, when it adopted a resolution calling for a ceasefire during the holy month of Ramadan.⁶⁶² The council has proved unable to jointly call for the existing arms embargo on Darfur to be respected, and for months took no action on reporting by the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan detailing the Rapid Support Forces and militias’ abuses. No known discussion or exploration of options has occurred on the need to protect civilians in Sudan.

On September 6, the United States imposed visa restrictions on RSF commander in West Darfur, Abdel Rahman Joma’a Barakallah, for “gross human rights violations,” and his alleged role in the killing of Governor Abbakar and Abbakar’s brother.⁶⁶³ It also imposed an assets freeze on Abdel Raheem Hamdan Dagalo due to his leadership in the RSF and their responsibility for human rights abuses, including conflict-related sexual violence and

⁶⁶¹ UNITAMS, “SRSG For Sudan and Head of Unitams Volker Perthes Remarks to the Security Council On 13 September 2023,” September 13, 2023, <https://unitams.unmissions.org/en/srsg-sudan-and-head-unitams-volker-perthes-remarks-security-council-13-september-2023> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁶² United Nations, “Security Council Press Statement on Darfur, Sudan,” SC/14878, April 29, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14878.doc.htm> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁶³ “Actions Against Senior Rapid Support Forces Commanders in Sudan,” US Department of State press release, September 6, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/actions-against-senior-rapid-support-forces-commanders-in-sudan/> (accessed October 19, 2023).

ethnically-based killings.⁶⁶⁴ On December 6, the United States State Department released an “atrocities determination,” finding that both the SAF and the RSF had committed war crimes and that the RSF and its allied militias had committed ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in Darfur. It is not obvious, however, what the implications of that determination will be for US policy toward Sudan.⁶⁶⁵

The European Union in January 2024 sanctioned six companies affiliated to the SAF and the RSF, but has not targeted individuals responsible for abuses.⁶⁶⁶ The UK’s Minister of State for Development and Africa Andrew Mitchell said in August 2023 that: “reports of deliberate targeting and mass displacement of the Massalit community in Darfur are particularly shocking and abhorrent,” adding that the UK will provide evidence to the UN Human Rights Council, UN Security Council and the ICC. However, at time of writing, the UK had not imposed sanctions on any individual suspects, only frozen the assets of six commercial entities, three linked to the SAF and three to the RSF.⁶⁶⁷

When the conflict between the RSF and the SAF broke out, the only presence the UN had in the field in Sudan was UNITAMS, a small political mission not tailored for such a complex environment. Even before April 2023, UNITAMS had been unable to step up its protection work in West Darfur (see Section I sub-section on Departure of the AU-UN Peacekeeping Mission: December 2020).⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁴ US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Sudanese Paramilitary Leader”, press release, September 6, 2023. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1712> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: Action Key After Atrocities Determination,” Human Rights Watch press release, December 11, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/11/sudan-action-key-after-us-atrocities-determination>.

⁶⁶⁶ European Union Council, “Sudan council adds six entities to the EU sanctions list,” January 22, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/01/22/sudan-council-adds-six-entities-to-eu-sanctions-list/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁶⁷ United Kingdom parliament, “Sudan: Sanctions on Entities Linked to SAF and RSF,” UK Parliament Statement, July 12, 2023, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-07-12/debates/23071219000008/SudanSanctionsOnEntitiesLinkedToSAFAndRSF> (accessed April 25, 2024); Patrick Wintour, “War crimes being committed in Darfur, says UK minister Andrew Mitchell,” *the Guardian*, August 22, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/22/war-crimes-being-committed-in-darfur-says-uk-minister-andrew-mitchell> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁶⁸ UN Security Council, Resolution 2524 (2020), S/RES/2524 (2020), June 3, 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3864102?ln=en> (accessed October 19, 2023); In the months leading up to the conflict, and despite more than two years in operation, it had still not scaled up its protection presence in El Geneina, despite having been granted additional resources that could have enabled it to do so. Human Rights Watch interview with a humanitarian, October 20, 2022; Human Rights Watch interview with a humanitarian, October 27, 2022; Human Rights Watch interview with a humanitarian, January 19, 2023.

The outbreak of fighting between the RSF and the SAF further weakened the mission. In June, the Government of Sudan, led by the SAF, declared Perthes persona non grata.⁶⁶⁹ On September 13, he resigned. On November 16, Sudan's acting foreign minister informed the UN that it was withdrawing its consent to continue hosting UNITAMS.⁶⁷⁰ The Security Council on December 1 endorsed the move, accepting a gradual drawdown ending in February, thereby stripping the UN of any semblance of a civilian protection mandate in the country.⁶⁷¹ On November 17, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed Ramtane Lamamra as his personal envoy to Sudan.

Throughout that period, there were no concrete discussions either at the level of the UN system, between member states at the Security Council, or at the African Union, or in other fora, on how to provide protection for civilians, notably in Darfur.

However, there have been efforts to pave the way for accountability for the abuses. On July 13, 2023, prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Karim Khan, warned of a “peril of allowing history to repeat itself” and announced at the UN Security Council that his office was investigating allegations of crimes committed in West Darfur since April.⁶⁷² In his January 2024 briefing to the Council, Khan decried the lack of cooperation from Sudan and the RSF. He said: “We have not received a scrap of paper from the Sudanese Armed Forces ... despite the oft-cited investigative committee that the Sudanese Armed Forces say has been established to catalogue and investigate any investigations of crimes, we have received no information whatsoever. Thirty-five requests for assistance remain unanswered by the government of Sudan.”⁶⁷³ He added, “And the same really applies to

⁶⁶⁹ “UN Says Sudan Cannot Apply Persona Non Grata to UN Envoy,” *Reuters*, June 9, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-says-sudan-cannot-apply-persona-non-grata-un-envoy-2023-06-09/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁷⁰ “Sudan Asks UN to ‘Immediately Terminate’ Political Mission – Letter,” *Reuters*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-asks-un-immediately-terminate-political-mission-letter-2023-11-16/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁷¹ “Sudan Asks UN to ‘Immediately Terminate’ Political Mission – Letter,” *Reuters*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudan-asks-un-immediately-terminate-political-mission-letter-2023-11-16/> (accessed April 23, 2024); “Security Council Agrees to Terminate Political Mission in Sudan,” UN News, December 1, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144257> (accessed March 20, 2024).

