



# WATCHLIST CRISIS ALERT **SUDAN**



A CATASTROPHE  
THE WORLD IS CHOOSING  
TO IGNORE

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**COVER:** Sudanese refugee Halima with her 8-month-old daughter, Fatma, outside an IRC health clinic in Ourang, eastern Chad, where Fatma is being treated for malnutrition.



# INTRODUCTION

The people of Sudan are being failed: failed by military leaders whose competition for control of the country has sparked civil war and put Sudan on the path toward total collapse; failed by regional leaders who are pumping in weapons and military supplies rather than pushing for relief and peace; and failed by the international community, whose diplomatic efforts to date have been wholly insufficient. Humanitarian action is the last resort to limit the human impact of such failures, but in Sudan it is itself being pushed to the point of failure—under attack from all sides and lacking sufficient support.

The result is an ever-worsening humanitarian catastrophe. Violence along ethnic lines has spread across many parts of the country, with mass killings, rape and the destruction of homes. Famine looms, and more children are at risk of death because their families must make impossible choices to find enough food. More people have been forced to flee their homes than anywhere else on earth. And the situation will get worse in the coming months as the “lean season” hits and rains cut off roads used by the country’s beleaguered humanitarian response. Moreover, neighboring countries, particularly Chad and South Sudan, risk being dragged deeper into crisis.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) put Sudan at the top of our **Emergency Watchlist** for 2024 because we saw the dangers stemming from the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). We are releasing this Crisis Alert now to sound the alarm that the international community’s continued and collective failure of Sudan means there is limited time to avert a catastrophe of historic scale. It is too late to talk about avoiding major loss of life. Conservative estimates suggest the conflict has already left **15,500** people dead and thousands more injured—though actual figures are likely far higher. Some estimates put the death toll as high as **150,000** already.



**Above:** Altuma and her children stand inside their roofless shelter in Gedaref, Sudan. After being displaced several times, they now face the challenge of living in temporary housing with limited protection.

There are two steps that would start to limit the number of lives lost:

- 1. Tilt the scales toward peace, not more war.** Right now, the parties to the conflict are incentivized to carry on fighting, not to make peace. That must change. Regional powers and bodies are well placed to push for relief and peace, but require encouragement and support from their allies, partners and the United Nations.
- 2. Reset the humanitarian response.** Humanitarian agencies know how to save lives and avert famine in even the most complex settings. But, in Sudan, humanitarian actors like the IRC have been pushed to the point of failure—under attack from all sides, with very limited access to the people who are in dire need. Immediate action is critical to ensure that lifesaving services are available to people who need them, wherever they are located.



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# CONFLICT SPIRALS AS DIPLOMACY FAILS

**The only way to meaningfully address the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan is to end the fighting, massively scale-up the humanitarian response, and then start the slow process of rebuilding the country. To date, however, diplomatic efforts have failed to deliver and the conflict has continued to escalate and spread, for three key reasons:**

**REASON 1: LEADERS ON BOTH SIDES BELIEVE THAT CONTINUED CONFLICT IS IN THEIR INTERESTS**

Unless and until commanders on both sides believe that a peace deal will protect their interests, and they trust that the other side will honor the agreement, they will continue to fight.

Today's conflict has its roots in the collapse of the self-interested collaboration between SAF head Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and RSF leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as "Hemedti").

The two men and their respective forces worked together to remove longtime president Omar al-Bashir from power in April 2019 following months of protests, building on the SAF and RSF's historic collaboration to fight armed opposition groups. However, any likelihood of a peaceful transition toward civilian rule was removed when the two men orchestrated the end of the transitional civilian government in October 2021. The two then turned against each other after a December 2022 agreement to resume the civilian transition suggested the RSF would be integrated into the SAF, threatening Hemedti's political, military and economic power.

The conflict in Sudan began in the capital, Khartoum, one of the main epicenters of the violence, with both the SAF and the RSF trying to secure control of government facili-

ties and institutions. The country is now largely divided in two, with the SAF controlling much of the north and east, and the RSF controlling much of the south and west. Neither side has managed to gain a decisive advantage over the other, with the RSF advancing in late 2023 and the SAF making gains around Khartoum in early 2024.

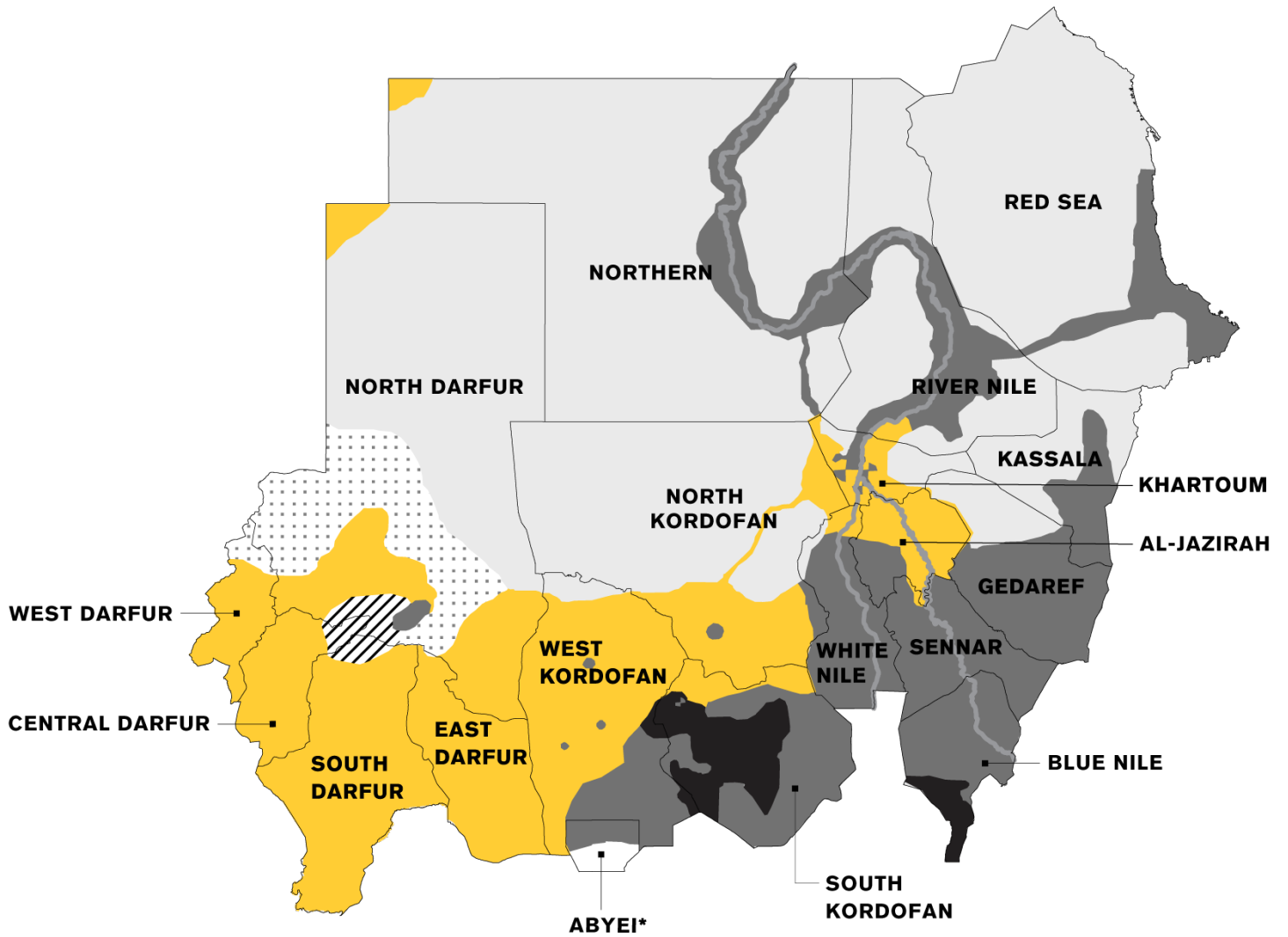
The origins of the conflict and current uncertainty about which side is strongest nationally present three key challenges for peace efforts:

