

The conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF, formerly the Janjaweed militia) led by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, who had jointly mounted a coup against the transitional government in October 2021, has been ongoing for over three years. The hostilities began on 15 April 2023, as both parties were due to merge in line with an internationally supported framework agreement on a transition to democracy.

Legal framework

Sudan is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The 2005 Interim National Constitution, enacted prior to the secession of South Sudan, provided for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and referred to shari'a 'and the consensus of the people' as the sources of nationally enacted legislation in northern states.

Under the civilian-led transitional government, established following the removal of former president Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, there were some improvements in FoRB, including a constitutional declaration signed in August 2019 which contained several provisions protecting the right to freedom of religious belief and worship 'in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order.' The constitutional declaration also affirmed Sudan as an 'independent, sovereign, democratic, parliamentary, pluralist, decentralised state, where rights and duties are based on citizenship without discrimination due to race, religion,' making no reference to religion as a foundation of the state.

Laws promulgated under the former constitution remained in effect while the transitional government worked on reforms to Sudan's legal framework in line with the constitutional declaration. Amendments included the decriminalisation of apostasy in 2020, the removal of flogging as a punishment for blasphemy, and rules allowing non-Muslims to drink, import and sell alcohol.

Conflict between the SAF and the RSF

Sudan's civilians continue to bear the brunt of violence 'marked by an insidious disregard for human life,' with estimates of over 150,000 people having been killed.¹

Consistent reports emerge of medical facilities being targeted by both warring parties, described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as 'a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law', of attacks on medical personnel, and of shortages of food, water and essential medications are equally concerning.

The conflict has extended across the whole of Sudan, with tensions flaring in Khartoum and Omdurman as the SAF

attempt to regain control of neighbourhoods taken by the RSF. It has also affected parts of South Kordofan and Gezira State. In March 2024 the SAF dropped four bombs on El Hadra village in the Nuba Mountains that fell on the local primary school, killing 14 people, most of them children, and causing the displacement of over 100 civilians. Gezira State, which had been under the control of the RSF, is now almost entirely controlled by the SAF. When the RSF expanded its military operations in Gezira State in December 2023, thousands of people who were displaced internally from Khartoum and Omdurman found themselves living under RSF control. As in other states occupied by the RSF, there have been reports of serious human rights violations, including the killing of civilians, attacks on hospitals, and the looting of homes.

In residential areas, civilians remain in grave danger due to aerial bombardment and home invasions by armed men seeking to use rooftops as vantage points, and who also loot extensively. Severe violations have been reported in cities in Central, North, South and West Darfur, Khartoum, Northern State and North Kordofan State, including sexual violence against women and girls, the forcible recruitment of civilians – including children – and arrests and false accusations targeting volunteers from Resistance Committees, who maintain a neutral stance while organising logistical support for medical services for all who are injured.

In February 2025 the RSF announced plans to form a parallel government during a summit hosted in Nairobi that included the RSF leader Hemedti, who is under US Sanctions. The leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM/N), Abdul Aziz al-Hilu, was also present and announced his group's allegiance to the RSF. The two areas of Blue Nile and South Kordofan have largely remained out of the conflict. However, since the declaration, the conflict has deepened and widened geographically, exacerbating the targeting of individuals and communities on the basis of ethnicity and/or place of origin across Sudan.

In March 2025 the SAF claimed victory by expelling the RSF from most of Khartoum, including the key locations of the Presidential Palace and Khartoum International Airport. Videos circulating on social media reportedly showed RSF fighters leaving the city without being attacked. Clean-up operations began in the capital, including assessing the damage and attempting to make the city safe for the return of civilians. In May 2025 the SAF declared the capital 'completely liberated' from the RSF.² The RSF has also been attacking civilians and military objects with drones in many states, including Khartoum and Port Sudan, the de facto capital.³

In April 2025 the RSF overran Zamzam camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) amid the continued siege of El Fasher in violation of a United Nations Security Council

1 BBC News, 'Sudan army launches major attack on capital Khartoum' 26 September 2024 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgeyg2g288wo>

2 Al Jazeera, 'Sudan's army declares Khartoum state 'completely free' of paramilitary RSF', 20 May 2025 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/20/sudans-army-declares-khartoum-state-completely-free-of-paramilitary-rsf>

3 Reuters, 'Drone attacks cut power across Khartoum state two years into Sudan war', 15 May 2025 <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/drone-attacks-cut-power-across-khartoum-state-two-years-into-sudan-war-2025-05-15/>

(UNSC) resolution. Zamzam and Abu Souk IDP camps comprise the largest displacement camps in Sudan, and the attacks caused further displacement for at least 400,000 people. During the attacks, the RSF targeted civilians, killing women and children and healthcare workers in the only operating clinic in Zamzam camp. In October 2025 El Fasher fell after an 18-month siege with devastating consequences on the civilian population. (see below)

Situation of freedom of religion or belief

Places of worship have also been targeted during the current conflict in violation of International Humanitarian Law. While both mosques and churches have been attacked, CSW sources report that there appear to be efforts made by both sides to avoid attacks on mosques even when operationally sensitive. However, churches have been deliberately attacked or used during military offensives.