⁶⁷² UN Security Council, “History at Risk of Repeating, International Criminal Court Prosecutor Tells Security Council, Urging Accountability for New Crimes in Darfur,” UN Press Release, SC/15354, July 13, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15354.doc.htm> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁷³ International Criminal Court, “Statement of the ICC Prosecutor, em A.A., Khan KC, to the United Nations Security Council on the Situation in Darfur, pursuant to Resolution 1593 (2005),” January 30, 2024, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-khan-kc-united-nations-security-council-situation-darfur-1> (accessed March 11, 2024).

the RSF. In November, we finally received the names of individuals that they contended were part of an investigative committee.”⁶⁷⁴

The UN Human Rights Council on October 11 voted in favor of a resolution establishing the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan to investigate human rights abuses in Sudan since the start of the conflict, including crimes in West Darfur.⁶⁷⁵

At the regional level, the African Union (AU), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and individual governments have done little to address the situation in West Darfur. On June 10, the IGAD Secretary-General said that the authority should coordinate with the AU and the international community to “act decisively in preventing further alleged atrocities,” addressing the situation in West Darfur.⁶⁷⁶ In July, the IGAD proposed the deployment of the East Africa Standby Forces (ESAF) to provide civilian protection and facilitate humanitarian aid. The SAF quickly rejected the proposal, and it appears to have since been dropped.⁶⁷⁷ In January 2024, the IGAD focused its calls on the need for a ceasefire, and for parties to negotiate.⁶⁷⁸ In late 2023, the AU appointed a High-Level Panel on Sudan. However, the African Union Heads of States Summit was held in February 2024 without a single high-level meeting on Sudan. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights released a statement in November, condemning the ethnically targeted abuses in Darfur, welcoming the establishment of the UN Human Rights Council-mandated fact-finding mission, and calling on Sudan’s neighbors to facilitate the work of the mission.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ UN Human Rights Council, “Human Rights Council Adopts 16 Texts, Establishes a Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan and a Working Group on the Rights of Peasants,” October 11, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/10/human-rights-council-adopts-16-texts-establishes-fact-finding-mission-sudan-and> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁷⁶ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), “Official Statement Workneh Gebeyehu, IGAD Executive Secretary Heads of State and Government Meeting of the IGAD Quartet Group of Countries on Peace and Stability in the Republic of Sudan Monday 10th June 2023,” June 10, 2023, <https://igad.int/official-statement-workneh-gebeyehu-igad-executive-secretary-heads-of-state-and-government-meeting-of-the-igad-quartet-group-of-countries-on-peace-and-stability-in-the-republic-of-sudan-monday-10th-j/> (accessed October 19, 2023).

⁶⁷⁷ “Could African peacekeeping forces deploy in Sudan?” *New Arab*, July 20, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/could-african-peacekeeping-forces-deploy-sud> (accessed March 20, 2024).

⁶⁷⁸ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), “Communiqué of the 42nd Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government,” January 18, 2024, <https://igad.int/communique-of-the-42nd-extraordinary-assembly-of-igad-heads-of-state-and-government/> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁷⁹ African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, “Resolution on the Human Rights and Humanitarian Crisis Caused by the Ongoing armed conflict in the Republic of Sudan,” December 29, 2023, ACHPR/Res.578 (LXXVII) 2023, <https://africanlii.org/akn/aa-au/statement/resolution/achpr/2023-12-29/resolution-on-the-human-rights-situation-and->

Underfunded, Under-resourced Humanitarian Response

The hundreds of thousands of people from El Geneina and surrounding areas who became refugees when they arrived in Adré, Chad in mid-June, met a woefully underfunded international humanitarian response. As of early April, only 4 percent of the regional refugee response plan was funded.⁶⁸⁰

The initially small group of organizations present in eastern Chad when the displacement crisis began in 2023 struggled to provide a basic adequate response to this deeply vulnerable population. The needs are immense: as of March 2024, 570,000 Sudanese had crossed into Chad since April 2023, 65 percent of them Massalit.⁶⁸¹ Eighty-eight percent are women and children.⁶⁸² As of late October 2023, 75 percent of the 450,000 Sudanese refugees who had arrived in Chad since April 2023 were from El Geneina.⁶⁸³

The main humanitarian organizations present in the region have warned of the consequences of severe underfunding. The World Food Programme (WFP), which has provided essential food assistance to hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees in Adré, announced in March 2024 that its assistance “will be suspended for 1.2 million Sudanese refugees and crisis-affected people in April due to funding shortfalls, including for new Sudanese refugees.”⁶⁸⁴ Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF), warned also in March of a spread in hepatitis E cases “exacerbated by poor sanitation and a desperate shortage of clean water in the camps,” and condemned the “insufficient funding” for aid groups.⁶⁸⁵ In mid-August 2023, MSF had already warned of an “alarming

humanitarian-crisis-caused-by-the-ongoing-armed-conflict-in-the-republic-of-the-sudan/eng@2023-12-29 (accessed January 26, 2024).

⁶⁸⁰ UNHCR, “Sudan Situation: UNHCR External Update #53 – 20 March 2024”, March 20, 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107453> (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁸¹ UNHCR, “Rapport Opérationnel Hebdomadaire (as of 05 Avril 2024),” April 8, 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107733> (accessed April 23, 2024); Human Rights Watch interview with humanitarians, April 5, 2024.

⁶⁸² UNICEF, “Humanitarian Situation Report N. 7,” March 10, 2024, [https://www.unicef.org/media/153541/file/Chad-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.7-\(L2-Emergency-Scale-Up\)-29-February-2024.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/153541/file/Chad-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.7-(L2-Emergency-Scale-Up)-29-February-2024.pdf) (accessed April 23, 2024).

⁶⁸³ Data on file with Human Rights Watch received by email from UNHCR, October 29, 2023. Human Rights Watch meeting with UNHCR Chad, April 5, 2024.

⁶⁸⁴ WFP, “WFP races to preposition food in Eastern Chad as funding crunch and looming rains threaten aid to Sudanese refugees,” March 12, 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-races-preposition-food-eastern-chad-funding-crunch-and-looming-rains-threaten-aid-sudanese> (accessed March 21, 2024).

⁶⁸⁵ MSF, “MSF calls for urgent action as Hepatitis E spreads through the Sudanese refugee camps in Chad,” March 19, 2024, <https://msf.or.ke/news-and-resources/news/msf-calls-urgent-action-hepatitis-e-spreads-through-sudanese-refugee-camps> (accessed April 9, 2023); MSF, “MSF calls for urgent international support for refugees in Chad as major crisis looms,”

rate of malnutrition.” UNICEF in February 2024 similarly reported acute under-funding of its response in Eastern Chad.⁶⁸⁶

Within West Darfur, international aid organizations evacuated all their international staff from El Geneina and halted aid distribution altogether within days of the outbreak of violence in April 2023. Several organizations later renegotiated access with the new de facto authorities that seized control of the city in mid-June: the RSF, El Geneina’s new de facto governor al-Tijani Karshoum, and native administration Arab leaders.

