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Sudan 2020

Positive legal reforms were instituted, including abolition of some forms of corporal punishment, and criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM). Security forces used excessive, and sometimes lethal, force against protesters. Opposition activists and officials of the deposed former government of Omar al-Bashir were subjected to prolonged arbitrary detention. COVID-19 lockdown measures left millions in need of relief assistance. The authorities failed to adequately protect civilians in Darfur, South Kordofan and eastern Sudan from serious human rights abuses arising from armed attacks by militias.

Background

A year after the 2019 overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir, the transitional government continued to struggle to address the former government’s legacy of corruption, economic crisis, past human rights violations, and lack of justice and accountability.

In March, the government declared a national health emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, introducing measures including an overnight curfew, movement restrictions and border closures.

In August, a peace agreement was signed between the government and the Sudan Revolutionary Front, an alliance of nine armed political groups based throughout the country, including in the conflict-torn areas of Blue Nile, Darfur and South Kordofan. Some armed groups did not sign the agreement. The Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Abdul Wahid Nur in Darfur refused to participate in any peace talks. Also, no agreement was reached with the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North which controlled parts of South Kordofan and Blue Nile.

Rights of women and girls

The government took steps to improve the protection of women’s and girls’ rights. In June, it adopted a National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, which provides guidance on preventing gender-based violence in armed conflict and increasing women’s participation in the peace processes.

In July, the government introduced legislation criminalizing the practice of FGM.

Excessive use of force

In September, police used live ammunition to disperse demonstrators in the town of Nertiti in Central Darfur, killing two protesters and injuring four others. The demonstrators were protesting against the government’s failure to protect civilians after unknown assailants attacked their community, killing a 14-year-old girl and a 24-year-old man, earlier that day. The Central Darfur State Security Committee promised to investigate the two incidents. There was no further information on the investigation at the end of the year.

Right to truth, justice and reparation

The National Committee of Inquiry, established to investigate the killing and injuring of protesters on 3 June 2019, had not concluded its work by the end of the year. On that day, members of the Rapid Support Forces and other security forces fired live ammunition at peaceful protesters outside the military headquarters in Khartoum, killing at least 100 and injuring 700 others. Many survivors and relatives of those killed were not optimistic that the Committee would provide them with justice and reparation.

In February, the government announced that former President Omar al-Bashir should appear before the ICC on charges related to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide carried out in Darfur. The ICC issued arrest warrants for Omar al-Bashir in 2009 and 2010. It also issued arrest warrants for two other officials in Omar al-Bashir’s former ruling National Congress Party (NCP) — Ahmad Harun in 2007 and Abdel Raheem Muhammad Hussein in 2012. However, the transitional government continued to fail to meet its obligation to surrender them to the Hague court, and still had not ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC.

In June, Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman (also known as Ali Kushayb), a former senior commander of the Janjaweed militia, surrendered to the ICC to answer charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in Darfur.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Despite the widespread practice of torture during the past 30 years, the government had not ratified the UN Convention against Torture.

In July, the government introduced legal reforms to protect certain rights. It abolished some provisions in the 1991 Criminal Act, including the use of flogging and some forms of corporal punishment as penalties for various crimes, and introduced legislation to decriminalize apostasy.

Arbitrary detention

At least 40 people remain arbitrarily detained, including opposition activists and members of the former government.

On 2 June, Muammar Musa Mohammed Elgarari, an opposition activist and leader of the Future Movement Group, was arrested in Khartoum for allegedly harassing members of the Committee for Removal of Empowerment. The Committee had been established to dissolve the NCP and confiscate its property. He remained in detention without charge in a police station in Khartoum North at the end of the year.

At least 40 NCP senior party leaders and members, who had been detained without charge for 14 months, were finally charged and brought before a special criminal court in July. They had been arrested following the 2019 military coup, after which they were held in Kober prison. In June 2020, the Attorney General announced that at least five cases would be submitted to the courts over the following weeks, including those involving suspects accused of serious human rights violations committed during the years under Omar al-Bashir. The first trial began on 21 July and related to the 1989 military coup that brought Omar al-Bashir to power. It was ongoing at the end of the year.

Economic, social and cultural rights

Doctors and other health workers were physically and verbally attacked by patients or their relatives who blamed them for the government's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ In May, the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors reported 28 attacks on health workers nationwide between March and May. In June, the government passed legislation to protect health workers, and deployed dedicated security forces to prevent further attacks.

Between 18 April and early June, the authorities imposed a 24-hour lockdown in Khartoum, although people were still allowed to leave their homes to buy essentials. Thousands who worked in the informal economy struggled to earn a living when movement between states was restricted. The measures put human rights at risk, particularly the rights to food, health, water and sanitation, of groups facing marginalization and discrimination like internally displaced people, refugees, migrants, women and children. In September, the UN Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Sudan said that 9.3 million people needed humanitarian assistance, an increase from 5.2 million in 2015.

Right to health

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the extent of under-investment in the public health system. Hospitals were found lacking key equipment for PPE and ventilators.

Unlawful killings

The violence in Darfur, South Kordofan and eastern Sudan continued. Inter-communal violence resulted in unlawful killings, sexual violence, torture and other ill-treatment, destruction of property and burning and looting of villages. At least 20 incidents were reported by the end of the year. The security forces and the government repeatedly failed to provide protection for civilians or to intervene in a timely manner to prevent the escalation of fighting and human rights abuses.

On 21 April, residents of the village of Tamar Bol-Jimeil, north-east of Zalingei in Central Darfur, were attacked by members of a militia from the neighbouring nomadic Rizeigat Arab ethnic group. Some of the attackers were said to have been wearing military uniforms. Two people were killed and 14 injured. At least 18 houses were burnt down and more than 400 families reportedly temporarily displaced.²

On 13 July, 10 protesters were killed in Fata Borno camp for internally displaced people in North Darfur, and at least 17 people injured, during an attack by an armed militia group, thought to be affiliated with government security forces. The attack took place as protesters staged a peaceful eight-day sit-in to demand, among other things, better security, protection for their crops from militia and other armed group attacks, and the dismissal of officials affiliated with the former government.³

On 25 July, at least 60 people from the Massalit ethnic group were killed and more than 54 wounded in a reprisal attack by an armed group in and around the village of Masterei in West Darfur. The Sudanese authorities failed to intervene or to prevent the attack, which lasted several hours. Although the authorities announced they would investigate the attack, no findings were made public by the end of the year.

1. [Exposed, silenced, attacked: Failures to protect health and essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic \(POL 40/2572/2020\)](#)
2. [Sudan: UN and AU must prioritize protection of civilians in Darfur \(AFR 54/2351/2020\)](#)
3. [Sudan: Promptly investigate protester killings at Fata Borno \(Press release, 14 July\)](#)

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