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SUDAN (Tier 3)

The Government of Sudan does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Sudan remained on Tier 3. During the reporting period there was a government policy or pattern of employing or recruiting child soldiers. Despite this, the government took some steps to address trafficking, including increasing investigations and prosecutions. The government identified an increased number of trafficking victims. The government also reportedly convened several meetings of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking (NCCHT), initiated the development of an emergency national action plan to combat human trafficking, and issued a public statement reaffirming 18 years as the minimum age for military recruitment to reduce trafficking vulnerabilities. However, since the onset of hostilities on April 15, 2023, which continued through this reporting period, both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have employed or recruited child soldiers, including children who were compulsorily recruited. The SAF commander general remained the head of the armed forces and de facto head of state. The government did not convict any traffickers or investigate or prosecute any officials for forced recruitment or use of child soldiers. The government did not disseminate or implement SOPs for child victims' identification and referral to care. The government's protection efforts, including shelter and services for victims, remained inadequate.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Cease the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by all parties to the conflict, including in combat or support roles, and demobilize children from all armed groups while providing adequate protection and reintegration support.
- Empower the NCCHT to coordinate the government's anti-trafficking efforts by adopting a new national anti-trafficking action plan and allocating dedicated resources.
- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including officials complicit in the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Proactively identify victims of all forms of trafficking and conduct screening for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations.
- Increase the availability of protection services – including short-term shelter – for all trafficking victims, including by partnering with civil society service providers.
- Coordinate with civil society and international organizations to disseminate and implement SOPs for victim identification and referral to care for child trafficking victims and develop SOPs for adult trafficking victims.
- Conduct efforts to raise awareness on all forms of human trafficking, particularly among refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other vulnerable populations.
- Increase training for security and judicial officials on distinguishing human trafficking from other crimes such as migrant smuggling and kidnapping for ransom.
- Draft and finalize a stand-alone smuggling law to enhance judicial officials' ability to prosecute migrant smuggling crimes separately from human trafficking crimes.

PROSECUTION

The government maintained inadequate anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

The 2014 Anti-Human Trafficking Law, as amended, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The law prescribed between three and 10 years' imprisonment for base offenses involving adult male victims and between five and 20 years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult female and child victims or involving additional aggravating circumstances; these penalties were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with the penalties prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. Article 14 of the Sudan Armed Forces Act of 2007 criminalized the recruitment of children younger than 18 years old by state armed forces, as well as the enslavement of civilians, sexual slavery, and coercing civilians into prostitution; and prescribed penalties between three years' imprisonment and death.

The ongoing conflict and related destabilizing effects across the country continued to greatly reduce anti-trafficking operations and hinder the government's collection of law enforcement statistics. The government reported investigating an unknown number of suspects in four cases under non-trafficking laws and continuing five investigations from previous years. The government reported prosecuting at least four defendants for unspecified forms of human trafficking. This compared with no investigations or prosecutions in the previous reporting period. The government did not report convicting any traffickers for the second consecutive year. Although law enforcement functions continued in some areas, police engagement was inadequate or entirely absent in many jurisdictions. The Ministry of Interior's Counter-Trafficking Unit was responsible for anti-trafficking law enforcement, but government institutions – including law enforcement – continued to experience significant operational constraints due to the ongoing conflict, limiting effectiveness against human trafficking. The RSF reestablished local police forces in some areas under its control, although these units did not address human trafficking crimes or hold RSF forces accountable for trafficking-related crimes. Officials continued to conflate migrant smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, and human trafficking crimes. Observers noted the lack of a stand-alone migrant smuggling law impeded prosecutors' efforts to try migrant smugglers separately from human traffickers. The government did not report providing anti-trafficking training to law enforcement, prosecutors, or judges.

The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government officials complicit in human trafficking crimes; however, corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns, inhibiting law enforcement action. The SAF and the RSF recruited and used child soldiers, including children who took direct part in hostilities, children who were coercively recruited, and children younger than 15 years. The government did not report investigating or prosecuting any officials for the recruitment or use of child soldiers. Some government officials or border guards allegedly exploited women and girls fleeing the country via sex trafficking in exchange for visas or safe passage to neighboring countries; observers stated some law enforcement and border officers were complicit in or otherwise profited from trafficking crimes specifically related to exploiting migrants along Sudan's borders. The RSF kidnapped and sold women and girls into sexual slavery.

PROTECTION

The government maintained inadequate efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims.

The government reported identifying 83 potential victims, including 30 forced labor victims and 53 victims of unspecified forms of trafficking, compared to identifying no victims during the previous reporting period. The government did not protect children from forcible recruitment and use as soldiers or in support roles by government forces or non-state armed groups.

The government did not report providing any services to trafficking victims. Observers noted the availability of victim assistance continued to significantly decrease across the country and the two government-run shelters remained closed, although shelters for women and victims of conflict assisted potential trafficking victims. The government reported it could provide housing and services to protect victims during court proceedings. The government issued a decree in the previous reporting period stating that victims of conflict-related sexual violence, including some

trafficking victims, should receive expanded court access and medical support, although the government did not report whether any victims received these services.