In mid-July, the French-NGO, Solidarités, was the first international aid actor to re-initiate operations in the city, focusing on water and sanitation activities, notably water-trucking.⁶⁸⁷ From August, UN agencies, including WFP and the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, began to organize a handful of cross-border distribution operations from Chad into West Darfur state.⁶⁸⁸ MSF began supporting the El Geneina Teaching Hospital again from October.

The response here too has been marred by serious underfunding, with only 6% of the Sudan Humanitarian Response plan funded as of April 2024.⁶⁸⁹

For over a month from February through to April 2024, UN convoys stopped entering Sudan from Eastern Chad along the route toward El Geneina following a Sudanese Armed Forces declaration that it would no longer allow such cross-border movement.

August 14, 2023, <https://www.msf.org/msf-calls-urgent-international-support-refugees-chad-major-crisis-looms> (accessed April 9, 2023).

⁶⁸⁶ UNICEF, “Humanitarian Situation Report No. 7,” March 10, 2024, [https://www.unicef.org/media/153541/file/Chad-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.7-\(L2-Emergency-Scale-Up\)-29-February-2024.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/153541/file/Chad-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.7-(L2-Emergency-Scale-Up)-29-February-2024.pdf) (accessed March 19, 2024).

⁶⁸⁷ “Sudan: the Theatre of Endless Violence,” Solidarités International news, July 13, 2023, <https://www.solidarites.org/en/live-from-the-field/sudan-the-theater-of-endless-violence/>; Human Rights Watch telephone interview with aid worker, July 25, 2023.

⁶⁸⁸ Relief web, “Sudan Situation - UNHCR External Update #25, 29 August – 4 September 2023,” September 6, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-situation-unhcr-external-update-25-29-august-4-september-2023> (accessed October 17, 2023); “Sudan’s Worsening Violence, Humanitarian Crisis Could Foreshadow Civil War, Senior Officials Warn Security Council, Calling for Urgent Action to End Conflict,” United Nations press release, SC/15409 September 13, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15409.doc.htm> (accessed October 17, 2023); UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “Sudan Situation Report,” August 17, 2023, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-situation-report-17-august-2023> (accessed December 6, 2023).

⁶⁸⁹ OCHA Financial Tracking Service, “Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024,” 2024, <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1188/summary> (accessed April 23, 2024).

XV. International Legal Standards

The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces that began in April 2023 is a non-international armed conflict governed primarily by international humanitarian law.⁶⁹⁰ International humanitarian law—otherwise known as the laws of war or of armed conflict—regulates what can and cannot be done during armed conflict and aims among other things to protect civilians and other non-combatants and reduce suffering. The laws of war in a non-international conflict can be found in Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions, the 1977 Additional Protocol II, and customary international humanitarian law.

The laws of war are binding on all parties to the conflict. International human rights law also remains applicable and provides complementary protection to victims during times of conflict.

Potential crimes in violation of international law that have been committed include genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Genocide

The crime of genocide in international law involves the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such, by killing its members or by: causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹⁰ For analysis of the conflict as non-international in character see, “Questions and Answers on Sudan and The Laws of War,” Human Rights Watch Question and Answer, April 25, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/25/questions-and-answers-sudan-and-laws-war>.

⁶⁹¹ See for example, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted December 9, 1948, G.A. Res. 260 A (III), entered into force January 12, 1951, Article II; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute), A/CONF.183/9, July 17, 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, art. 6.

Genocide is distinct from other crimes because of this special, specific intention, as a constitutive element of the crime.⁶⁹² Genocide can be committed against a part, but a substantial or significant part, of an identified group,⁶⁹³ and in a limited geographic zone, such as a region or municipality.⁶⁹⁴

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide commits state parties to prevent and punish, not only genocide itself, but also conspiracy, incitement and attempt to commit genocide as well as complicity in genocide. It provides that the crimes should be tried before a competent tribunal in the state where the act took place, or before a competent international tribunal with the requisite jurisdiction. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has jurisdiction over the crime of genocide, and in particular enjoys jurisdiction in Darfur.

International Criminal Court judges issued an arrest warrant in 2010 against former president Omar al-Bashir on three charges of genocide related to the period 2003-2008 (genocide by killing; genocide by causing serious bodily or mental harm; and genocide by deliberately inflicting on each target group conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction. See also Section 1 Background).⁶⁹⁵ Bashir remains a fugitive and there has yet to be a prosecution before the ICC for genocide during that period in Darfur.

As documented in this report and elsewhere, the RSF's ethnic cleansing campaign against the Massalit in El Geneina and its surrounding areas has been characterized by targeted ethnic killings and widespread use of rape and sexual violence, as well as mass forced displacement. Local groups have identified efforts by the RSF and its allied militia to target prominent members of the Massalit community, looking for individuals by name. Witnesses testified how Massalit were called by derogatory names such as “*Zurga*,” “*Nuba*,” and “*Ambaya*”, and how many direct perpetrators said that Massalit people should be killed.

⁶⁹² See for example, *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, Case No. ICTR-96-4-T (Trial Chamber), September 2, 1998, para. 498; *Prosecutor v. Jelusic*, Case No. IT-95-10 (Appeals Chamber), July 5, 2001, para. 45.

⁶⁹³ *Prosecutor v. Krstic*, Case No. IT-98-33 (Trial Chamber), August 2, 2001, para. 634; *Prosecutor v. Jelusic*, Case No. IT-95-10, (Trial Chamber), December 14, 1999, para. 82.

⁶⁹⁴ *Prosecutor v. Jelusic*, Case No. IT-95-10 (Trial Chamber), December 14, 1999, para. 83.

⁶⁹⁵ See, *Prosecutor v. Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir*, Case No. ICC-02/05-01/09, July 14, 2008.