1. Both sides likely believe they can win, given their external backing, so they have little reason to make concessions.
2. Even if they are ultimately prepared to negotiate an end to the conflict, SAF leaders currently believe they have regained some battlefield momentum and so have little reason to negotiate right now. For their part, RSF leaders may be unwilling to negotiate from a position of weakness and may prefer to continue fighting in the hope of regaining a military advantage.
3. There are extreme levels of mistrust between RSF and SAF leadership. Collaboration between the two has broken down before. Leaders on both sides fear any future deal could also collapse, making them unwilling to agree to concessions that could weaken their position militarily.

As a result, both SAF and RSF leaders will continue to believe that their interests are best protected by fighting, unless and until regional and global powers put pressure on them to engage meaningfully in peace efforts.



# Sudan is now divided between warring groups



## Control lines as of April 15, 2024



\*Abyei is an area on the Sudan-South Sudan border that has special administrative status. A proposed referendum to decide whether Abyei becomes part of South Sudan or Sudan has been delayed indefinitely.

Data sources: Sudan War Monitor (control lines) and OCHA HDX (administrative boundaries)



## REASON 2: THE CONFLICT IS DRAWING IN MORE GROUPS—AND INCREASINGLY PLAYING OUT ALONG ETHNIC LINES, PARTICULARLY IN DARFUR

With more groups becoming involved in more parts of the country, the conflict is currently on a path to escalate and spread further. The growing number of actors will also make it harder to resolve the conflict through dialogue, as any deal will have to balance the interests of many groups and their leaders—not just the RSF and the SAF. The proliferation of armed actors also adds to the challenges facing the humanitarian response in Sudan, as aid organizations must negotiate with more groups that may not have complete control over what their fighters do on the ground.

Violence escalated in the Darfur region as soon as the first shots of the conflict were fired in Khartoum. Darfur is the stronghold of the RSF, where it is fighting alongside Arab militias against a loose alliance of Darfuri armed groups (which largely recruit from non-Arab communities) and the SAF. The RSF's origins lie in the “Janjaweed,” Darfuri Arab militias created by the central government to fight local armed groups during the Darfur conflict from 2003 onwards. Conflict reduced from the peak in 2003-2005, with the government and armed groups agreeing to three separate peace deals between 2006 and 2020. Nonetheless, some level of conflict between the RSF/Arab militias on one side and Darfuri armed groups on the other has continued since then, often focused on control of resources like gold, water and pastureland.

Fighting escalated after April 2023, however, and the RSF rapidly took control of the capitals of all Darfur states with the exception of North Darfur. Al-Fashir, the state capital of North Darfur, is now the focus of RSF advances, triggering the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights to publicly **implore** Hemedti and al-Burhan to de-escalate. The violence in Darfur has been marked by killings and forced displacement of civilians, often along ethnic lines. There have been reports of large-scale massacres, conflict-related sexual



People inspect the remains of a home after it was struck by an artillery shell in the Azhari district in the south of Khartoum.

violence and the razing of homes. The reality that Darfuri armed groups and Arab militias are also key players in Darfur underscores that diplomatic efforts focused only on brokering a deal between Hemedti and al-Burhan are unlikely to deliver peace in Darfur.

Other armed groups are also being drawn into the conflict across Sudan, which will complicate diplomatic efforts to end the conflict as their interests will have to be addressed in any deal. Additionally, this makes it harder for humanitarian actors to negotiate access to deliver assistance because, as groups splinter, weak command and control means that negotiations with the leadership of a group may not actually translate into improvements in access on the ground. The growing violence, often directed against civilians, and easy availability of weapons are leading many communities to arm themselves.

While some are explicitly aligning with either the SAF or the RSF, others remain independent for now—although it is unclear how long that can continue. For example, the SAF is overtly reaching out to Arab tribes in eastern Sudan for support against the RSF.



### REASON 3: REGIONAL POWERS ARE PUMPING WEAPONS INTO SUDAN RATHER THAN PUSHING FOR PEACE

While the origins of the conflict are domestic, multiple regional actors are increasingly involved—heightening the risk of a protracted conflict. Regional powers are pumping weapons into Sudan and, while civil wars are often long, external intervention further prolongs conflicts and drives intensification.<sup>1</sup> The support these powers are offering confers leverage over parties to the conflict that they could use—if they chose. However, the continuing constraints on humanitarian action (as outlined below) and the lack of meaningful diplomatic progress underline that regional powers are not yet using their influence to push for peace or to address the impact of the war on Sudanese civilians.

External involvement reflects regional powers' pre-war economic interests in the country, the geopolitical importance of the Red Sea region, and pre-existing rivalries (for example, between the United Arab Emirates and Iran). It includes support for both sides:

- U.N. experts have found what they describe as “**credible**” evidence that the UAE is sending large quantities of weapons and ammunition to the RSF via Amdjarass in eastern Chad—although Abu Dhabi maintains that regular Emirati flights to Amdjarass are humanitarian in nature. The **U.S. government** has sanctioned several UAE-based companies in connection with the conflict in Sudan. Moreover, the RSF has established supply lines through parts of several neighboring countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan and Libya. Russia's private military company Wagner **reportedly** helped to establish some of these supply lines, though Russia has drawn closer to the SAF in recent months, holding senior meetings with SAF leaders.
- Egypt was a major investor in Sudan before the civil war and has offered strong diplomatic support to the SAF since, including hosting al-Burhan in early 2024. It has also reportedly **delivered** Turkish-made drones to the SAF and may be offering other, more covert support as well. Iran has increased its **support** to the SAF, reportedly also delivering drones—which have played an important role in giving the SAF the military advantage around Khartoum. Eritrea, meanwhile, is reportedly **hosting camps** for a number of pro-SAF armed groups.

<sup>1</sup> In civil wars that ended between 1960 and 1999, those that involved external intervention lasted an average of nine years—whereas those without it ended after an average of 1.5 years. **External Interventions and the Duration of Civil Wars**, Ibrahim A. Elbadawi and Nicholas Sambanis, World Bank, 2000

**Below:** Aziza Ibrahim with her two daughters. They now live in a school that was converted into a shelter for internally displaced people in Khartoum. Photo: UNOCHA/Ala Kheir





## DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS ARE **FAILING**

The only way to halt the tragedy unfolding in Sudan is through negotiations that bring an end to the conflict. However, none of the diplomatic efforts focused on the crisis in Sudan to date have proven effective.