These attacks are consistent with actions taken by leaders of both the SAF and RSF during the period following their joint coup in October 2021, which was marked by the clawing back of limited democratic gains, the return to prominence of Islamists from the al-Bashir era, an emboldening of extremist non-state actors amid growing impunity, and repression and violations of FoRB across the country, including harassment, arrests and prosecutions of converts, despite apostasy no longer being a crime under the law, and seizures and demolitions of church-owned properties.

There have also been reports of the arrest and detention by the SAF of Christians who have fled from RSF-controlled areas. In October 2024 over 100 members of the Sudanese Church of Christ (SCOC) fled Al Ezba, Khartoum, due to rising insecurity in the area and travelled to Shendi in River Nile State, where 26 men were arrested by the Military Intelligence Unit and accused of being affiliated with the RSF. In RSF-controlled areas, Christians report being forcibly converted or detained if they attempt to flee.

On 26 November 2025 members of the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) and Orthodox Church in Port Sudan found red graffiti consisting of Islamic shahadahs written on their walls. CCTV footage at the latter showed the culprit arriving in a car with others, emerging from the vehicle with a can of red graffiti spray, and approaching the exterior wall of the church. The two churches are among the oldest Christian places of worship in Sudan. Both incidents occurred during the day in populated areas under SAF control; however, no action was taken by local officials, including the police.

In December 2025 Muslim extremists in Wad Diab Al Gaba in Northern State forcibly prevented the Coptic community in the village from completing the reconstruction of their church building, which the community had demolished after it was damaged by heavy rains in 2019. The community had almost completed the reconstruction; however, extremists filed a complaint to the local authority against the man to

whom the land belonged, and he was in turn ordered to stop all worship activities and construction work until a permit was issued, which the local authority has refused to provide. Places of worship continue to be attacked across the country in areas controlled by both parties to the conflict where fighting is intense. In the latter months of the siege on El Fasher, between June and September 2025 specifically, several such attacks were reported, including an attack on a mosque which killed at least 70 people on 19 September 2025.

For further information on attacks on places of worship over the course of the conflict, please see CSW's briefing on this issue specifically.⁴

El Fasher, Darfur

Over the course of 18 months, El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur State, became the main battleground between the RSF and the SAF in the state, as it was the only city that was not under RSF control. The RSF siege of the city began in April 2024, and continued despite a UNSC resolution calling for it to be lifted. In April 2025 the RSF seized the Abu Souk and Zamzam IDP camps, which housed over 700,000 people between them. Both camps have been turned into RSF military bases.

Fighting intensified from June 2025, with further attacks on civilians. Between June and September, CSW reported on an intensive bombing campaign by the RSF that targeted civilian infrastructure including places of worship. Reports also emerged of the RSF using places of worship, including churches, for military purposes. In August 2025 the UN Human Rights Office monitoring Darfur warned that there were no safe exit routes in or out of the city. Civilians were left with the choice of leaving and risking sexual violence, execution or abduction, or remaining in the city and suffering bombardments, starvation and potential atrocities if the RSF overran it.

On 26 October 2025 the RSF declared that they had captured an SAF military outpost in El Fasher. Two days later, on 28 October, General Burhan confirmed that SAF forces had withdrawn from the city. In the hours that followed the RSF's announcement that they had taken El Fasher, communications networks to the city were restricted, with Sudanese across the country and in the diaspora reporting they were unable to reach loved ones still trapped there. In the first 24 hours following the capture of the city, videos, audio files and photos detailing severe human rights violations committed by the RSF against civilians began to emerge. Images of summary executions, bodies of civilians in what appear to be mass graves, and audio files of RSF fighters targeting women and girls were shared online. There is also evidence of the RSF targeting individuals who stayed in El Fasher during the siege to support civilians with food and medical assistance.

