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# THE CIVIL WAR IN SUDAN: ACTORS, IMPACTS, AND THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS





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# **The Civil War in Sudan: Actors, Impacts, and the Humanitarian Crisis**

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## I. Summary

Since the outbreak of civil war in Sudan, the country has experienced immense suffering due to violent conflict between the **Sudanese Armed Forces** (SAF) and the **Rapid Support Forces** (RSF), exacerbated by a complex web of internal and external actors. This report sheds light on the underlying causes of the conflict, the roles played by these actors, and the resulting humanitarian crisis, which has left millions of Sudanese citizens in dire conditions. The findings presented herein are based on in-depth interviews with six individuals, including experts in humanitarian work, international law and affairs, as well as Sudanese nationals, to offer a balanced perspective on both the political landscape and the lived experiences of those affected.

### Main Points:

**Causes of the War:** Key motivations include power struggles, economic interests, and political dynamics, fueled by a lack of accountability, Islamist influence, and ethnic tensions within Sudan.

**Key Actors:** Both local forces (SAF and RSF) and external actors (notably Russia's Wagner Group, and other Middle Eastern powers) have influenced the ongoing conflict, each with distinct motivations and impacts on the ground.

**Humanitarian Impact:** Sudan's civilian population bears the brunt of the violence, facing widespread displacement, gender-based violence, enforced disappearances, and an inadequate international response.

## II. Introduction

The civil war that erupted in Sudan on April 15, 2023 has devastated the nation, plunging it into chaos and exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis. What began as a violent power struggle between the RSF and the SAF escalated into a full-scale conflict<sup>1</sup>, intensifying long-standing political, ethnic, and social tensions. With Sudan's fragile post-dictatorship transitional period mishandled, the country has been thrust into turmoil. The war has resulted

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<sup>1</sup> Nashed, Mat. "Analysis: Fighting erupts in Sudan after months of tension." *Al Jazeera*, 15 April 2023

in widespread destruction, mass displacement, and immense suffering, with millions facing severe shortages of essential resources such as food, water, medicine, and basic services.<sup>2</sup>

## **Purpose of the Report**

The protracted civil conflict in Sudan, characterized by power struggles, foreign interventions, and deep-rooted ethnic and political divisions, has had a catastrophic impact on the region. This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the conflict's origins, the key stakeholders, and the extensive humanitarian repercussions that have ensued. Through a thorough examination of both internal and external factors, the report seeks to shed light on the nature of the conflict, the motivations of the parties involved, and the severe humanitarian crisis affecting millions of Sudanese citizens.

## **Methodology**

Research for this report was conducted from July to October 2024, drawing on six in-depth interviews. These interviews included three individuals working in fields related to Sudan's conflict and humanitarian crisis and three Sudanese nationals who have experienced the war's effects firsthand. The interviews were conducted remotely to ensure the safety and comfort of the participants.

The three experts consulted for this report include **Farhan Siddique**, formerly a Human Rights Officer with the Darfur Network for Human Rights. ; **Isabella Currie**, a PhD candidate and Associate Lecturer at La Trobe University studying the The Wagner Group's impact on international relations; and a seasoned professional (referred to as "**Salma**") with over a decade of experience in international law and policy. Salma requested partial anonymity to protect her identity.

Additionally, three Sudanese nationals who shared their experiences include **Omnia Elgunaid**, a Sudanese refugee, along with two other individuals who requested anonymity. The first is a young Sudanese refugee, identified here as "**Nura**," and the second is a male resident of Sudan,

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<sup>2</sup> "Sudan: Seven months of conflict - Key Facts and Figures (15 November 2023)." *OCHA*, 19 11 2023

referred to as “**Amir**.” These three provided personal insights into the ongoing challenges and fears caused by the civil war.

All interviewees were briefed on the purpose of the interview, how their information would be utilized, and were offered anonymity where requested.

Identifying information for certain individuals has been withheld, and pseudonyms are used where necessary to safeguard privacy. None of the interviewees received financial or other incentives for participating in this report.