The Jeddah process led by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, with the East African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) bloc representing the African Union (AU), brought promise in May 2023 with a **focus** on improving humanitarian access and establishing temporary ceasefires. In reality, it has failed on both fronts, and talks adjourned in December 2023. The SAF and the RSF did **agree** to protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian action, but this had no impact on the ground. Plans to resume the Jeddah track under the leadership of new U.S. Special Envoy Tom Perriello have gone nowhere. Other negotiating tracks, including those led by IGAD and the AU, have also failed.

A number of key flaws have undermined diplomatic efforts to date:

**1. Lack of buy-in from parties to the conflict:** The SAF has rejected IGAD-led efforts on the basis that it believes several IGAD members support the RSF. Instead, the proliferation of dialogue tracks has allowed parties to “forum shop,” choosing

to engage only with tracks they think are more likely to protect their interests.

- 2. Failure to recognize the international nature of the conflict:** The UAE, Egypt and other regional actors involved have not always been brought into peace efforts and held accountable for ensuring meaningful RSF/SAF engagement. Meanwhile, both al-Burhan and Hemedti have been on diplomatic tours of the wider region in recent months, seeking to shore up their support.
- 3. Lack of high-level international pressure to push both parties to the conflict and regional actors to engage meaningfully:** The selection of a new U.S. **special envoy**, Perriello, in February 2024 was a welcome and necessary step in elevating the seniority of U.S. engagement on the crisis, but it has yet to deliver diplomatic progress. Further, his engagement may be curtailed by the U.S. elections in November 2024. The passing of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2736, which focuses on Al-Fashir but includes a call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and dialogue to end the violence, is welcome, but will require continued diplomacy to see it implemented.

Unless and until these flaws are addressed, the most likely scenario is one of continued conflict and deepening crisis.

**Below:** View of the Borota site in Chad, where at least 25,000 Sudanese refugees arrived in 2023. Sudanese refugees, mainly women and children, fled their villages without anything.





# EVER-GROWING HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE

**Civilians in Sudan are already facing massive threats to their safety and will continue to bear the brunt of the violence as the SAF and the RSF battle each other. With the conflict escalating, the rainy season impending and civilians inevitably caught in the middle, the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan will worsen rapidly in the coming months.**

## **DARFUR HAS SEEN MAJOR VIOLENCE ALONG ETHNIC LINES, WHICH IS JUST ONE OF MANY THREATS TO CIVILIANS ACROSS SUDAN**

Sudan is one of the most dangerous places in the world for civilians. Human rights organizations have documented horrific violence against civilians, including grave human rights abuses like **mass killings** and **sexual violence**, particularly in Darfur. **Human Rights Watch** has said there is a possibility that genocide may have been or is being committed in Darfur.

The IRC has no way to confirm this claim. However, independent data about the number of people forced to flee their homes suggest that violence on a comparable scale to that seen in 2003-2005, when the **U.S.** described the killing of an estimated **200,000** people as a genocide, may be underway. Over **2 million** people from the Darfur states are displaced within Sudan and another **600,000** people have fled across the border into Chad, which is already more than the **2 million** displaced in 2003-2005.

Far fewer deaths have been reported in Darfur since April 2023 compared to 2003-2005, but this is likely because of limited reporting. A leaked U.N. report said **10,000 to 15,000** people may have been killed just in Al-Junaynah, the capital of West Darfur. With violence affecting many other towns—and escalating rapidly in and around Al-Fashir in North Darfur

as we write this report—effectively besieging the town and causing immense suffering—it is plausible that estimates of civilian deaths will rise significantly over time.

Conflict now affects large parts of Sudan, and violence against women and girls has been reported throughout the country—ranging from widespread conflict-related sexual violence and trafficking to sexual exploitation and abuse when accessing basic services. IRC teams also report increases in intimate partner violence since the conflict began, meaning that women and girls are now often less safe within their homes than they were before. Gender-based violence is a particular concern for older women, adolescent girls, and women and girls with disabilities, while parties to the conflict have specifically **targeted women's rights defenders** and those delivering aid services.

## **FAMINE LOOMS BUT MAY NEVER BE DECLARED DUE TO RESTRICTIONS ON HUMANITARIAN ACTION**

The conflict has destroyed Sudan's economy, decimated agricultural production and restricted the transportation of food, leaving famine a realistic scenario. Over 20 million people faced crisis levels (IPC 3) of food insecurity or worse at the peak of the “lean season” in mid-2023—more than in any previous year. At these levels of food insecurity, growing numbers of people are forced to sacrifice their futures to buy food today, for example by selling off assets or pulling children out of school to work. Fighting and restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict have limited humanitarian agencies' ability to assess food security since late 2023. An updated assessment is due to be released imminently, but media reports based on preliminary findings suggest the number of people facing crisis levels (IPC 3) of food insecurity or worse has risen to a record **25.6 million**—54% of the population.

Hunger is set to reach new extremes in the coming months. The lean season started earlier this year (in April) due to low food production, and it will intensify during the rainy season, which typically runs from June to September. However, parties to the conflict continue to block humanitarian workers from accessing affected communities, making it hard to carry out the detailed assessments necessary to confirm whether famine is happening.

Whether or not famine is formally declared, the worst, catastrophic (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity **are expected** in many parts of Sudan over the coming months. By the end of the lean season, preliminary assessments suggest **756,000** people will face catastrophic (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity, where people are starving to death every day and their weakened bodies struggle to fight off diseases like diarrhea, measles and malaria, further adding

to death rates. Children are at highest risk and typically die at twice the rate of adults. Indeed, the U.N. has warned that **222,000** children could die of malnutrition in Sudan in the coming months.