⁴ CSW, Sudan Briefing: Attacks on places of worship, 17 November 2025 <https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/11/17/report/6662/article.htm>

In February 2026 the UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) published a report that found that the RSF's siege and actions in the aftermath of the capture of the city bore the 'hallmarks of genocide', namely in the militia's systematic targeting of the non-Arab Darfuri Fur and Zaghawa communities.⁵

El Fasher remains effectively cut off from the rest of the world. Those who were able to flee from the city moved to the nearby town of Tawila. Concerns remain among humanitarian organisations that with the RSF's control of the Darfur region, civilians remain at risk. In February 2026 heavy fighting between the RSF and forces aligned with the SAF resulted in the deaths of Chadian soldiers posted in a town along the Darfur-Chad border. The government of Chad closed the border, preventing all goods, aid and people from crossing. With the continuing humanitarian crisis many civilians are seeking refuge in Chad from the fighting and famine in the region.

El Obeid, North Kordofan

In June 2026 the UN Security Council expressed alarm at reports of military reinforcements to the RSF gathering around the city of El Obeid, raising concerns of a potential ground offensive.⁶

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned in the same month that the conflict in El Obeid risked the safety of civilians, and that the extensive use of drones against critical civilian infrastructure was hampering efforts to support civilians in the city. El Obeid has an estimated population of 600,000 people and an additional estimated 80,000 IDPs who have fled conflict in other parts of Sudan. The UN estimates that 15,000 families have been displaced into the city between July and August, adding significant humanitarian pressure and need in the city.⁷

The use of drones by both the RSF and SAF against civilian infrastructure continues to be documented, including IDP camps, traditional courts and a mosque.⁸ Within this context, attacks on fuel and water sources have a disproportionate impact on civilian populations and could constitute violations of international humanitarian law.

The Nuba Mountains

Recent months have seen several instances of tribal violence and attacks on places of worship in the Nuba Mountains, a region known over centuries for respecting ethnic and religious diversity.

In March 2026 tensions broke out in Kauda, South Kordofan, when the SPLM/N, the ruling authority in the city, demarcated land between the Otoro and Shawaya tribes – both predominantly Christian – prompting some members of the former to attack Shawaya villages. Attacks have since extended to the Kawaleeb tribe, which is also predominantly Christian, and to which the commander of the SPLM/N belongs.

On 6 April 2026 members of the SPEC in South Morta, Kadugli, awoke to find that their church building had been badly damaged in an arson attack. The community had been able to worship peacefully in the building since July 2020, when the mayor of South Morta rejected efforts by some Muslim residents to shut the church down.

On 19 June Father Youhanna Al Amin Nyaroum – a Catholic priest from the Kawaleeb tribe – and church guards Youhan Marcus and Joahn Adam were killed when fighters from the Otoro tribe attacked and looted the Catholic church in Kadua for the second consecutive day. A third church guard was injured.

On 23 July Reverend Adil Idris Jangoul of the Sudanese Episcopal Church in Heben was extrajudicially executed along with six other people from the Otoro tribe after they were arrested by the SPLM/N.

On the same day members of the Otoro tribe killed at least 10 people and took at least 20 hostages, including children, in an attack on Heban. Among the hostages was Reverend Yakoub Ibrahim Tia, the former General Secretary of the SCOC and six members of his family, from the Shawaya tribe. All hostages were released safely on 28 July following appeals from church ministers from different tribes.

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)

Distressing reports have emerged from areas seized by the RSF in Khartoum and Omdurman of rape, gang rape and forced 'marriages' as its forces advanced through neighbourhoods, with the majority of these violations occurring in victims' homes.⁹ Initially Ethiopian and Eritrean female refugees in Khartoum were targeted, while Sudanese women were spared.¹⁰ However, they soon began to suffer similar atrocities.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported cases involving gang rape of girls as young as nine, and of older women, including a 60-year-old in Khartoum North who was raped

5 OHCHR, 'Sudan: Evidence in El-Fasher reveals genocidal campaign, targeting non-Arab communities, UN Fact-Finding Mission says', 19 February 2026 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/sudan-evidence-el-fasher-reveals-genocidal-campaign-targeting-non-arab>

6 UN News, 'Sudan: Security Council warns of mass atrocity risk in El Obeid', 20 June 2026 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/06/1167773>

7 UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 'Increased Drone Attacks, Mass Atrocities in War-Torn Sudan Deepening Already Catastrophic Humanitarian Crisis, Top Officials Warn Security Council', 24 August 2026 <https://press.un.org/en/2026/sc16437.doc.htm>

8 Reuters, 'RSF renews assault on Sudan's al-Obeid as drones strike capital, witnesses say', 12 August 2026 <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/rsf-renews-assault-sudans-al-obeid-drones-strike-capital-witnesses-say-2026-08-12/>