### III. Overview of the Civil War in Sudan

Sudan's contemporary civil war is rooted in a complex historical legacy of conflict, driven by profound political, ethnic, and religious divisions. After gaining independence from Britain in 1956, Sudan has been embroiled in almost continuous domestic strife.<sup>3</sup> The First<sup>4</sup> and Second<sup>5</sup> Sudanese Civil Wars, primarily fought between the central government in the north and southern Sudanese rebel factions, stand out as particularly significant events. These protracted conflicts culminated in the eventual secession of South Sudan in 2011, following decades of violence, famine, and mass displacement<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005<sup>7</sup> and South Sudan's independence, peace did not materialize in the north. Sudan's political landscape remained deeply fractured, with persistent ethnic, regional, and ideological tensions fueling ongoing instability. The Darfur conflict exemplifies these deep-seated grievances, where state-sponsored militia groups, such as the *Janjaweed*, engaged in systematic violence against non-Arab populations, leading to accusations of genocide and war crimes<sup>8</sup>.

In 2019, following months of protests driven by economic hardships and political dissatisfaction, long-standing autocrat **Omar al-Bashir** was overthrown in a military coup<sup>9</sup>. Al-Bashir's removal represented a significant turning point in Sudanese history, as the nation

<sup>3</sup> “Sudan Gains Independence From Britain.” *African American Registry*

<sup>4</sup> Momodu, Samuel. “First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972) •.” *Blackpast*, 22 January 2020

<sup>5</sup> Momodu, Samuel. “Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) •.” *Blackpast*, 23 December 2018

<sup>6</sup> “South Sudan profile - overview.” *BBC*, 27 April 2016

<sup>7</sup> Ottaway, Marina. “The Comprehensive Peace Agreement - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 4 January 2011

<sup>8</sup> Collins, Robert O. “Sudan - Darfur Conflict, Genocide, War Crimes.” *Britannica*

<sup>9</sup> “Sudan coup: Why Omar al-Bashir was overthrown.” *BBC*, 15 April 2019



embarked on a fragile transition to civilian governance. However, the transitional government, a power-sharing arrangement between the military and civilian leadership, faced persistent challenges<sup>10</sup>. Power struggles, economic crises, and disagreements over the distribution of authority weakened the transitional framework.

The failure to effectively manage this transition, coupled with Sudan's deeply entrenched divisions, set the stage for the current civil war, which erupted in April 2023<sup>11</sup>.

## IV. Main Internal and External Actors

### Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, are the principal belligerents in the conflict. The SAF represents Sudan's formal military establishment, while the RSF, originally a paramilitary group, evolved from the Janjaweed militias involved in the Darfur conflict and has a reputation for human rights violations.

Both factions aim to consolidate power within Sudan, but internal divisions and rivalries have prevented a unified approach, particularly regarding the transition to civilian-led governance.

The SAF seeks to maintain traditional military control, while the RSF, driven by Dagalo's ambitions, aims to reshape the balance of power in favor of a more decentralized, paramilitary-focused influence. Economic interests also play a significant role; the RSF's control of key gold mines provides a major source of revenue, enhancing their capacity for sustained conflict<sup>12</sup>.

### Foreign Involvement: Russia, Wagner Group, Egypt, and Gulf States

Foreign intervention has deepened the complexity of Sudan's civil war. **Russia**, especially through the **Wagner Group**, has strengthened its ties with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)<sup>13</sup> to secure control over Sudanese gold—a resource fueling Russian geopolitical ambitions.

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<sup>10</sup> Khalifa, Abdelrahim, and Malik Agar. "Sudan's Transition: Challenges and Opportunities." *The Washington Institute*, 1 June 2020

<sup>11</sup> "Stopping Sudan's Descent into Full-Blown Civil War." *Crisis Group*, 20 April 2023

<sup>12</sup> "Exposing the financial network behind Hemedti's RSF in Sudan." *Global Witness*, 9 December 2019

<sup>13</sup> Eltayeb, Amgad Fareid. "Sudan: The Wagner-RSF ties that block the path to democratisation." *The Africa Report.com*, 2 February 2023

According to Isabella Currie, a PhD candidate focused on Wagner's African operations, the group's role extends beyond resource exploitation.