The crimes identified and context have raised the possibility that genocide has been and/or is being committed in Darfur. Warnings of the risk of genocide have been issued by senior UN figures and experts, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi⁶⁹⁶ and the UN Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, Alice Nderitu, who in November 2023 concluded “[c]urrent dynamics in the region could lead to further mass killings.... The risks of genocide and related atrocity crimes in the region remain grimly high.”⁶⁹⁷ The European Union's chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, also in November stated that “[t]he international community cannot turn a blind eye on what is happening in Darfur and allow another genocide to happen in this region.”⁶⁹⁸

Because of the limitations of its research, Human Rights Watch has not reached a determination on whether the intent required for the crime of genocide has been established in relation to atrocities committed in Darfur either during the 2003 - 2006 period or in the current conflict since April 2023. However, the commission of potential genocidal acts of mass killing, rape, and infliction of conditions of life that could bring about the destruction of a group, requires urgent action from all governments and international institutions to prevent the perpetration of genocide in Darfur, and through mechanisms such as the ICC and the Independent Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, to investigate whether there exists among the RSF leadership and its allies a specific intent to destroy in whole or in part the Massalit and other non-Arab ethnic communities in West Darfur, and if so, to hold those responsible accountable.

⁶⁹⁶ “Sudan: UNHCR warns of increasing violence and human rights violations against civilians in Darfur,” UNHCR press release,” November 10, 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/press-releases/sudan-unhcr-warns-increasing-violence-and-human-rights-violations-against> (accessed April 24, 2024): “Twenty years ago, the world was shocked by the terrible atrocities and human rights violations in Darfur. We fear a similar dynamic might be developing.”

⁶⁹⁷ “Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the renewed escalation of violence in Darfur, Sudan,” United Nations press release, November 14, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN_Special_Adviser_statement_Sudan_14_Nov_2023.pdf. See also similar statements in June and December 2023 respectively, “Protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law, says UN Special Adviser as she raises alarm on Sudan conflict,” United Nations press release, June 13, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/USG_and_Special_Adviser%20Nderitu_Sudan_13_June_2023.pdf; “Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the situation in Sudan,” United Nations press release, December 21, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/USG_Special_Adviser_Nderitu_Sudan_21_Dec_2023.pdf (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁶⁹⁸ “Sudan: Statement by the High Representative on the atrocities in Ardamata Darfur,” European Union External Action press release, November 12, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/sudan-statement-high-representative-atrocities-ardamata-darfur_en (accessed April 24, 2024).

War Crimes

Serious violations of international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, committed with criminal intent—that is, deliberately or recklessly—are war crimes.

Since April 24, 2023, RSF and allied militias have committed numerous serious violations of international humanitarian law as part of a campaign targeting the Massalit population of El Geneina and some surrounding areas, extending to other non-Arab populations of majority-Massalit neighborhoods. These violations include directing attacks against the civilian population, directing attacks against civilian objects, murder, pillaging, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, forced displacement of the civilian population, and conducting indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.

International humanitarian law prohibits indiscriminate attacks, that are attacks which strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction.⁶⁹⁹ These include attacks that are not directed at a specific military objective or that use weapons that cannot be directed at a specific military objective, and bombardment of an area, which are attacks, including by mortars or artillery, that treat as a single military object a number of clearly separated and distinct military objectives located in an area containing a concentration of civilians and civilian objects.

Crimes Against Humanity

Crimes against humanity are part of customary international law and were first codified in the charter of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal of 1945. The purpose was to prohibit crimes “which either by their magnitude and savagery, by their large number, or by the fact that a similar pattern was applied ... endangered the international community or shocked the conscience of mankind.”⁷⁰⁰ Since then, the concept has been incorporated into a number of international treaties and the statutes of international criminal tribunals, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The definition of crimes against humanity varies slightly by treaty, but the definition found in the Rome Statute,

⁶⁹⁹ ICRC, International Humanitarian Law Databases – Customary IHL, “Rule 1. The Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants,” undated, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule1> (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁷⁰⁰ History of the United Nations War Crimes Commission and the Development of the Laws of War (1943), p. 179, quoted in Rodney Dixon, “Crimes against humanity,” in *Commentary on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court* (O. Triffterer, ed.) (1999), p. 123.

largely reflects customary international law and includes a range of crimes committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack and pursuant to or in furtherance of a state or organizational policy to commit the attack.⁷⁰¹

The requirement that the crime be committed as part of an attack directed against a civilian population, means that the targeted population should be at least predominantly civilian nature, but the presence of some combatants does not alter its classification as a “civilian population” as a matter of law.⁷⁰² It is necessary only that the civilian population be the primary object of the attack by state or non-state forces. Thus, the presence of some Massalit fighters among the civilian population that the RSF and allied militias targeted for attack and abuses does not discount them from being possible crimes against humanity.

The attack against a civilian population underlying the commission of crimes against humanity must be widespread or systematic, it need not be both.⁷⁰³ “Widespread” refers to the scale of the acts or number of victims. Human Rights Watch considers the numerous serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by the RSF and allied militias against Massalit and some other non-Arab civilians in El Geneina and surrounding areas since April 24 to be “widespread” and constitute a broader attack on the civilian population. Specific crimes, such as murder, torture, rape, and deportation committed as part of this widespread attack against civilians, may then constitute and be prosecuted as crimes against humanity.

In addition, a single occurrence of large-scale killings, such as the massacre that took place as tens of thousands were trying to flee El Geneina on June 15 can by themselves be considered a widespread attack.

A systematic attack indicates a pattern or methodical plan. International courts have considered to what extent a systemic attack requires a policy or plan. For instance, such a

⁷⁰¹ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute), A/CONF.183/9, July 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, art. 7.

⁷⁰² *Prosecutor v. Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Trial Chamber), September 2, 1998, para. 582.

⁷⁰³ *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Appeals Chamber), Case ICTR-96-4-A, September 2, 1998, para. 579; *Kordić & Čerkez*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Case IT-95-14/2, ICTY Trial Chamber, February 26, 2001, para. 179; *Prosecutor v. Clément Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Case ICTR-95-1-A, ICTR Trial Chamber, May 21, 1999, para. 123.c

plan need not be adopted formally as a policy of the state. The nature of the abuses, their broad-based character, and their frequency (rather than the actions of individual security forces and personnel) constitute the relevant factors to assess whether the acts are reflective of a policy.⁷⁰⁴

Ethnic Cleansing

The term “ethnic cleansing” does not refer to a discrete crime under international law, and as such has no formal definition. However, a UN Commission of Experts defined it as a “purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means, the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas” where “the purpose appears to be the occupation of territory to the exclusion of the purged group or groups.”⁷⁰⁵

The Commission of Experts’ definition has three components. “Purposeful policy” indicates the existence of coordinated actions by individuals and groups (whether formal or informal), acting in the pursuit of a common goal. It can, but does not have to implicate state actors. The second component—the removal by one ethnic or religious group of the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from a geographic area—indicates that the policy aims at widespread displacement of a given group by another. Thirdly, ethnic cleansing relies on “violent and terror-inspiring means.”