9 Human Rights Watch, '"Khartoum is not Safe for Women!": Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Sudan's Capital', Section 'Rape by multiple perpetrators', 28 July 2024 <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/28/khartoum-not-safe-women/sexual-violence-against-women-and-girls-sudans-capital>

10 Al Jazeera, 'Don't let the other soldiers watch': Rape as weapon in Sudan war', 14 August 2023 <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/longform/2023/8/14/dont-let-the-other-soldiers-watch-rape-as-a-weapon-of-war-in-sudan>

alongside her daughter and granddaughter. Women and girls have also been raped in front of male family members.¹¹

The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) documented similar violations by the RSF after they took control of Gezira State in December 2023, with women and girls being abducted from their homes, held for several days in various locations, and raped repeatedly by multiple perpetrators.¹²

While there are fewer documented accounts detailing CRSV by the SAF, this could be due to reluctance, stigma or pressure from family members and others to keep silent for fear of reprisals from the military, which constitutes the de facto state authority. However, accounts have emerged from SAF-controlled areas of soldiers abusing their positions to violate vulnerable women. For example, over two dozen women who are unable to leave Omdurman city have reported being forced into transactional sex with SAF soldiers to receive humanitarian aid, or access to abandoned properties where they forage for items to sell to feed their families.¹³

In Darfur, where the office of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor asserts credible evidence exists of a recurrence of atrocity crimes targeting the ethnically African Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes, chilling evidence is emerging of rape once again being used as a weapon of war. Following the fall of Geneina in West Darfur State to the RSF in November 2023, women reported ethnicity-based rape and sexual abuse by RSF fighters and their allied Arab militias. Many victims were from the Masalit community. However, women from Arab tribes were also targeted if they were married to Masalit men or had children with them.¹⁴

In areas controlled by the RSF, women and girls are not only subjected to sexual violence but are also often abducted and held for extended periods of time. A 23-year-old woman from North Kordofan state was abducted by an RSF fighter and taken to his home in Kas, South Darfur. She eventually escaped, but returned home pregnant.¹⁵ A woman from Omdurman who was kidnapped by the RSF along with her three young children was subjected to sexual violence for six months, and was later informed her children would be killed unless she became a spy. She was eventually sent to an

SAF-controlled area, was caught, and placed in a protection centre.¹⁶

Other women forced to work with the RSF who return to SAF-controlled areas or are captured by the SAF also face prosecution, and in some cases have been sentenced to death following unsound judicial rulings which fail to consider the trauma and coercion they have endured, and thereby compound the injustices experienced by survivors.¹⁷

In addition, the targeting of hospitals, schools and medical staff has exacerbated the physical and mental anguish of survivors of CRSV.¹⁸ The consequent lack of access to primary care, specialist treatment and psychosocial assistance heightens the suffering of deeply traumatised victims, causing some to commit suicide.¹⁹

Ongoing international scrutiny

In March 2026 the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommended that the US State Department designate the RSF as an Entity of Particular Concern (EPC) – a designation assigned to ‘non-state actors that have engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom’ – citing ‘religious violence in Darfur and elsewhere in Sudan’ and the ‘harmful effects to religious freedom and Sudan’s diverse religious and ethnic communities’ caused by the RSF’s campaign of mass atrocities and widespread human rights violations.²⁰

In May 2026 the UN FFM for Sudan and the Joint Fact-Finding Mission of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Human Rights Situation in the Sudan issued a joint declaration calling for the protection of civilians, a sustainable ceasefire, an end to CRSV, and, among others, an immediate halt to ‘all forms of ethnic cleansing by the RSF particularly targeting Indigenous people in Darfur, including in El Fasher and in the Kordofan regions’.²¹

CSW continues to urge enhanced scrutiny of the situation of Sudanese citizens, particularly women and girls amid rising CRSV, refugees and other vulnerable groups, and to highlight the importance of ensuring that perpetrators of violations targeting civilians or civilian objects are left in no doubt they will be held to account.