*"Prigozhin and the Wagner Group's involvement in Sudan is a stark example of how external actors can exploit fragile states for their own gain, often at the expense of the country's democratic aspirations and human rights. In Sudan, his network's interference not only helped derail a democratic transition but also secured a lucrative foothold in one of Africa's most resource-rich nations."*

**Egypt**, which shares deep historical ties with Sudan, supports the SAF<sup>14</sup> due to its opposition to paramilitary autonomy near its borders, fearing that a destabilized Sudan could impact Egyptian security and influence in the Nile Basin.

In contrast, the **UAE** has allegedly backed the RSF<sup>15</sup>, led by Hemedti, in exchange for access to Sudan's mineral and agricultural resources. **Saudi Arabia** has aimed for a balanced diplomatic role, seeking regional stability while maintaining ties with both sides. Ultimately, Gulf involvement, marked by financial and military aid, has fueled the conflict, complicating Sudan's path to peace.

External involvement has exacerbated the conflict, providing armaments, financing, and strategic support that perpetuates the war and exacerbates Sudan's humanitarian crisis. International bodies persistently advocate for diminished foreign intervention, imploring diplomatic resolutions that prioritize peacebuilding and civilian safeguarding.

## V. Causes of the War

### Internal Politics

The civil war in Sudan is firmly grounded in internal power dynamics, economic difficulties, and a precarious political milieu. After the 2019 removal of long-serving President Omar

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<sup>14</sup> "Egypt's spy chief visits Sudan amid rising frustration with SAF." *The Sudan Times*, 25 August 2024

<sup>15</sup> Rinaldi, Alma Selvaggia. "How Sudan's RSF became a key ally for the UAE's logistical and corporate interests." *Middle East Eye*, 1 September 2024

al-Bashir<sup>16</sup> Sudan's shift towards civilian leadership was characterized by tensions between the military and civilian factions. SAF, commanded by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces RSF, under Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, initially cooperated but subsequently clashed over the direction of Sudan's future governance<sup>17</sup>.

This rivalry, according to Salma, centers on competing desires to control Sudan's military and political apparatus. In her words,

*"This war is fundamentally a struggle for power."*

The transitional period that followed President Omar al-Bashir's ousting highlighted this tension, as Sudan prepared to integrate the RSF into the Sudanese army.

Salma explains,

*"This integration involved a militia group created by the Islamists under al-Bashir's regime, with figures like al-Burhan playing a central role."*

Hemedti, meanwhile, gained significant support, particularly among Sudanese of lower incomes, who viewed him as an ally.

As Salma notes,

*"Hemedti actively supported the Sudanese people, particularly those with low incomes, and as a result, he garnered widespread support."*

Yet this rising influence created friction. Salma emphasizes,

*"It seemed that with the integration of the Rapid Support Forces into the army as planned during the transitional period, the Sudanese army, along with the Islamists, al-Burhan, and his allies, would have likely lost their influence within the military."*

The struggle between Hemedti and al-Burhan thus became a primary driver of the conflict, with both factions vying to avoid losing their power.

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<sup>16</sup> "Sudan coup: Why Omar al-Bashir was overthrown." *BBC*, 15 April 2019

<sup>17</sup> "Stopping Sudan's Descent into Full-Blown Civil War." *Crisis Group*, 20 April 2023

Salma believes that Sudan must learn to navigate these challenges rather than expecting them to disappear entirely.

She remarks,

*"The Islamist regime in Sudan is here to stay—it will never fully disappear... It's just a matter of navigating these realities in a way that allows for democracy to work for everyone."*

### **Avoidance of Accountability**

Sudan's transitional government faced numerous challenges in its attempts to hold past regime officials accountable, a process that Salma believes also contributed to the outbreak of the war. Reflecting on the role of accountability, she explains,

*"There was a TV program on national television highlighting the human rights abuses carried out by the Bashir regime in the late 80s and early 90s. Activists were arrested, tortured, and some even went missing. Slowly, their families and victims started speaking out on national TV."*

This transparency led to fear among the country's elites. Salma explains,

*"I believe it was this very idea of transition that caused fear among those in power—they feared for their own lives, knowing they were heading toward accountability mechanisms."*

With high-profile cases advancing, such as the ICC case against Ali Kushayb<sup>18</sup> Sudan's elite faced increasing pressure from the justice system, contributing to their urgency to retain control.