The UN Commission of Experts further defined the means of ethnic cleansing to include crimes such as “murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extra-judicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destructions of property.”⁷⁰⁶

Human Rights Watch believes that the ethnically targeted attacks by RSF and allied militias from April 24, 2023 through to at least early November, on Massalit and some other non-Arabs, constitute a campaign of ethnic cleansing that forced hundreds of thousands to flee

⁷⁰⁴ *Prosecutor v. Kunarac*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Case ICTY-96-23/1 A, Appeals Chamber, June 12, 2022, para. 98.

⁷⁰⁵ UNHCR, “Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992),” May 27, 1994 (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

El Geneina and some surrounding areas, with the intent to permanently displace them from the territory. The RSF and allied militias pursued various means to carry out their ethnic cleansing campaign, including coordinating the forcible removal of Massalit, the killing of many Massalit including civilians, and the pillage and looting of Massalit property. The destruction of majority-Massalit neighborhoods and sites for displaced persons in El Geneina began in the first days of the conflict in April and continued for months after the fighting had stopped. It extended to at least four majority-Massalit villages and towns in West Darfur.

Witnesses noted in their accounts how RSF and allied militias asked people about their ethnicity, usually specifically whether they were Massalit, and said the assailants had told them that all Massalit people should leave or should be killed. On some occasions, witnesses were left unharmed when they said they belonged to other non-Arab communities or Arab communities. Some witnesses from non-Arab communities said they had been told that all non-Arabs should leave. People fleeing to Chad in mid-June were told that this area was now “*Dar Arab*,” and not “*Dar Massalit*.”

The destruction of neighborhoods and essential infrastructure following the expulsion of the Massalit and other non-Arab populations undermine the ability of the refugees to return home. These actions are consistent with an intent to permanently remove the Massalit population from the region and thus changing the demographic nature of El Geneina. The organized, forcible displacement of Massalit, removed much of the Massalit population from land that for decades and generations was their home.

Deportation or Forcible Transfer

The deportation or forcible transfer “without grounds permitted under international law ... to another location, by expulsion or other coercive acts” can amount to a crime against humanity.⁷⁰⁷ The ICC Elements of Crimes provide that both physical and psychological force, such as “fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression, or abuse of power against such a person or persons or another person” can characterize an act of displacement as forcible transfer.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁷ Rome Statute, article. 7(1)(d).

⁷⁰⁸ Rome Statute, article. 7(1)(d), n.12.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement prohibit the “arbitrary” displacement of persons, which is defined as including displacement in situations of armed conflict, “unless the security of civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand.”⁷⁰⁹ The prohibition of displacing civilians in non-international armed conflicts is set forth in Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions and customary humanitarian law.⁷¹⁰ Under the ICC Statute, “ordering the displacement of the civilian population for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand,” constitutes a war crime.⁷¹¹

As of early January 2024, the UN estimated that over 490,000 people from Sudan had crossed the border into eastern Chad. As of late October, 75 per cent of this figure is originally from El Geneina.

Persecution

The crime against humanity of persecution is also originally found in the Charter of the International Military Tribunal in 1945, which defined crimes against humanity as including “persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds.”⁷¹² The Rome Statute defines persecution as the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of “the identity of the group or collectivity,” including on national, religious, or ethnic grounds.⁷¹³

The crime of persecution entails actual discrimination, that is intentionally discriminating on one of the recognized grounds set out above, in the denial of fundamental human rights. Persecutory acts have been found to include murder, sexual assault, beatings, destruction of livelihood, and deportation and forced transfer, among others. Ethnic cleansing, which is in and of itself not a defined crime under international law, may be

⁷⁰⁹ UNHCR, “The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,” September 2004, <https://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.pdf> (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁷¹⁰ Protocol Additional of 1977 to the 1949 Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of the victims of non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II), adopted June 8, 1977, entered into force December 1978, article 17; 710 ICRC, International Humanitarian Law Databases – Customary IHL, “Rule 124, Access to persons deprived of their liberty,” undated, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule124> (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁷¹¹ Rome Statute, article 8(2)(e), n.8.

⁷¹² Agreement for the prosecution and punishment of the major war criminals of the European Axis, and Charter of the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg), Adopted August 8, 1945, entered into force August 8, 1945, art. 6.

⁷¹³ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7 (2) (g).

prosecuted as the crime against humanity of persecution, given the specific element of discrimination.

Acts of violence and other crimes—such as the deliberate deprivation of access to livelihoods or food—documented in this report to have been committed against Massalit and non-Arab populations by reason of their ethnic identity, may be considered acts of persecution that amount to crimes against humanity.

Right to Return

Since the adoption of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees in 1951 (the Refugee Convention), three so-called durable solutions have emerged to enable refugees to put an end to their refugee status and re-establish an effective link in a country. These are voluntary repatriation to the refugee's country of origin, local integration in the country of asylum, and resettlement in a third country.⁷¹⁴

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) promotes voluntary repatriation—the voluntary return of refugees to their home countries—as the optimal solution to refugee crises. UNHCR has statutory responsibility to seek, promote, and facilitate durable solutions, including the voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin.⁷¹⁵

The right to return to one's own country is a fundamental human right, which is articulated in multiple international instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) under the right to freedom of movement, which includes the right to

⁷¹⁴ See for example, Global Refugee Forum, “Solution – The Global Compact on Refugees, Fact Sheet,” undated, <https://globalcompactrefugees.or> (accessed April 24, 2024).

⁷¹⁵ Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, December 14, 1950, Res. 319 A (IV) of 3 December 1, 1949, article 1.1.

enter and return to one's own country.⁷¹⁶ The UNHCR routinely reminds states of refugees' right to return voluntarily to their places of origin in conditions of safety and dignity.⁷¹⁷

Victims of the crime against humanity of deportation and forcible transfer are entitled to the remedy of return to their home areas and property. The UN Security Council and other UN bodies have repeatedly asserted the right of internally displaced persons to return to their former homes. The Security Council, in its Resolution 820 (1993) dealing with Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated that, "all displaced persons have the right to return in peace to their former homes and should be assisted to do so." The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are drawn from accepted principles of international law, set out provisions relating to return, resettlement and reintegration of Internally Displaced Persons. Principle 28 states:

Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavor to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted December 16, 1966, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976, ratified by Georgia on August 3, 1994, art. 12(4). The Human Rights Committee, the international body that monitors compliance with the ICCPR, in its General Comment on the freedom of movement, "considers that there are few, if any, circumstances in which deprivation of the right to enter one's own country could be reasonable. A State party must not, by stripping a person of nationality or by expelling an individual to a third country, arbitrarily prevent this person from returning to his or her own country." UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment 27, Freedom of Movement (art.12), CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.9, November 2, 1999, para. 20. See also, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted December 10, 1948, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 at 71(1948) art. 13(2): "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country"; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted December 21, 1965, G.A. Res. 2106 (XX), annex, 20 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 14) at 47, U.N. Doc. A/6014 (1966), 660 U.N.T.S. 195, entered into force January 4, 1969, art. 5 which guarantees "the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights: . . ." These include in Article 5 (d) (ii) "The right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's country."