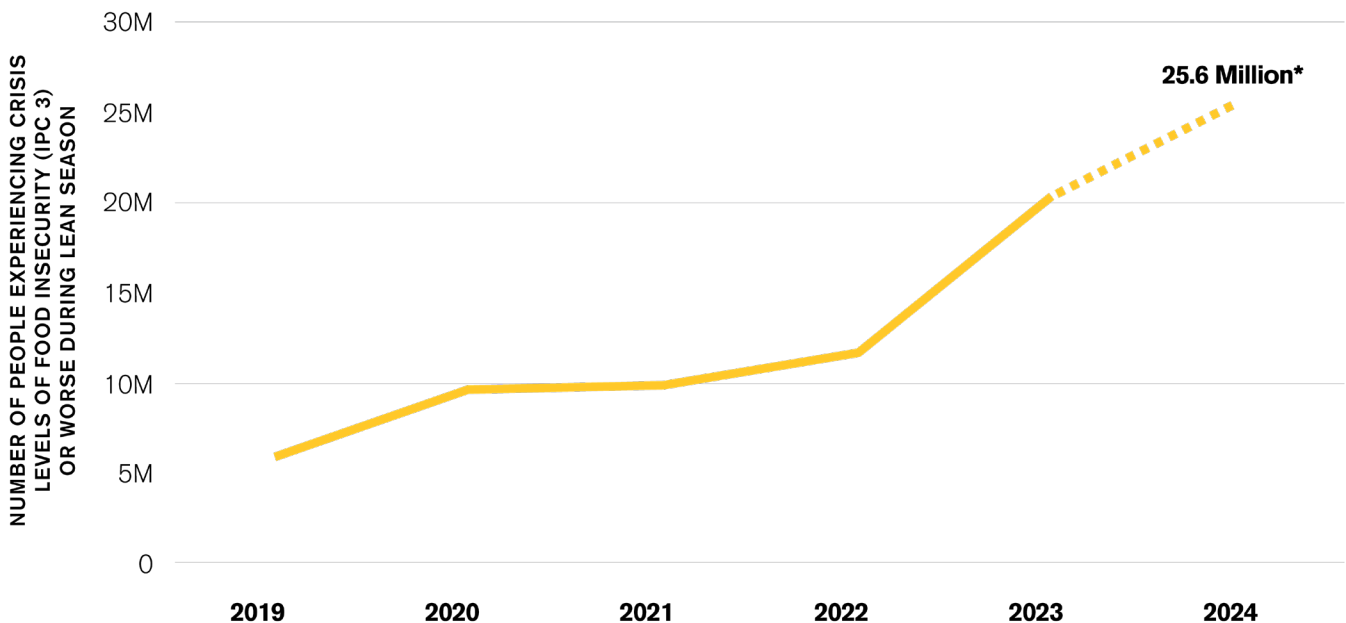
Pregnant and breastfeeding women have increased nutritional needs and therefore face particular risks of malnutrition as well. As of March 2024, an estimated **1.2 million** pregnant and breastfeeding women in Sudan were acutely malnourished. Without essential health care, they will face increased risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery. And women, especially widows, female-headed households and adolescent girls, are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, with **79%** of women unable to meet minimum food needs. In turn, the greater difficulty obtaining enough food is directly linked to women and girls facing increasing exploitation and abuse as they try to access food.



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**Food insecurity in Sudan rose fourfold between 2019 and 2023, and will set new records in 2024**



**Data Sources:** IPC Info data for the maximum number of people assessed to be experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC 3) or worse during the June-September lean season each year. \*The figure for 2024 is based on Reuters reporting of a preliminary projection.



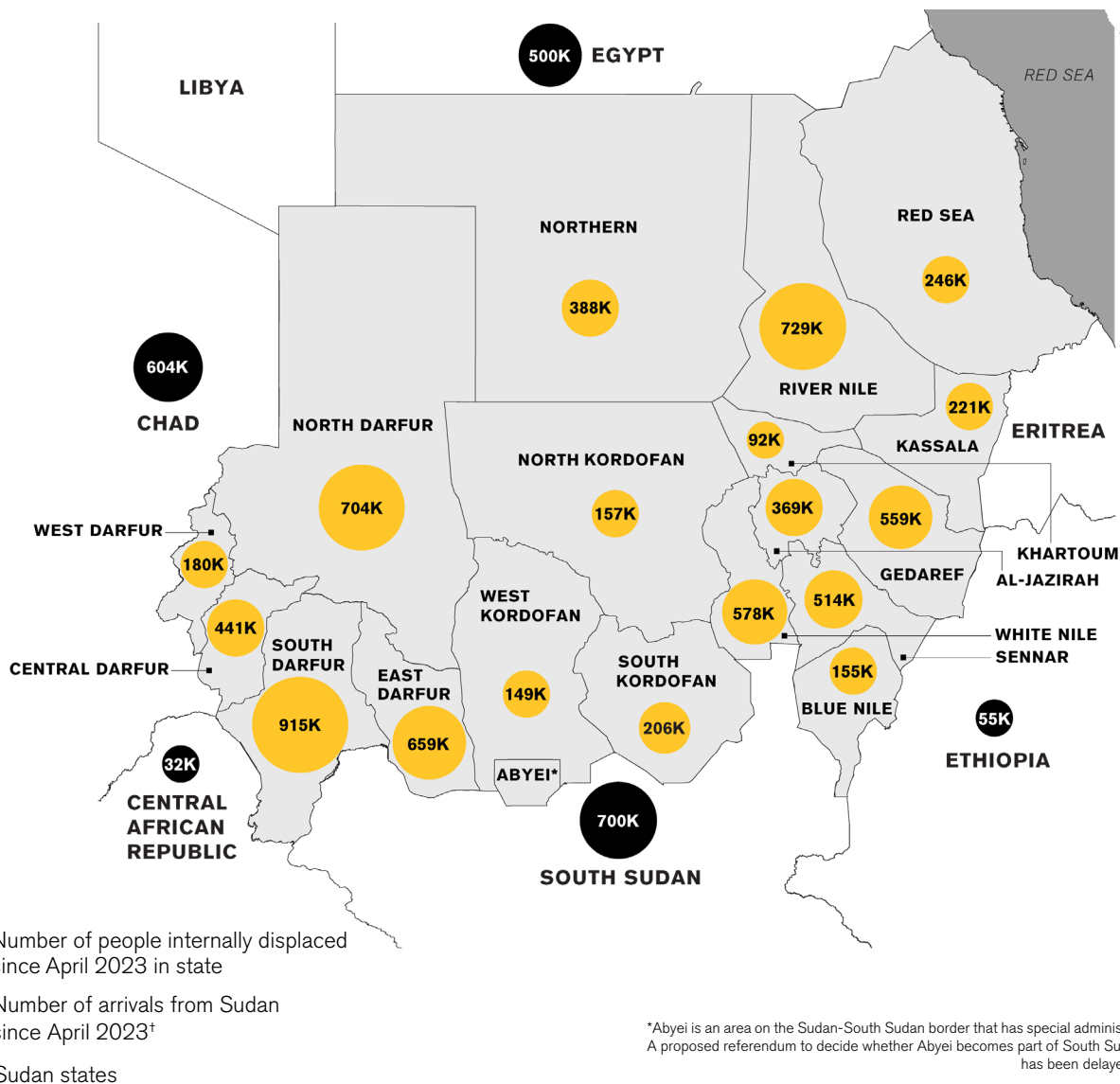
**AROUND 12 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE THEIR HOMES IN SUDAN, AND MORE PEOPLE ARE NOW INTERNALLY DISPLACED WITHIN SUDAN THAN IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY**

The brutal conflict since April 2023 has forced millions of people to flee their homes, pushing the number of displaced people to around 12 million by May 2024. The vast majority—over **10 million** people—remain within

Sudan, representing the largest internal displacement crisis in the world. These figures include people displaced prior to April 2023. If we look only at population movements between April 2023 and May 2024, **7.3 million** people, of which **52%** are women and girls, have been internally displaced and another **2 million** people have fled across an international border.<sup>1</sup> Around **half** of internally displaced families are living in host communities, rather than in formal camps.

<sup>1</sup> Most (**1.9 million**) externally displaced people have left to neighboring countries, primarily to Chad, South Sudan and Egypt. These figures include both Sudanese nationals and refugees (particularly from South Sudan) who had sought safety in Sudan but have now been forced to leave.

**Millions of people are displaced throughout Sudan and the region**



# Number of people internally displaced since April 2023 in state  
 # Number of arrivals from Sudan since April 2023<sup>†</sup>  
 Sudan states

\*Abyei is an area on the Sudan-South Sudan border that has special administrative status. A proposed referendum to decide whether Abyei becomes part of South Sudan or Sudan has been delayed indefinitely.