### **Ethnic and Tribal Divisions**

According to Salma, Sudan's ethnic and tribal dynamics have long fueled internal conflicts, with this war representing a "rebellion" against a system that marginalized groups such as Hemedti's ethnic background.

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<sup>18</sup> "Abd-Al-Rahman | International Criminal Court." | *International Criminal Court*

*"For many years, the clans where Hemedti and his allies are from were sidelined and viewed as inferiors,"*

she explains.

*"It's a rebellion against the Arabization of the Sudanese people, and that's what's emerging now."*

This deep-seated division has escalated violence, with reports of increased sectarian hostilities.

*"We're hearing about raids, houses being looted, and cars being blown up—these are signs of deep hatred, a desire for retaliation,"*

says Salma, illustrating how these ethnic grievances contribute to the conflict.

### **Economic Inequality**

Sudan's economic disparity has further complicated the crisis. As wealth flowed into Sudan during the transitional period,

*"the poor were getting poorer, while the rich continued to grow wealthier,"*

Salma points out.

Wealthy individuals, particularly those from the diaspora, invested heavily in the country, concentrating resources in affluent areas like Al-Riyadh, where NGOs and diaspora communities have established themselves.

Salma notes that this economic divide has exacerbated tensions, leading to feelings of marginalization among less affluent Sudanese. While resource interests—such as gold and oil—are part of the story, Salma argues that these factors are

*"a relatively small component compared to the broader causes behind the war and its history."*

## VI. Role of Wagner Group and Other Foreign Influences

Foreign actors, including the UAE, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, have played pivotal roles in shaping Sudan's political landscape and fueling the conflict, often driven by interests in Sudan's natural resources. According to Salma, while these external influences significantly impact Sudan, they do not alone explain the conflict's complexity.

*"The pressure from international actors like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Russia has played a role in Sudan for many years, and it will continue,"*

she acknowledges, underscoring that

*"These countries will keep engaging in Sudan, exerting influence over the peace process."*

A deeper examination of these influences reveals complex motivations beyond mere political support.

Isabella Currie identifies Wagner Group's entry into Sudan as part of a strategic alliance formed in 2017 to support the regime of Omar al-Bashir. Currie explains that this partnership began with high-level meetings between Bashir and Russian officials, notably a November 23, 2017 meeting with Vladimir Putin<sup>19</sup>.

In this meeting, Bashir sought protection against what he called

*"U.S. intervention"*

in exchange for

*"concessions that would allow Russian companies, including those linked to Prigozhin, to operate in Sudan."*

Following this, Wagner Group mercenaries arrived in Sudan, tasked with

*"training Sudanese military forces"*

and suppressing anti-government protests that threatened Bashir's rule.

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<sup>19</sup> Doxsee, Catrina. "How Does the Conflict in Sudan Affect Russia and the Wagner Group?" *CSIS*, 20 April 2023

This initial mission soon evolved into a brutal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators<sup>20</sup>. Currie recounts that

*“by 2018-2019, Wagner mercenaries were involved in brutal crackdowns on demonstrators.”*

Alongside Sudanese forces, Wagner personnel reportedly fired live ammunition into crowds, which eyewitnesses confirmed included

*“Russian-speaking foreigners”*

among the Sudanese security forces.

The involvement led to at least 40 civilian deaths by January 2019, and Wagner agents were further involved in detaining students linked to protest movements, systematically suppressing the pro-democracy movement.

### **Control of Gold Resources**

A significant facet of the Wagner Group’s presence in Sudan lies in the control of gold resources, a relationship facilitated by Prigozhin-linked shell companies.

Currie elaborates on the economic incentives driving Wagner’s involvement in Sudan’s gold sector, describing it as

*“a consistent feature of their activities across Africa.”*

The company M-Invest<sup>21</sup>, led by Prigozhin, secured gold mining concessions, granting Wagner profitable control over Sudanese gold resources.

