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Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Situation of Human Rights in the Sudan

1. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) through research and advocacy.
2. This submission seeks to draw the Council's attention to concerns surrounding the situation of human rights, including FoRB in the Sudan since 15 April 2023.

Violence between Rapid Support Forces and the Sudan Armed Forces

3. The actions taken by 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, both of whom participated in the coup against the transitional government in October 2021, continue to undermine prospects for a civilian-led transition to an inclusive Sudan.
4. The most recent manifestations of hostilities between the forces, beginning on 15 April 2023, occurred as both parties were due to merge in line with an internationally supported framework agreement on a transition to democracy.
5. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the violence. In residential areas, the Sudanese civilians remain in grave danger due to aerial bombardment and home invasions by armed men seeking to use roof tops 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 assaults on women and girls, the recruitment of civilians, 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.¹
6. Consistent reports 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.
7. The perilously insecure situation of civilians has been exacerbated by the RSF's decision to release detainees from five prisons, including several wanted by the International Criminal Court.²
8. The situation in the already fragile Darfur region, where worrying levels of violence existed prior to the outbreak of current hostilities, is particularly alarming, and has taken on an ethnic coloration reminiscent of the earlier period characterised by genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.
9. Reports as of 16 May indicated around 2,000 people had died in El Geneina in the violence, with the death toll rising.³ The destruction in El Geneina and reports of people held captive and extorted in areas controlled by the RSF, warns of the potential commission of atrocity crimes. There are also credible fears the fighting may degenerate into a lengthy conflict with wider regional and international implications.
10. The Sudan has long provided sanctuary to refugees, who are now extremely vulnerable. For example 237 Tigrayan refugees were left without shelter following a fire which broke out at 4:00 am on 4 May at Um Rakuba camp, severely injuring two children and an elderly person. There are also disturbing reports indicating the forcible return of around 3,500 Eritrean refugees to an uncertain fate.⁴

Situation of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)

11. CSW is concerned by recent FoRB violations, including violations against places of worship.

12. On 17 April the Anglican Cathedral in central Khartoum was seized as a military base by suspected RSF fighters, who damaged six cars, and forced 42 people who were sheltering there, and who included the Archbishop and his family, to leave the building after physically assaulting several of them. In Bahri, Khartoum North, the Evangelical Church was bombed and partially burned.⁵
13. Elsewhere, the RSF forcibly removed all priests, including His Grace Bishop Elia, the Bishop of Khartoum and South Sudan, from Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church on Nile Street in Khartoum on 14 May in order to use the premises as a military base. The RSF had reportedly been intimidating and harassing those in the church for a week before they forced them to leave. A similar incident was reported on 3 May when the Coptic Church in Khartoum North (Bahri) was attacked.
14. CSW sources report six gunmen attacked the Al-Masalma Coptic Church in Omdurman on 13 May. The gunmen drove to the church in a car and shot four men, including a priest named Arsenius, and his son. They also stabbed the church guard before looting the building for two hours. All five victims received treatment at a private hospital and have since recovered; however, they were unable to access the largest hospital in the area as it is currently under the control the RSF, and its electricity has been cut off by the SAF.
15. Mosques have also been attacked as violence continues across the country. CSW has received reports of the bombings of mosques in the Alazhari and Burri Al Daraisa areas of Khartoum; one person was killed in the latter.
16. On 14 May the Al Zareeba Mosque was bombed in El Geneina, West Darfur, a region where fighting is particularly intense and entire villages have been burnt down. According to the Preliminary Committee of Sudan Doctor's Trade Union, 280 people were killed and more than 160 were injured in the region between 12-13 May.

Ongoing International Scrutiny

17. On 11 May representatives of the SAF and RSF signed a Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of the Sudan in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 'to enable the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, the restoration of essential services, the withdrawal of forces from hospitals and clinics, and the respectful burial of the dead.'⁶
18. However, a seven-day ceasefire which began on 23 May, brokered and monitored by the United States of America and Saudi Arabia, was violated by both sides, amid air strikes and seizure of medical supplies by SAF, and looting and occupation of civilian buildings by the RSF.
19. The international community must remain engaged. Any rush to restore seeming stability at the expense of justice and accountability for the litany of grave violations committed since 2019 will ultimately prove unsustainable.
20. An investigative mechanism is necessary to collect, consolidate, analyse and preserve documentation and evidence of violations and abuses, and to end the cycle of impunity by identifying and holding to account the individuals and entities responsible, a level of investigation that meets the threshold for future accountability efforts, reparations and justice.
21. In the aftermath of the evacuation of foreign nationals, CSW urges enhanced and closer scrutiny on the situation of the Sudanese citizens - particularly women and girls amid rising conflict related sexual violence - refugees and other vulnerable groups, and to ensure that perpetrators of violations targeting civilians or civilian objects are left in no doubt they will be held to account.

Recommendations

22. Continue to urge both parties to the conflict to agree to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and respect it.

23. 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.
24. 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 the Sudan, yet unable to return to their home country due to well-founded fears of persecution.
25. Urge all parties to the conflict to facilitate humanitarian access to enable supplies of food, water, medical and other essentials to reach those in need, and to allow for the evacuation of those needing or desiring evacuation from severely affected areas.
26. Respond to those fleeing the violence in accordance with the stipulations of the UN and African Refugee Conventions and 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 if needed.
27. Establish an investigative and accountability mechanism on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, addressing all alleged human rights violations and abuses that have occurred and are occurring.
28. 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.

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