Data Sources: IOM Sudan Mobility Update (02), June 11, 2024 (internal displacement); UNHCR, June 9, 2024 (external displacement); Sudan War Monitor (control lines)

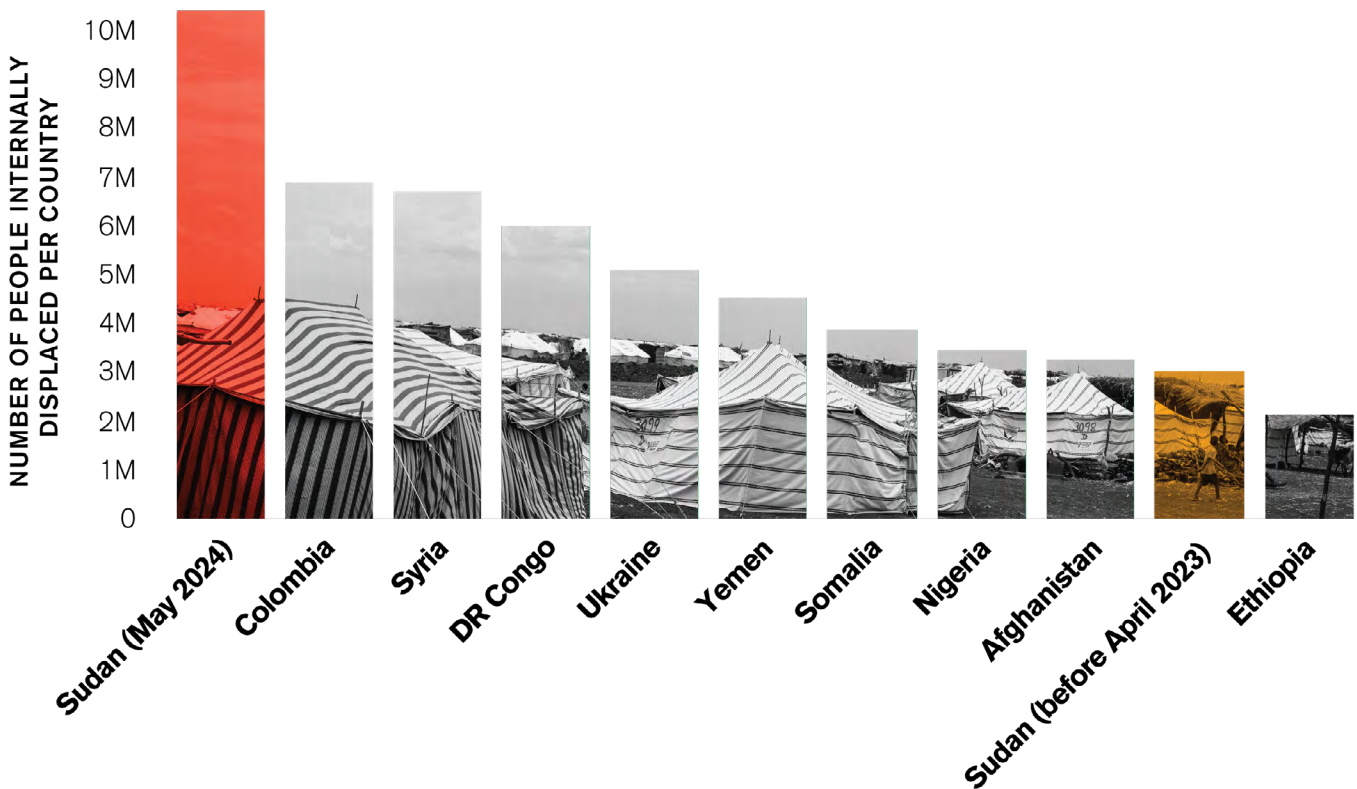
<sup>†</sup>Including refugees, returnees and non-Sudanese refugees/asylum seekers

In an illustration of the scale of the upheaval in Sudan, at least 40% of the **pre-war** residents of Khartoum state, the economic and political heart of the country, have abandoned the area and are displaced elsewhere in the country. This figure does not account for people from Khartoum who have fled to another country or who have not been registered by the U.N., for example because they are staying with family. It is therefore plausible that more than half of Khartoum state's pre-war population of 9.4 million people have fled the fighting and collapse of services within the state. And there are still millions of people unable to flee the fighting in Khartoum, often dependent on food and other services provided by local responders.

With the conflict escalating, more people will be forced to flee—where they will face further risks of violence and a lack of access to adequate food, health care and other essential services. Displacement has particular impacts on children, who account for half of the displaced population, undermining both their health and their access to education. Heavy rain and flooding during the rainy season will also worsen conditions in overcrowded camps for displaced people. Outbreaks of cholera, dengue fever and malaria have been **reported** across the country, and they may become even more frequent.



### Sudan's internal displacement crisis is now the largest in the world



**Photo:** Tents in the Tunaybah refugee camp in east Sudan as far as the eye can see.

**Data Sources:** Data for internal displacement in Sudan as of May 2024 is from IOM. All other internal displacement data are from UNHCR and updated to mid-2023.



# A HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PUSHED TO FAILURE POINT

Set against the scale of the crisis, the current humanitarian response in Sudan is grossly inadequate. Critical aid is just not reaching large parts of the population. For example, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in mid-2024 that no actors were delivering “food security and livelihoods” programming in five of Sudan’s states—a shocking gap in a country facing looming famine. The virtual collapse of Sudan’s health care system, among other critical services, threatens not only the lives of many Sudanese people in the present day, but it also threatens future generations.

The state of the humanitarian response in Sudan is not an inevitable consequence of the war. Across the world, national and international humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and U.N. agencies deliver aid in many other complex and insecure environments. The fact that they cannot do so in Sudan is a reflection of the failure of the warring parties to abide by their obligations to facilitate the delivery of aid and of the international community to hold them to account. As a result, the humanitarian response is failing. Donors and member states could also do more to support humanitarian operations both financially and diplomatically, particularly those provided by local groups who have proven successful in meeting needs.

## **CHALLENGE 1: TARGETING OF HUMANITARIAN WORKERS AND LOOTING OF SUPPLIES**

Insecurity in Sudan makes it a difficult and dangerous place for aid delivery. In 2023 alone, **22** aid workers were killed in Sudan. More recently, **two employees** of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were killed in Darfur, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) was forced to **suspend** its operations in Wad Madani in Al-Jazirah state due to aid obstructions and harassment of

their staff. In June 2024, MSF and the Ministry of Health suspended all activities at one of the last remaining hospitals in Al-Fashir, after RSF fighters stormed and looted the facility. National responders, including community-based local responders who have served **millions** of Sudanese, have also been affected, facing harassment and bans on their operations and in some cases the detention and killing of their members.

Increased violence along ethnic lines makes the situation even more challenging, as agencies must carefully consider the background of staff before deploying them to different regions of the country. The looting of humanitarian supplies has also undermined the ability to serve affected populations. OCHA has said that over **150 vehicles** have been stolen from aid organizations, while 61 offices and 57 warehouses have been looted. The World Food Programme (WFP) has estimated that over **\$13 million** of food aid has been looted since April 2023.