The group’s operations involved exporting gold out of Sudan through covert methods, as Currie describes:

*“Sudanese authorities, under the direction of Sovereignty Council leader Burhan, ignored Prigozhin's blatant corruption as his security team illegally smuggled thousands of boxes labeled as 'cookies' but concealing gold out of Sudan and into Russia.”*

The operation’s profits were channeled back to Russia, evading international sanctions and securing financial returns for the group. This economic partnership extended to support the RSF militia through the sale of weapons and equipment.

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<sup>20</sup> Leviev, Ruslan. “From Russia with Wagner: are Russian mercenaries suppressing the Sudan protests? – Conflict Intelligence Team.” *Conflict Intelligence Team*, 11 January 2019

<sup>21</sup> Sharife, Khadija, and Erin Klazar. “Documents Reveal Wagner's Golden Ties to Sudanese Military Companies.” OCCRP, 2 November 2022

Currie states that,

*“Meroe Gold is coincidentally the same 'humanitarian aid' initiative which delivered PPE and medical supplies to Sudan in 2020,”*

while in reality, the group was deeply involved in gold smuggling and other covert operations.

## **Military and Political Influence**

The Wagner Group’s role extended into training and supporting Sudanese paramilitary forces, particularly the RSF, with whom they developed a strong alliance.

Currie explains,

*“The Wagner Group played a key role in shaping the tactics and operations of the RSF, forging a deep and mutually beneficial relationship that fueled both repression and profit.”*

Wagner’s training enabled the RSF to adopt brutal tactics, including the violent suppression of the 2019 Khartoum Massacre<sup>22</sup>, where RSF forces, allegedly supported by Wagner, executed widespread crackdowns on pro-democracy protests, leading to numerous civilian casualties.

This close collaboration between Wagner and the RSF reached its apex during the October 2021 coup, with Wagner providing disinformation support and propaganda to stabilize RSF’s hold on power.

*“Prigozhin’s network worked to obscure the truth and maintain control of the narrative,”*

Currie says, underscoring how the Wagner-linked digital network manipulated media to undermine the Sudanese pro-democracy movement.

## **Current Influence and Potential Outcomes**

The Wagner Group’s entrenchment in Sudan continues to have profound implications.

Currie asserts,

*“Prigozhin and the Wagner Group’s involvement in Sudan is a stark example of how external actors can exploit fragile states for their own gain, often at the expense of the country’s democratic aspirations and human rights.”*

Their alliance with the RSF remains a factor in the ongoing civil war, although recent losses in Ukraine may have impacted Wagner’s operational reach. Currie emphasizes that while she has not seen clear evidence of Wagner’s current combat role in Sudan, the group’s ongoing support for factions like the RSF has undoubtedly influenced the conflict’s dynamics.

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<sup>22</sup> ““They Were Shouting 'Kill Them'”: Sudan’s Violent Crackdown on Protesters in Khartoum | HRW.” *Human Rights Watch*, 17 November 2019



## VII. Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan

### Scope of the Crisis

The Sudanese civil war has precipitated a humanitarian catastrophe of staggering proportions. Extensive displacement, casualties, and destruction of infrastructure have devastated the country. Current data suggests that over 11 million<sup>23</sup> individuals have been forcibly relocated, both within Sudan and across its borders, with civilians disproportionately impacted by the violence. Systematic targeting and demolition of healthcare facilities<sup>24</sup>, educational institutions, and other essential infrastructure<sup>25</sup> have severely constrained access to basic services, further exacerbating the crisis for vulnerable populations.

According to Farhan Siddique, formerly a Human Rights Officer at the Darfur Network for Human Rights (DNHR),

*“The conflict, classified as a Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC), continues to escalate daily. It has become the world's largest humanitarian crisis, yet it remains under-addressed by the international community.”*

Despite the immense suffering of innocent civilians, Siddique asserts,

*"substantial efforts to resolve the conflict are still lacking,"*

leaving millions without essential humanitarian aid or protection.

Since April 15, 2023, when the civil war erupted, Sudan has experienced unprecedented levels of displacement. Farhan explains that the conflict has now forced over 11 million Sudanese from their homes, with over 10 million still internally displaced. This marks Sudan as the site of the largest internal displacement crisis in the world, with over half of its population—nearly 25 million people—in need of humanitarian assistance due to the escalation of conflict.