11 Op. cit. fn 9

12 SIHA Network, ‘Press Statement: Gezira State and the Forgotten Atrocities: A Report on Conflict-related Sexual Violence’, 22 July 2024 <https://sihanet.org/press-statement-gezira-state-and-the-forgotten-atrocities-a-report-on-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>

13 The Guardian, ‘Women in war-torn Sudanese city forced to have sex in exchange for food’, 22 July 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/22/women-forced-to-have-sex-with-soldiers-for-food-in-sudanese-city>

14 The Guardian, ‘Darfur rape survivors gather together after ethnically targeted campaign’, 14 March 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/mar/14/darfur-survivors-gather-together-after-ethnically-targeted-campaign>

15 African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, ‘South Darfur: Two girls abducted and subjected to sexual slavery in Nyala’, 19 August 2024 <https://www.acjps.org/publications/south-darfur-two-girls-abducted-and-subjected-to-sexual-slavery-in-nyala>

16 Instagram, ana.sudani @ana.sudani, 28 August 2024 https://www.instagram.com/ana.sudani/reel/C_OMeJSRydw/?hl=en

17 Rhino News, ‘Young woman sentenced to death in Atbara on charges of collaborating with RSF’, 11 August 2024 <https://rhinosd.net/?p=11851&lang=en>

18 ReliefWeb, ‘Sudan: Omdurman hospital bombed, deadly violence in North Darfur and El Gezira’, 13 August 2024 <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-omdurman-hospital-bombed-deadly-violence-north-darfur-and-el-gezira>

19 Op. cit. fn 9

20 USCIRF, 2026 Annual Report, March 2026 https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2026-03/USCIRF_2026_AR_3326_NEW.pdf

21 UN Human Rights Council, Joint Declaration on Sudan, 12 May 2026 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/05/joint-declaration-sudan-adopted-joint-fact-finding-mission-african?sub-site=HRC>

In September 2026 the UN FFM for Sudan issued a report highlighting the role of external networks in supporting the parties to the conflict and furthering harm to civilians.²² The actions of these external networks may contribute to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. The report highlighted entities and individuals who are registered in their countries, including the UAE, with providing support to the parties to the conflict.

The international community must remain engaged, and all efforts to broker peace must include a broad and significant civil society component, since the creation of an inclusive Sudan remains a guiding principle of the civilian movement. This is the only way to secure a durable solution based on an inclusive Sudanese identity, rule of law, human rights and, most importantly, accountability. Any rush to restore a semblance of stability at the expense of justice and accountability for the grave violations committed since 2019 will ultimately prove unsustainable. Addressing impunity by holding accountable those responsible for gross violations is an integral part of peace and stability. This accountability must also extend to other countries that have supported the parties to the conflict, including by supplying arms and facilitating trade in illicitly extracted natural resources.

Recommendations

To the United Nations and Member States:

- Continue to urge both parties to the conflict to agree and adhere to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, and to cooperate fully with the UN FFM on Sudan and other UN mechanisms.
- Support the Designated Expert and OHCHR in their reporting on Sudan, as well as the mandate of the UN FFM on Sudan, ensuring it is fully resourced and equipped to fulfil its mandate.
- Condemn all attacks on civilians and the targeting of human rights defenders, medical personnel, humanitarian and religious workers, hospitals and places of worship as gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law which may border on war crimes, and which will not go unpunished.
- Support independent investigations into atrocity crimes, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Advocate for the identification and prosecution of individuals responsible for perpetrating these crimes – including UNSC referrals to the ICC and expanding its jurisdiction to the whole of Sudan – and through universal jurisdiction.
- Facilitate broad and significant civil society participation in negotiations on a peaceful democratic transition. This is the only way to secure a lasting political solution based on an inclusive Sudanese identity, rule of law, human rights and accountability.
- Utilise the Universal Periodic Review process to raise the concerns and recommendations highlighted in this briefing.
- Where possible, provide financial support and platforms for Sudanese human rights defenders to share their experiences, including facilitating their participation during key UN dialogues.
- Call on all parties to the conflict to ensure the safety and non-refoulement of refugees, who now find themselves in exceptionally difficult circumstances, unable to stay safely in Sudan, yet unable to return to their home country due to well-founded fears of persecution.
- Work to facilitate humanitarian access to enable food, water, medicine and other essential supplies to reach those in need, and to allow for the evacuation of those needing or desiring evacuation from severely affected areas.
- Respond to people fleeing the violence in accordance with the stipulations of the UN Refugee Conventions, encouraging neighbouring states to respect the African Refugee Convention and embrace the spirit of Pan-Africanism with regard to protection, provision and non-refoulement, and to seek additional assistance from the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Red Crescent or Red Cross whenever needed.
- Advocate for the imposition of a comprehensive arms embargo on parties to the conflict, and for the imposition of sanctions on countries that persist in supplying arms.

²² UN HRC, 'Sudan: External support networks are fuelling conflict and civilian harm, UN Fact-Finding Mission warns', 3 September 2026 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/09/sudan-external-support-networks-are-fuelling-conflict-and-civilian-harm-un?sub-site=HRC>

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