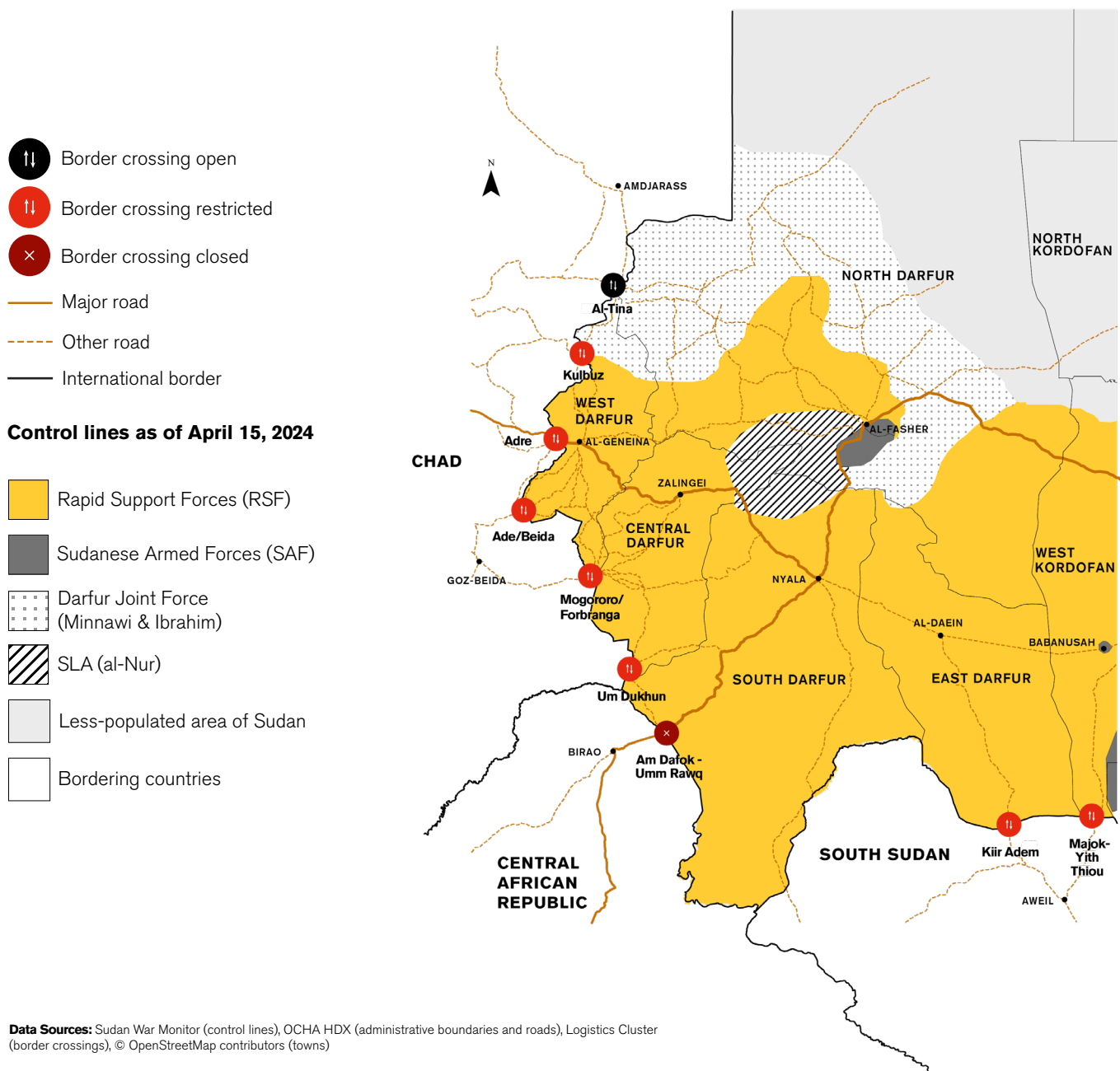
## **CHALLENGE 2: RESTRICTIONS ON AID DELIVERY**

Both the SAF and the RSF are responsible for slowing or halting lifesaving humanitarian assistance, and the impact of these delays on Sudanese civilians is quantifiable and severe. Close to **1.1 million** people were unable to receive humanitarian assistance in May 2024 due to active conflict and operational barriers such as travel permit delays. The result is that the humanitarian response is disproportionately focused on areas controlled by the SAF, despite the huge scale of needs in RSF-controlled areas as well.

ACAPS, which reports on access barriers, rates Sudan at the highest level (**five**) for the severity of access constraints. These restrictions have taken a variety of forms:

- Since the start of the conflict, hundreds of international NGO staff have faced lengthy delays in obtaining visas—with many visas pending for more than three months. Until the end of May 2024, no international NGO had secured a multi-entry visa. It is unclear whether improvements seen in early June 2024 will endure.
- Approximately 30,000 metric tons of aid were sitting in Port Sudan, Al-Obeid and Kosti as of mid-May 2024, awaiting permissions for onward movement.
- Security services in White Nile and Khartoum regularly seek to **“accompany”** humanitarian workers delivering aid and reportedly prevent access to certain locations.
- Fighters at checkpoints sometimes demand payments from humanitarian personnel to be allowed to pass.

 **Humanitarian access is particularly challenging in Darfur**





### **CHALLENGE 3: HUMANITARIAN ACTORS BLOCKED FROM CROSSING FRONTLINES AND BORDERS TO REACH PEOPLE IN NEED**

With Sudan divided into regions of SAF and RSF control, aid must move across frontlines and borders to reach those who need it—yet, both sides are consistently undermining these efforts.

The challenges facing cross-border aid are starkly illustrated by the situation in Darfur. Aid transferred from Chad has historically been a lifeline for Darfuris. However, in February 2024, following accusations that the RSF was transporting weapons from Chad, the SAF revoked its previous non-objection to cross-border aid delivery. Diplomatic pressure saw **one crossing point** from Chad officially approved at Al-Tina, providing access into SAF-controlled areas only. Now, fighting around Al-Fashir, delays and inspections have rendered the crossing point largely inoperable regardless.

Although some NGOs continue to enter Darfur via the Adre crossing, U.N. agencies are critical to launching a response on the scale that Sudan currently requires. The lack of authorization from the SAF authorities in Port Sudan means that U.N. agencies are not using Adre—the key route to access nearly all RSF-controlled regions, including all Darfur state capitals other than Al-Fashir. In a limited effort to ease the impact of the restrictions, 60 U.N. trucks were granted exceptional permission to cross at Adre in March 2024. However, there is no clarity on when this will happen again. Reflecting the critical nature of the border crossing, the Security Council has issued a resolution calling on the SAF authorities in Port Sudan to re-authorize the crossing for humanitarian use by the U.N.

The only other way for humanitarian aid to reach millions of people living in RSF-held parts of Sudan is by bringing it across frontlines within the country. Yet, to date, no sustained agreements on crossline aid access have been reached. In **April 2024**, the first crossline aid delivery in six months reached Darfur from Port Sudan. In May 2024,

OCHA **reported** that denial of permission to move within Sudan or to cross an international border, combined with ongoing conflict, blocked the transport of humanitarian aid to over 600,000 people in Darfur, 300,000 people in Kordofan and 100,000 in Khartoum. Since **August 2023**, there have been almost no crossline deliveries in Khartoum state due to conflict and the denial of travel permits.