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<sup>23</sup> “Sudan | Situation Reports.” *Situation Reports*, 3 November 2024

<sup>24</sup> “Destruction, disruption and disaster: Sudan's health system amidst armed conflict - Conflict and Health.” *Conflict and Health*, 27 September 2023

<sup>25</sup> “Sudan's War and its Devastating Impact on Infrastructure – African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies.” *African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies – ACJPS*, 24 November 2023

Farhan highlights how this dire situation has compounded the pre-existing crisis in Sudan, which had already left millions struggling with political and economic instability before the war.

The war has disproportionately affected regions like Darfur, Kordofan, and Khartoum. In Darfur, where RSF forces have gained control over most territories, Siddique notes that

*"the humanitarian situation is catastrophic, with daily reports of looting and killings,"*

while attempts to seize the strategic city of El Fasher have led to further civilian casualties and displacement. In Kordofan, intense clashes between the SAF and RSF have led to growing insecurity and additional displacement, further straining local resources.

### **Gender-Based Violence and Rights Violations**

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has led to a stark increase in gender-based violence (GBV), with women and girls especially vulnerable to abuse.

Salma, emphasized the deep-seated challenges facing Sudan in addressing these issues:

*"Gender-based violence, without a doubt...what we read and see is just the tip of the iceberg. In Sudan, there's a strong taboo around sexual and gender-based violence—not necessarily as Muslims, but culturally as Sudanese people."*

This societal stigma often results in severe underreporting, allowing abuses to persist largely unchecked.

Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and conflict zones have become epicenters of such violence.

Salma observed that the scale of GBV in Sudan feels unparalleled:

*"We are seeing hate-fueled crimes tied to tribalism and retaliation...for instance, there are videos showing the Rapid Support Forces committing gender-based violence against girls in central Khartoum."*

These incidents illustrate how GBV is being used as a tool of intimidation and control, further marginalizing already vulnerable populations and leaving survivors with limited access to justice and support systems.

Survivors of GBV face considerable barriers to justice, with limited law enforcement and prevailing impunity for perpetrators.

*“Many people suddenly go missing,”*

Salma added,

*“But it's not because they're dead—they are often arrested, tortured, or held in dungeons.”*

This absence of accountability not only deters survivors from seeking justice but also perpetuates a cycle of violence that goes unchallenged.

Farhan Siddique, highlighted the exacerbating impact of the conflict on Sudan's humanitarian crisis, noting the scale of displacement and worsening health conditions. He described Sudan's internal displacement situation as the largest in the world:

*“Over 12 million Sudanese are now displaced...Sudan currently represents the largest internal displacement crisis in the world.”*

Farhan's perspective underscores the overwhelming humanitarian needs in Sudan, with essential services, including trauma care for GBV survivors, severely lacking across the country.

The crisis in Darfur exemplifies this dire need. Farhan pointed out that

*“the RSF has been consistently looting humanitarian aid and medicines intended for civilians or preventing their distribution altogether.”*

This interference by armed factions compounds the suffering of local populations, while sexual violence and torture by RSF forces continue in Darfur with little to no accountability.

In conclusion, both interviewees convey the harrowing state of gender-based violence and broader human rights abuses in Sudan. As Farhan described, the widespread and unchecked

nature of these violations has created a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented proportions, exacerbated by an international community slow to act.

### **Testimonies from Sudanese Nationals**

For those still within Sudan's borders, the ongoing civil war has turned everyday life into a battle for survival.

Amir, a 35-year-old resident of Omdurman, reflects on the radical shift his life has undergone since the war's onset:

*"Life was calm here once, centered around a close-knit community. There was a deep sense of belonging. Now, I've lost everything, including the production company I built from the ground up in 2018."*

Amir's company had been his dream, his way of contributing to Sudan's economy and culture.

*"It wasn't just a loss of income,"*

he says,

*"but the loss of a vision I'd worked hard to achieve."*

Like many who remain, Amir endures daily reminders of the conflict's proximity. Although he is not in the midst of direct clashes, he is frequently shaken by the sounds of nearby shelling across the Nile.

*"Every explosion is a reminder that danger is close,"*

he explains.