⁷¹⁷ For example, the Executive Committee Conclusion on Voluntary Repatriation, No. 40 (XXXVI), October 18, 1985, 1985, "the basic rights of persons to return voluntarily to the country of origin," while the Executive Committee General Conclusion, No. 74 (XLV), October 7, 1994, on International Protection "calls upon countries of origin, countries of asylum, UNHCR and the international community as a whole to do everything possible to enable refugees to exercise freely their right to return home in safety and dignity."

⁷¹⁸ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement," September 2004, <https://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.pdf> (accessed April 25, 2024).

Right to Redress

Under international law, victims of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are entitled to redress, including reparation. According to the UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy, victims of gross violations in particular have the right to receive “adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered.”⁷¹⁹ This right draws on the broader principle of a right to concrete and effective remedy in the face of violations.⁷²⁰ The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights General Comment No. 4 also provides guidance on the right to redress for victims of torture and other forms of ill-treatment.⁷²¹

Victims of gross violations are “persons who individually or collectively suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights,” and include “the immediate family or dependents of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization.”⁷²²

Reparation includes, among other aspects, restitution, and compensation. Compensation is due when restitution cannot be obtained.⁷²³

People who have been unlawfully displaced, such as the victims of ethnic cleansing, are entitled to return to their homes and, if their homes have been destroyed, to be compensated for the loss.⁷²⁴ The competent authority, has a duty to victims to recover their

⁷¹⁹ United Nations, “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law,” March 21, 2006, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/files/BASICP~1.PDF> (accessed April 25, 2024).

⁷²⁰ International Commission of Jurists, *The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations, A Practitioner’s Guide*, 2018, pp. 52-84; Theo van Boven, *Victims’ Right to a Remedy and Reparation: The New United Nations Principles and Guidelines*, p. 22. <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r26214.pdf> (accessed April 25, 2024), p. 22.

⁷²¹ African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, General Comment No. 4: The Right to Redress for Victims of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment, (March 4, 2017), https://www.achpr.org/public/Document/file/English/achpr_general_comment_no._4_english.pdf (accessed April 25, 2024).

⁷²² UN Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law on the Right to a Remedy, adopted December 15, 2005, G.A Res.60/147, principle 8.

⁷²³ International Commission of Jurists, *The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations, A Practitioner’s Guide*, 2018, pp. 156.

⁷²⁴ UN Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law

possessions and, if not possible, to provide them, or assist them in obtaining, compensation.⁷²⁵

Victims are also entitled to reparation for other rights violations committed as part of crimes against humanity and war crimes, for instance if they were detained arbitrarily, tortured, raped, or subjected to other forms of sexual violence, their family member killed, or if their property was looted. The Sudanese government bears primary responsibility to provide victims with, or assist them in obtaining compensation.

The process of reparation and the right to return should not result in further human rights violations. The UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, under the UN Commission on Human Rights, said that authorities have a responsibility to “develop effective and expeditious legal and administrative procedures to ensure the free and fair exercise of this right, including fair and effective mechanisms to resolve outstanding housing and property problems.”⁷²⁶ This means that the Sudanese government has a duty to ensure that dwellers who do not have lawful rights to occupy homes that were made vacant during the ethnic cleansing campaign do not become homeless or subject to human rights violations.

on the Right to a Remedy, adopted December 15, 2005, G.A. Res. 60/147, principles 19, 20; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted December 21, 1965, G.A. Res. 2106 (XX), annex, 20 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 14) at 47, U.N. Doc. A/6014 (1966), 660 U.N.T.S. 195, entered into force January 4, 1969.

⁷²⁵ UN Sub-commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (the Pinheiro Principles), UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, June 28, 2005, <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/idps/50f94d849/principles-housing-property-restitution-refugees-displaced-persons-pinheiro.html> (accessed April 25, 2024).

⁷²⁶ UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Resolution 1998/26, August 26, 1998, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/HRBodies/CHR/54/Documents/E.1998.23_EN.pdf (accessed April 25, 2024).

Recommendations

To the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Allied Militias

- Publicly order all forces and allied militias to fully abide by international humanitarian law, including by adopting measures to end abuses including unlawful killings, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, looting, and arson.
- Immediately allow full, safe, and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel and the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance across Darfur.
- Ensure that all aid and health staff, as well as humanitarian and medical facilities and supplies, are protected from attacks and looting, and that health and aid staff and agencies are able to carry out their work free of harassment or other interference.
- Suspend civilian and military officials credibly implicated in serious violations in West Darfur pending investigations into their actions including investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) for the Sudan.
- Prohibit actions that could result in further destruction of evidence of violations committed during the violence.
- Cooperate with and facilitate full and unfettered access to all areas for the ICC and the IFFM for the Sudan.
- Provide prompt and fair redress to victims of violations or their relatives including through compensation and the recovering and returning of all looted or destroyed property.
- Ensure that internally displaced persons and refugees wishing to return to their homes or places of habitual residence have the right to do so, that returns take place in accordance with regional and international standards, and that returns are safe, voluntary, well-informed, and dignified.

To the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)

- Publicly order all forces and allied militias to fully abide by international humanitarian law.

- Cease all forms of indiscriminate attacks or use of explosive weapons in civilian populated areas that may indiscriminately impact civilians and civilian objects.
- Immediately allow full, safe, and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel and the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance across Darfur.
- Ensure that all aid and health staff, as well as humanitarian and medical facilities and supplies, are protected from attacks and looting, and that health and aid staff and agencies are able to carry out their work free of harassment or other interference.
- Cooperate with and facilitate full and unfettered access to all areas for the International Criminal Court and the Independent International Fact-Finding mission for the Sudan.