### **CHALLENGE 4: TARGETING AND DESTRUCTION OF ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

The scale of the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan is not just a result of the direct harm done to civilians by the fighting; it is also a consequence of the way in which the war has destroyed infrastructure essential for civilians to meet their needs, and for humanitarians to deliver assistance.

- **The health care system has virtually collapsed.** Despite protections under international law, at least **307** incidents of violence against health care workers or facilities have been recorded since the war began, with both sides reportedly using facilities for military purposes. The **killing and kidnapping** of health workers has led to a massive shortage of staff, while those who remain have not been paid for months. As a result, nearly **two-thirds** of medical centers in Khartoum are no longer functioning and now just one hospital remains functioning in Al-Fashir. Patients are already dying because they cannot access dialysis, cancer treatment or even basic medical care, while **vaccine coverage** has fallen dramatically, increasing the risk of new disease outbreaks. Women face particular challenges accessing lifesaving sexual and reproductive health services.
- **Banking operations are almost completely suspended.** Many bank headquarters, most of which were based in Khartoum, have been closed due to insecurity, power outages and **looting**. Blockages in banking transactions, the lack of liquidity and transportation disruptions are contributing to a rise in basic food prices. Humanitarian operations are also affected: With few



**NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF MEDICAL CENTERS IN KHARTOUM ARE NO LONGER FUNCTIONING**

viable mechanisms to transfer money into and around Sudan, agencies are reliant on the hawala system and other financial service providers to ensure they have cash to pay staff and suppliers.

- **The RSF and the SAF are both responsible for regular and widespread telecommunications outages.** Civilians use the internet to share and receive information, including about safe routes and security incidents, as well as to access cash and bank transfers to purchase basic goods like food and water. The internet is also essential for humanitarian actors to coordinate their operations and deliver assistance. All **three** of Sudan's main internet operators were reported offline in February 2024, leaving almost 30 million Sudanese without internet or telephone access for more than a month. While connectivity has improved, the country still faces regular blackouts, and services from the **Emergency Telecommunications Cluster** only cover areas in the east of Sudan.

#### **CHALLENGE 5: WEAK RESPONSE LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL RESPONDERS**

The U.N. plays a critical role in making effective humanitarian responses happen. The IRC and other organizations depend on coordination and information provided by U.N. agencies to maximize our impact. Where famine is looming, the ability of the WFP and other U.N. agencies to operate at a massive scale is essential to avert catastrophe.

In Sudan, however, a lack of U.N. leadership and the limited presence of U.N. agencies and staff across the country, including senior decision-makers and essential monitoring teams, are undermining efforts to ensure assistance reaches those most in need.

Decisions made by the U.N.-led Humanitarian Country Team are rarely followed up with explanations or instructions, and there

is nearly no monitoring of decisions at the operational level. Field-level coordination structures are reported to be ineffective and meetings sporadic.

Moreover, U.N.-led coordination efforts often take place in English, which is convenient for U.N. agencies and international NGOs but excludes many local organizations and responders without whom an appropriate, at-scale response cannot happen. Finally, international and national NGOs are rarely engaged as equal partners and often feel as though they are unable to influence the design of sector-based strategies. This means their operations on and near the frontlines and their consultations with—and understanding of—affected communities are not being integrated into U.N. response planning.

Three out of every five dollars provided by donors for the Sudan response has been **directed** to U.N. agencies, despite their comparatively limited presence. In contrast, locally led organizations and responders have been **woefully underfunded**. Across Sudan, local responders, **women-led organizations** and youth initiatives that stepped in as established humanitarian actors had to leave are now central to the provision of services. The U.N. reports that since the start of the war, local responders have reached **4 million** civilians with vital assistance, playing a particularly critical role in serving communities within urban areas that international NGOs have struggled to reach.

While the Sudan Humanitarian Fund has provided limited grants of \$5,000 to local responder management groups, and donors have channeled funding to local responders via international NGOs, the overall funding dedicated to local response mechanisms remains low. The failure to fund women-led organizations is particularly damaging for women and girls, who are suffering disproportionately in Sudan. In some areas, there is only one Sudanese women-led organization remaining to continue lifesaving services for survivors of gender-based violence.

# SUDAN'S NEIGHBORS ALSO FACE DEEPENING CRISIS

**What starts in Sudan will not stop there. As the civil war escalates and the humanitarian disaster deepens, the crisis is spilling over into neighboring countries and risks engulfing the wider region. South Sudan and Chad face particular threats given their deep social, political and economic ties with Sudan.**

## CHAD

The conflict in Sudan, and especially Darfur, risks exacerbating political fault lines in Chad and destabilizing the country. Chad is weathering a delicate political transition after President Idriss Déby's death in 2021 and the succession of his son Mahamat Déby—who was announced the victor of the presidential election in May 2024. Chad initially sought to remain neutral in the conflict within Sudan, reflecting close connections between Chadian political elites and both the SAF and the RSF. However, after the UAE and Chad signed multiple military and economic **agreements** in mid-2023, reports of the UAE sending support to the RSF via Chad began. There are tensions within the Chadian political elite over this cooperation with the UAE to support the RSF because some of the ethnic groups threatened by the RSF's advances in North Darfur are also present in Chad.

## SOUTH SUDAN

There is a risk of renewed civil war in South Sudan. It is unclear how much longer the country will be able to export oil via Sudan, especially as oil pipelines in Sudan have been damaged due to the conflict. If this route closes, it would massively destabilize not only South Sudan's economy but also its politics and the delicate peace process stemming from a political crisis and civil war that broke out after the country gained independence in 2011. Oil exports, which account for **90%** of government revenue, are crucial to its ability to deliver on key commitments in the peace process. An Emirati company announced in April 2024 that it would loan

South Sudan **\$12 billion**, raising the possibility that—like Chad before it—South Sudan might start to move closer to the UAE's pro-RSF axis.

Moreover, close political and ethnic ties between groups in Sudan and South Sudan further increase the risk of tensions in Sudan spilling over, especially with South Sudan's first-ever elections approaching in December 2024. As the conflict in Sudan drags on, there will be a growing risk that political or military factions in South Sudan will judge that becoming involved in the conflict is the best way to advance and protect their political and economic interests. Such a scenario would escalate the conflict in Sudan and could lead to political tensions and violence in South Sudan itself—further deepening the humanitarian crisis there.

Even if South Sudan and Chad can avoid the worst-case scenarios, these and other neighboring countries will continue to face major challenges as the war in Sudan continues. Population movements from Sudan into these countries will continue and increase, straining their already-limited coping capacities as they face their own internal crises. Chad already hosts over **600,000** Sudanese refugees, while over **700,000** people have fled Sudan for South Sudan, mostly (550,000) South Sudanese refugees who have been forced to return home.

Donors have also announced cuts to funding for the response in South Sudan of **up to 50%**, even though the humanitarian response there is already massively underfunded. This could both limit refugees' access to critical services and also drive tensions between refugees and their host communities, leading to localized violence. Similar issues may arise in **other countries** hosting people who have fled Sudan, including Egypt (500,000 people), Ethiopia (55,000), Uganda (**33,000**) and the Central African Republic (32,000).