*"I'm constantly on edge, ... there's a constant undercurrent of anxiety, as my thoughts are often with my family's safety and the instability around us."*

Refugees who managed to escape Sudan's violence continue to face an array of physical and emotional hardships.

Omnia Elgunaid, now living in Egypt, recounts the repeated displacements she endured before crossing the border:

*“I’ve been displaced numerous times, finally making it to Egypt. But my father and most of my bloodline are still in Sudan. Some of them are in active war zones, and we’ve lost contact with them.”*

Even in relative safety, Omnia’s experience is marked by profound anxiety and loss. She struggles with the guilt of being safe while her loved ones remain in harm’s way.

*“Many of my aunts and cousins still live in areas where they face daily threats,”*

she says.

*“They face threats on a daily basis whether it’s by the bombs and bullets raining on them, food insecurity or militiamen looting/terrorizing them.”*

Nura, a young Sudanese refugee who fled with her family, highlights the economic and personal challenges of starting anew in a foreign country.

With her mother as the sole provider, Nura describes the strain on her family:

*“Despite being outside Sudan, we’re facing immense financial strain. My mother now supports not only us but also her siblings and parents.”*

Nura also emphasizes how the conflict has severed her educational path.

*“Since the conflict began, I haven’t been able to resume my studies.”*

With passport issuance halted for nearly a year due to the war, her ability to pursue higher education outside Sudan remains blocked.

Both Omnia and Nura describe the extreme vulnerability faced by Sudanese women and girls, who are often targeted by armed groups.

Nura, who fled Sudan after being harassed and stalked by members of the RSF, explains,

*“The violence by the RSF has always focused on women and girls, even before the war officially began. I myself am a victim of several sexual assaults by RSF members.”*

Her testimony sheds light on the systemic threats women face, made worse by a climate of impunity.

Omnia corroborates these experiences, describing the dangers women still face in RSF-controlled areas:

*“Women and girls in those regions continue to face constant threats of sexual violence.”*

Access to healthcare, food, and water is critically strained for those within Sudan.

Amir, who suffers from hypertension, has struggled to manage his health due to the unavailability of medication.

*“Managing my blood pressure has become a daily challenge. Medications are nowhere to be found, and every fluctuation in my condition reminds me how vulnerable we are.”*

Humanitarian assistance remains sparse and inconsistent, often limited to local organizations struggling to meet the immense need. Amir notes that the Hadreen organization, a Sudanese NGO, has occasionally helped by providing food items to community kitchens. Yet government aid from agencies like the WFP has only reached his area twice in six months.

*“We feel largely abandoned,”*

*he remarks,*

*“and the world seems indifferent.”*

These testimonies collectively capture the despair, resilience, and frustration felt by those enduring the Sudanese conflict.

As Nura passionately states,

*“My message is that Sudan is currently the world's worst humanitarian crisis yet no one knows or understands anything about it. Many people will be surprised to hear*

*that there is a war to begin with. I urge the world not to forget about us or about our loved ones still displaced and under bombardment.”*

## **VIII. The Role of International Organizations and Justice Mechanisms**

### **Involvement of the UN, NGOs, and the ICC/ICJ**

International organizations, including the United Nations, various NGOs, and legal institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ), have attempted to address Sudan’s crisis. However, their impact has been severely limited, especially in terms of delivering justice and accountability.

Salma expressed deep skepticism about the ICC's role, stating,

*“The ICC...doesn’t have jurisdiction or the capacity to go in and make arrests, which is a huge failure, not just in Sudan but in any international scenario outside its jurisdiction.”*

She pointed to a decade-old arrest warrant<sup>26</sup> that has yet to be enforced, underlining the ICC’s limited reach without government cooperation.

Salma described the ICC and ICJ as

*“not structured in a way that makes them effective in the countries that need justice the most.”*

Reflecting on her experience, she explained that international bodies often fail to connect with civil society or victims on the ground, creating a sense of alienation among the people they are supposed to support.

*“Sudanese people deserve to be part of the process on their own soil, not left out by international bodies that can never fully understand their suffering,”*

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<sup>26</sup> “Al Bashir | International Criminal Court.” | *International Criminal Court*

she emphasized, pointing out that this disconnect often undermines the credibility of these justice mechanisms.