The government did not have SOPs for victim identification and referral to care for adults. For the sixth consecutive year, officials did not report disseminating or implementing child trafficking victim identification SOPs developed in partnership with an international organization. Due to a lack of formal identification procedures, the government did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked, including among women in commercial sex and children associated with armed groups. The government did not report screening for child soldiers among local militia members integrating into the armed forces as part of the Juba Peace Agreement after the conflict began. Inadequate screening for trafficking indicators hindered identification of potential victims during the government's deportations of foreign nationals without proper documentation, including Ethiopians, Eritreans, and South Sudanese. The government did not provide foreign trafficking victims with legal alternatives to their removal to countries where they would face retribution or hardship.

PREVENTION

The government maintained inadequate efforts to prevent trafficking.

The NCCHT led the government's anti-trafficking efforts and convened regular meetings, although it had limited operational effectiveness due to the conflict. The NCCHT continued implementing an anti-trafficking emergency national action plan for 2024 and began drafting a plan for 2025, but resources and efforts to implement the plans were limited. Officials noted persistent staffing shortages and insufficient resources, as well as a limited presence outside of the capital, hindered the NCCHT's ability to execute its mandate.

The government continued the suspension of many of its human trafficking prevention programs and awareness-raising initiatives. The government did not report whether a previous hotline was still operational. Ministry of Labor inspectors were responsible for providing oversight of recruitment agencies, but they did not report investigating or sanctioning fraudulent recruiters. The Domestic Workers Act of 2008 established a legal framework for employing and registering domestic workers with limited labor rights and protections; however, the government did not report registering or protecting any domestic workers under the law. The government did not provide anti-trafficking training to its diplomatic personnel. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

Although the SAF affirmed 18 years as the minimum age for recruitment in a broader call to mobilize volunteers to fight the RSF, the government reported no additional efforts to prevent the recruitment or use of child soldiers. The SAF-affiliated Child Protection Unit, which had responsibility for leading the government's child protection efforts in conflict areas, reported organizing one workshop on the protection of children in armed conflict in December 2024 for 120 SAF officers. The RSF demonstrated no measurable efforts to fulfill its previous pledge to establish a human rights unit, disseminate human rights field manuals, and hold violators accountable.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Sudan, and traffickers exploit victims from Sudan at home and abroad. Traffickers exploit children experiencing homelessness in Khartoum – including Sudanese and unaccompanied migrant children from West and Central Africa – in forced labor for begging and market vending, as well as in sex trafficking. Children experience exploitation working in agriculture, brick-making factories, gold mining, medical waste collection, and street vending;

victims endure threats, physical and sexual abuse, and hazardous working conditions with limited access to education or health services. Although information was difficult to obtain due to the conflict, observers report potentially exploitative child labor remains prevalent in Sudan. Criminal groups exploit Sudanese women and girls – particularly IDPs or those from rural areas – in domestic work and sex trafficking.

The ongoing conflict disrupted previous patterns of human trafficking and heightened the risks of conflict-related forms of trafficking in persons, including child soldiering and sexual slavery. The SAF and the RSF recruited and used child soldiers, including children who took direct part in hostilities, children who were compulsorily recruited, and children younger than 15 years. Observers have reported thousands of allegations of combatants recruiting and using child soldiers since April 2023. In addition to combat roles and the operation of checkpoints, children transport ammunition, conduct rudimentary reconnaissance and surveillance activities, and perform labor in military camps. RSF forces allegedly use children as human shields and in sexual slavery. The SAF and the RSF also supported local militias and armed groups that recruited child soldiers.

Some SAF and RSF elements have forcibly recruited civilians to participate in hostilities alongside the armed forces or perform forced labor. IDPs, migrant workers, and people kidnapped by combatants faced a heightened risk of forced labor due to the conflict. Traffickers also exploit women and girls in manual labor for combatants.

Widespread reports indicate women and girls are kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery, particularly in parts of the country controlled by the RSF. Observers report women and girls are also abducted and sold for ransom or slavery in North Darfur and neighboring countries such as Chad and South Sudan. Additionally, observers reported incidents of women brought to Khartoum and kept as wives, exploited in sex trafficking, or compelled to engage in sex in exchange for food and security.

The conflict has displaced nearly nine million people internally, and almost four million people have fled to neighboring countries, resulting in dire humanitarian needs and vulnerability to exploitation. Observers report food shortages, and the absence of livelihood opportunities are increasing the number of women relying on “survival sex,” which further increases their vulnerability to trafficking. The conflict exacerbated migrant smuggling and increased vulnerabilities to trafficking as many Sudanese attempted to flee to Chad, Egypt, South Sudan, or onward to Libya and Tunisia to reach Europe, particularly as some neighboring states restricted cross border movement.

Prior to the conflict, Sudan was a primary transit point for migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa seeking to reach Europe. Large populations of Eritrean, Ethiopian, and other African asylum seekers, as well as some Syrians, resided in Khartoum while planning to travel to Europe. However, migration routes through Sudan were disrupted by the conflict, resulting in fewer migrants transiting Sudan. Many migrant workers in Sudan, predominately from neighboring countries, returned to their countries of origin after April 15, 2023.