To the United Nations Security Council

- Call on the UN Secretariat, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, and in consultation with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, to:
 - Urgently develop options for a civilian protection mission for Sudan, with a view to deploying a new mission.
 - Include in the mission's mandate to protect civilians, the monitoring of international human rights and humanitarian law violations, including obstruction of humanitarian assistance, and laying the groundwork for the safe returns of those displaced.
 - Include a robust policing unit in the mission to focus on key locations where civilians are most at risk of deliberate attacks, including in Darfur.
 - Insist on sufficient resources for the civilian protection mission with thoroughly vetted personnel and a civilian oversight mechanism to report on and mitigate abuses.
- Establish a country-wide arms embargo.
- Impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, on commanders, officials and tribal militia leaders responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes in West Darfur, including the six people identified in this report and those identified in the recent reporting of the UN Panel of Experts, as well as on commanders and officials obstructing humanitarian assistance.
- Publicly condemn individual governments not respecting the existing UN Security Council arms embargo on Darfur and support efforts to impose sanctions on individuals or entities breaking the arms embargo on Darfur.

- Organize a high-level Security Council visit to refugee sites in eastern Chad.
- Call for full cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Ensure regular public Security Council briefings on Sudan, and regularly schedule briefings by the personal envoy of the secretary-general on Sudan and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, in addition to the existing briefings by the ICC prosecutor.
- Call on the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, the UN special-representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, and the special representative of the secretary-general on children and armed conflict to conduct fact-finding missions and provide formal briefings to the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council. Regularly invite members of war-affected communities in Darfur, including survivors of sexual violence, to brief the Council.

To the UN Human Rights Council

- Extend and renew the mandate of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan as necessary to ensure it is able to carry out its comprehensive investigations of ongoing abuses, and to advance accountability for international crimes in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan.

To the United Nations Secretary-General

- Request that the UN Secretariat, in collaboration with counterparts in the African Union Commission and in consultation with Intergovernmental Authority on Development, urgently develop options for a civilian protection mission in Sudan.
- Encourage the personal envoy of the secretary-general on Sudan to work with the UN Secretariat and counterparts at the regional level on the civilian protection mission options.
- Ensure that adequate resources continue to be available to the office of the personal envoy of the secretary-general on Sudan.
- Ensure the envoy's office has a strong team of experts, including on human rights, civilian protection, gender, sexual violence, and the needs of survivors.

To the African Union Peace and Security Council and Key Member States

- Call on the African Union Commission, and notably the High-Level Panel on Sudan (HLP-Sudan), in collaboration with the UN Secretariat and in consultation with Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), to urgently develop options for a civilian protection mission for Sudan with a view to deploying a new mission.
 - The mission should be mandated to protect civilians, monitor violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including obstruction of humanitarian assistance, and lay the groundwork for the safe returns of those displaced.
 - Such a mission should include a robust policing unit to focus on key locations where civilians are most at risk of deliberate attacks, including in Darfur.
 - Any future protection of civilians mission should have sufficient resources, thoroughly vetted personnel, and a civilian oversight mechanism to report on and mitigate abuses.
- Request the African members of the UN Security Council (known as the A3) to support efforts aimed at establishing a new civilian protection mission either by the UN Security Council and/or AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), and to establish a country-wide UN arms embargo.
- Enhance collaboration with the UN to ensure the effective enforcement and monitoring of existing arms embargoes in Sudan, which should be extended to all parties engaged in the conflict, and the distribution of small arms and light weapons.
- Call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law and to refrain from attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.
- Press the warring parties to ensure that all aid and health staff, as well as humanitarian and medical facilities and supplies, are protected from attacks and looting, and that health and aid staff and agencies are able to carry out their work free of harassment or other interference.
- Hold regular briefings on the situation on Sudan and request briefings from the AU HLP-Sudan.
- Publicly condemn individual governments not respecting the existing Security Council arms embargo on Darfur and impose sanctions on individuals or entities breaking the arms embargo on Darfur.

- Ensure that investigations and accountability are central to political processes spearheaded by the AU and IGAD.
- Publicly support existing international investigations into abuses in Sudan, including the International Criminal Court investigations and those of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Sudan, and call for full cooperation with these investigations including from the de facto Sudanese authorities and warring parties.
- Build into processes of the AU and the (IGAD) on Sudan, strategies that respond to the needs of women and girls affected by the conflict, including to address sexual violence.

To United Nations Member States, including Particularly Concerned Regional States, and Donors

- Press for action at the UN Security Council to enforce the existing arms embargo and expand it to the whole country.
- Support the deployment of a new mission to protect civilians, monitor violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including obstruction of humanitarian assistance, and lay the groundwork for the safe returns of those displaced, including to at risk locations, notably Darfur.
- Impose targeted sanctions, including by using established sanctions regimes, on leaders of the Rapid Support Forces, armed groups and tribal militias, including the six named in this report, responsible for serious abuses against civilians documented in this report.
- Coordinate the use of sanctions aimed at ensuring an end to atrocities and a change in behavior of those in positions of command.
- Provide proactive political and practical support to the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigation, including by engaging with the ICC prosecutor to identify and meet in a timely manner needs for legal assistance or other forms of cooperation.
- Support, cooperate with, and engage robustly with the findings and recommendations of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, including through ensuring its mandate is extended and renewed as needed, ensuring it has adequate resources and support to carry out the work it has been tasked with, and allowing full and unfettered access as requested.

- Support under the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws, the investigation and prosecution by national judicial authorities of those credibly implicated in serious crimes under international law.
- Encourage the UN Secretariat and the African Union Commission to work together to urgently establish a protection of civilians mission and then support this mission with the needed resources, including funding necessary for human rights and accountability structures.
- Support the office of the personal envoy of the secretary-general on Sudan, notably to ensure robust civilian protection, gender, and human rights expertise within the team.
- Significantly increase humanitarian support both in Sudan and in Chad and other neighboring countries, notably for the Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and the Regional Refugee Response Plan, to adequately meet the needs of those fleeing abuse. This support should include funding for protection, gender-based violence response, and psychosocial and trauma programming.
- Provide urgent, flexible direct funding to local Sudanese aid groups, such as the Emergency Response Rooms.
- Provide protection and support to Sudanese refugees in Chad and other countries of first arrival by offering or expanding on resettlement numbers, while prioritizing the most vulnerable, such as refugees with medical or disability needs that are not adequately met in countries of first arrival, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, women-headed households, Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender refugees, and those at heightened risk in countries of first arrival because of their political opinions or specific profile in their community.
- Allow access of Sudanese civilians to territories and to asylum procedures; suspend forcible returns to Sudan until the situation has improved to allow for safe and dignified return of people found not to be in need of international protection; and ensure that any Sudanese national whose claim for international protection has been rejected in the past is given the opportunity to have their case reheard and reviewed based on changed country circumstances.
- Support domestic organizations documenting and reporting on rights abuses in Darfur.
- Provide urgent and meaningful support and assistance to individuals at particular risk, including human rights defenders, journalists, and former government officials.