NGOs, while essential in documenting abuses and delivering aid, struggle with restricted access and constant security threats. Similarly, despite sanctions and condemnations from the UN, tangible improvements remain elusive. These challenges illustrate the gap between international mechanisms and on-the-ground realities in Sudan, leaving countless individuals without clear avenues for justice or support.

### **Perspectives on Reform**

Salma believes that a comprehensive overhaul of international organizations is essential if they are to be effective in conflict zones like Sudan.

*“The international system as a whole needs reform to meet the needs of the people it’s supposed to serve,”*

she argued, suggesting that even longstanding agreements, such as the Geneva Convention, may need updates to reflect current challenges.

Salma highlighted the need for organizations to focus on the interests of affected populations rather than the priorities of donor governments.

*“International organizations...need to focus on serving the people, not the governments,”*

she asserted.

Salma proposed specific steps to address these issues, such as building Sudan’s local legal capacity through training with international experts, possibly from regions like former Yugoslavia or Rwanda, to help develop hybrid tribunals.

Additionally, she suggested that strengthening the ICC’s independence from political pressures would enhance its ability to prosecute crimes in non-cooperative countries. For her, reforms that allow local involvement in justice processes are critical:

*“You can’t impose international justice on people who feel excluded from the process.”*



## **Limitations in Aid Delivery and Global Attention**

Farhan Siddique offered a critical perspective on the international community's response to Sudan's crisis. He highlighted severe gaps between pledged aid and the actual support reaching Sudan.

*“The situation for displaced populations and refugees both within and outside Sudan remains dire,”*

he explained, describing desperate conditions in IDP camps with severe shortages of food, shelter, and medical care. Farhan noted the grim reality of rising hunger and disease within these camps, particularly in hard-hit areas like Darfur, where cholera and famine are taking lives.

He criticized the lack of sustained international engagement, explaining,

*“Global attention and resources have largely been directed towards the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, sidelining the escalating crisis in Sudan.”*

According to Farhan, this shift in focus has led to an uneven and sporadic response, which only worsens the crisis. He urged the international community to prioritize Sudan's urgent needs:

*“While these international bodies have made efforts to engage with Sudanese civil society and local organizations, they are not treating the conflict in Sudan with the urgency and importance it deserves.”*

## **IX. Conclusion**

### **Summary of Findings**

This report emphasizes the tremendous obstacles confronting Sudan as it grapples with an ongoing civil war that has ravaged communities, fractured political structures, and precipitated one of the most severe humanitarian emergencies in recent history. Expert analysis and first-hand accounts reveal a deeply ingrained conflict, driven by entrenched power dynamics, ethnic and religious divisions, and external interference.

Interviewees highlighted the role of key domestic actors, such as the Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces, whose rivalries and abuses have perpetuated civilian suffering. Furthermore, the testimonies of Sudanese nationals illustrate the profound human toll of displacement, violence, and the psychological trauma experienced by refugees and those who remain within the country.

## **Final Reflections**

The conflict in Sudan has significant implications for regional stability, threatening to destabilize neighboring countries and intensify global humanitarian challenges. The involvement of external actors, such as Russia's Wagner Group and Gulf States, has fueled hostilities, exacerbating the war's impact and complicating diplomatic resolution efforts.

As the conflict endures, Sudan has become emblematic of the limitations of international justice mechanisms and the urgent need for reform within institutions like the ICC and the UN to effectively serve vulnerable populations. Without sustained global attention and intervention, the cycle of violence and displacement may deepen, with ramifications extending beyond Sudan's borders.

## **Call to Action**

To break this cycle and address the root causes of the conflict, decisive international action is essential. First, the establishment of robust accountability mechanisms, potentially through a hybrid court, would provide justice for victims of war crimes and build a foundation for reconciliation.

Second, immediate efforts to scale humanitarian aid delivery must be prioritized, focusing on creating safe corridors and ensuring that aid reaches those in desperate need.

Finally, the international community must support inclusive peace processes that bring together all stakeholders—political actors, civil society, and marginalized communities—ensuring that Sudanese civilians are at the forefront of any long-term solution. Only by addressing these foundational issues can there be hope for a stable and peaceful Sudan, where citizens can rebuild and thrive.

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