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## TILT THE SCALES TOWARD PEACE, NOT MORE WAR

Funding for and reform of the humanitarian response in Sudan are essential, and priorities are outlined below. However, humanitarian agencies cannot solve the political drivers of this crisis. Without parallel efforts to reduce the violence and ensure humanitarian workers can operate safely, the impact of financial investments made to date will be minimal.

### Elevate diplomacy and the focus on the crisis in Sudan to contribute to efforts to secure a ceasefire.

- Engagement with warring parties and their sponsors should be elevated to the highest diplomatic level as a reflection of the severity of the crisis and a demonstration of international commitment to addressing it.
- Western and regional member states should allocate senior diplomatic and analytical capacity, while working with the U.N. and regional bodies (AU, IGAD, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), to identify levers of influence with the SAF, the RSF and their sponsors that will contribute to decreased violence and efforts to secure a ceasefire.

### Identify and deploy levers of influence.

In efforts to do so, member states, regional bodies and the U.N. should consider:

- Expanding the current arms embargo for Darfur to cover all of Sudan and all those that support the warring parties.
- Leveraging regional powers' economic interest in Sudan to support de-escalation by encouraging Gulf states—including the UAE and Saudi Arabia—to halt the import of Sudanese gold and livestock until a ceasefire is implemented, thereby

depriving warring parties of key income streams that fund the conflict.

- Continuing to extend the mandate of the [U.N. Panel of Experts](#) and use the findings to increase public scrutiny of the roles of regional actors in the conflict.
- Expanding investigative mechanisms, potentially including a Commission of Inquiry on Sudan, to hold those responsible for violations of international law to account.

### Establish one inclusive negotiation track to end the fighting.

- Efforts to secure a halt to the fighting should focus on unifying current diplomatic efforts into one track, with participation by senior representatives from both warring parties and—as called for by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2736—supported by coordinated action from the UAE, Egypt and regional bodies. This approach would avoid “forum shopping,” whereby parties engage only with the diplomatic tracks they believe are most favorable to their objectives. Key member states with influence on regional actors including the U.S. and Saudi Arabia should stay closely involved in these efforts.

**Below:** Widat soothes her 4-month-old baby inside her tent at the Kiryandongo reception center in Uganda.



## **RESET THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE**

The severity of humanitarian needs and the threats to humanitarian aid delivery in Sudan require urgent reforms to the way such aid is supported, designed, implemented and funded.

### **Take steps to meet the needs of food-insecure and marginalized Sudanese.**

- Sustained humanitarian access (see below) is a prerequisite for addressing food insecurity across Sudan. In addition, donors and the U.N. should urgently scale up funding for and delivery of cash operations to meet the needs of food-insecure families and support local markets, while ensuring the cash and nutrition response is designed to meet the specific dietary needs of pregnant and lactating women. Such approaches are critical for meeting the needs of displaced people, many of whom are staying in host communities rather than camps.
- Where security allows, donors and humanitarians should support Sudanese farmers to plant crops and improve food production by expanding access to agricultural inputs—including tools and drought-resistant seeds—and finance through proven mechanisms such as microfinance institutions and cooperatives that allow farmers to pool resources.
- When scaling the response to hard-to-reach regions, the U.N. and donors should ensure that lifesaving gender-based violence prevention and response services are prioritized and that risk-mitigation measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse are mainstreamed across all sectors.

### **Increase funding for local responders.**

- Donors should expand direct and indirect support for local responders. First, as a short-term solution to scale up, they should increase the volume of funding channeled through existing agreements that use international NGOs as intermediaries between donors and local responders. Second, in parallel, they should reform funding structures to increase the opportunities for local responders to directly access grants. Priorities should include reforming the Sudan Humanitarian Fund, which in 2023 failed to fund any local responders, and directing finances through feminist funds such as the Urgent Action Fund Africa to ensure they reach women's organizations.

- All funding pledges made at the Paris humanitarian conference for Sudan in April 2024 should be urgently translated into commitments to help bring the humanitarian response to scale in both SAF- and RSF-controlled areas.

### **Address access constraints and appoint a senior access coordinator.**

- Reflecting the appointment of Sigrid Kaag in the Gaza response and her efforts to separate access engagement from conflict diplomacy, the U.N. secretary general should appoint senior diplomatic capacity on access in Sudan. Working with the U.N., the coordinator would ensure consistent, high-level engagement with warring parties to facilitate the movement of cross-border aid and establish a minimum of four crossline aid delivery points (in Khartoum, Darfur, Al-Jazirah and the Kordofans) so that there is equal humanitarian access for all communities affected by the conflict, whether they live in areas controlled by the SAF, the RSF or any other group.
- Access negotiations should take place in parallel to, but separate from, diplomatic efforts to end the fighting to avoid the further politicization of access negotiations. The coordinator should regularly consult with NGOs and local responders, including women's organizations, to ensure their needs and priorities are reflected in negotiations.
- Member states, working with Egypt and the U.N., should encourage the SAF to implement U.N. Security Council Resolution 2736 urgently and designate Adre as an official border crossing point, to facilitate its use by the U.N. to deliver humanitarian aid into Darfur. The U.N. should also be encouraged to work with NGOs who have access to Darfur and can transport U.N. supplies over the border. If progress on cross-border access cannot be secured before the rainy season, all options should be on the table, including further Security Council action to ensure the re-opening of Adre crossing for use by the U.N. to allow the movement of lifesaving supplies into Darfur.

### **Strengthen and decentralize U.N. response leadership in Sudan.**

- The U.N. should establish operational hubs across the country led by senior U.N. staff to decentralize and speed up operational decision-making, strengthen coordination (including the active partic-



ipation of local responders and women's organizations), and bolster access negotiations.

- The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster should urgently increase capacity in Darfur, Khartoum and the Kordofans to ensure that all humanitarian actors can access services. Warring parties should also be reminded of the civilian nature of telecommunications infrastructure, and they should refrain from attacking it and facilitate access for repairs.

### **Increase the U.N. Security Council's scrutiny of the crisis.**

- The Security Council should hold regular, open briefing sessions led by the secretary general and the emergency relief coordinator. The briefings should monitor the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2724 and 2736 as well as the recommendations put forward by the secretary general under the Resolution 2417-related white note on food insecurity in Sudan. Using the **Women,**

**Peace and Security** framework, the Security Council should also scrutinize the warring parties' use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and the barriers to the delivery of gender-based violence services.

- The Council should create safe opportunities for NGOs and local responders to share their experiences of humanitarian access barriers into and within Sudan.
- The Council, AU and IGAD should work with the secretary general as the U.N. develops recommendations on civilian protection options, as mandated in U.N. Security Council Resolution 2736.
- The Council and member states should use regular briefings provided by the secretary general and emergency response coordinator, as well as shared written evidence, to expand their diplomatic engagement, support the delivery of humanitarian aid, and improve the protection of civilians.

**Below:** 60-year-old Fairuz walks to the market with her grandchildren outside one of the transit centers in Renk, South Sudan. Since the Sudan conflict began, nearly 700,000 people have arrived at the centers.







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