To Sudan's Neighboring Countries, including Chad, Egypt, South Sudan, Ethiopia

- Allow civilians fleeing the conflict at least temporary protection and prompt access to humanitarian assistance and expeditiously and impartially process asylum applications.
- Suspend forcible returns to Sudan until the situation has improved to allow for safe and dignified return of people found not to be in need of international protection.
- Allow for unhindered humanitarian access across borders into Sudan.
- Support the work of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan for Darfur, and the ICC including by allowing access for investigations.

To UNHCR and other Agencies Supporting Refugees in Neighboring Countries

- Prioritize prompt protection interviewing of at-risk categories of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Prioritize ensuring that all survivors of sexual violence can access time-sensitive, life-saving, and confidential services in Sudan and in displacement and refugee sites, in line with international standards. This includes clinical management of rape—including emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV, medications to prevent and treat other sexually transmitted infections, access to abortion, and other gynecological care—and both immediate and longer-term emotional or mental health support. Child and male survivors of sexual violence should have access to services tailored to their needs, including access to high quality health, sexual and reproductive health, and psycho-social services. Survivors of sexual violence should be able to access services for many years and not only in the immediate aftermath. Services should include access to justice as envisaged by survivors themselves.
- Provide clear, accurate, and accessible information to refugee and IDP populations about the situation in their areas of habitual residence to ensure that decisions to move are fully informed.
- Ensure the right of Sudanese refugees to return with equal respect for the human rights of all communities and their access to security as a precondition for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity; provide refugees with complete,

objective, up-to-date and accurate information about conditions in prospective areas of return, including security conditions, and availability of assistance and protection to reintegrate; in consultation with displaced communities, ensure that any repatriation programs are entirely voluntary with full informed consent, and conducted in a safe, orderly and dignified manner with accompaniment and monitoring by UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant parties.

- Ensure that refugees and IDPs who are unable or unwilling to return to their homes have the right to choose compensation from the government for the loss of all their homes and properties. Refugees who have been arbitrarily or unlawfully deprived of their liberty, livelihoods, and family life also have the right to restitution.

To the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court

- Collaborate with the UN Panel of Experts on the Sudan for Darfur and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, including to request information on their investigations in Darfur.
- Continue to call on ICC member states to provide the robust resources needed in the court's regular budget and to its contingency fund to support the implementation of the court's mandate across its docket, including in Darfur.

To International Criminal Court Member States

- Express consistent, public support for the ICC's investigations in Darfur, Sudan, including those directed at recent atrocities, and call for full cooperation by all concerned states, including in the arrest and surrender of those subject to ICC arrest warrants.
- Provide through the ICC's regular budget and contingency fund the robust resources necessary to support the implementation of the court's mandate across its docket, including in Darfur, to ensure that the full scope of potential crimes there including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity can be effectively investigated.
- Ensure that the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims has the resources necessary to support assistance programs in all situations before the court, including Darfur.
- Engage with the Office of the Prosecutor to understand its cooperation needs in its Darfur investigation and provide timely responses to requests for cooperation.

To the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan

- As part of investigations into Darfur, investigate obstruction on aid access, attacks on humanitarian personnel and assets, and impacts on communities most affected by ongoing abuses in West Darfur and other parts of Darfur.
- Coordinate closely with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) including by organizing, if feasible, joint consultations on accountability for serious violations with Sudanese civil society, emergency rooms and human rights defenders.

To the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Conduct robust ongoing monitoring and regular public reporting on the rights situation in Sudan, including in Darfur, and take measures to address impunity and advance accountability for serious abuses.
- Ensure the full and continuing operationalization of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, ensuring that the mechanism has the support, resources and expertise to ensure robust investigations.

To the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

- Continue to express public support for, and coordinate closely with, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan, as appropriate and including by organizing, if feasible, joint consultations on accountability for serious violations with Sudanese civil society, emergency rooms and human rights defenders.

To the UN Human Rights Council Special Procedures Mandate Holders and African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Mechanisms

- Regularly report, including jointly, on ongoing abuses against civilians in Darfur and Sudan more broadly, including on enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, internally displaced persons, violence against women, grave violations against children, and human rights defenders.

To the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

- Make country visits to Sudan and Chad, recognizing these are subject to approval from the host state.
- Include in the annexes of the Secretary General’s 2024 annual report on children in armed conflict (the so-called “List of Shame” of parties to conflict responsible for grave violations against children) the RSF and allied militias for killing and maiming and sexual violence of children.

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(left) Incendiary damage to the Imam al-Kazem school, an IDP gathering site in El Geneina, Sudan, May 1, 2023.
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(front cover) Abdullah Khatir, 30, from El Geneina in West Sudan whose leg was amputated after he was shot by RSF fighters, walks through Ambelia refugee camp on April 20, 2024 in Adré, Chad.
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“The Massalit Will Not Come Home”

Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan

Since conflict broke out in Sudan in April 2023, West Darfur state has witnessed extremely grave violations against civilians. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – an autonomous military force – and allied, predominantly Arab militias carried out widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity, amounting to a campaign of ethnic cleansing, against Massalit and other non-Arab populations of West Darfur’s capital, El Geneina.

Based on over 220 interviews with survivors and witnesses, the verification and assessment of 110 photographs and videos, and analysis of satellite imagery, *“The Massalit Will Not Come Home”* comprehensively documents the crimes carried out against civilians between April and June 2023, and in November. Survivors describe how the RSF and its allies attacked one majority-Massalit neighborhood after another, ethnically targeting unarmed civilians in summary executions, stabbings, and sexual violence and torture. These forces also carried out widespread looting and destruction of civilian property and appear to have targeted prominent members of the Massalit community, including lawyers, doctors, and government officials.

The RSF and militias pursued and attacked convoys of tens of thousands of civilians who tried to flee toward Chad, leaving the city and the countryside strewn with bodies. At least several thousand people from El Geneina are known to have died between April and November 2023, but the actual number remains unknown and may be significantly higher.

The United Nations and the African Union should deploy a new mission to Sudan with a mandate to protect civilians at risk and monitor human rights violations and obstruction of aid. The UN and countries should sanction individuals implicated in these crimes, and the UN Security Council should urgently establish a countrywide arms embargo on Sudan.