

African Union

Research Reports

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Forum: African Union

Issue: Averting the risk of genocide in the Sudanese civil war

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Sudanese Civil War in April 2023 8.2 million people have been displaced and almost 15,000 have been killed. This has caused significant concern about the threat of genocide particularly in the Darfur region. The main parties in this crisis are the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF is a powerful paramilitary group that has connections to the Janjaweed militia, which was previously found guilty of genocide in Darfur in the early 2000s.

In comparison to the tragedies of the 2003-2005 genocide, the RSF and the affiliated militias have been carrying out targeted, racially motivated violence against non-Arab populations in Darfur. According to the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, There are severe concerns that genocide may be taking place in Darfur due to the circumstances, particularly in El Fasher. Human Rights Watch collected evidence of crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing perpetrated against the Masalit people and other non-Arab communities in the region by the RSF and its Arab allies.

Long-standing disputes over resources between Arab pastoralist groups in Darfur and non-Arab farming populations are the main cause of the occurring violence. Even though the RSF labels the conflict as a “tribal dispute,” it originated with the Janjaweed militia, who were involved in the 2003 massacre. As the civil war rages on, there is still a high probability of widespread crimes against civilians in Darfur once the UN peacekeeping force UNAMID ended in 2020.

Definition of Key Terms

Sudanese Civil War

The ongoing conflict in Sudan that began in April 2023, involving significant violence and displacement.

Darfur

A region in western Sudan that has been severely affected by the civil war and has a history of ethnic conflict and violence.

Displaced

Refers to people who have been forced to leave their homes due to conflict or violence.

Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)

The national military force of Sudan, involved in the conflict against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

A powerful paramilitary group in Sudan with historical links to the Janjaweed militia. The RSF is one of the main combatants in the current civil war and is accused of committing targeted violence against non-Arab populations.

Janjaweed Militia

A group associated with genocidal violence in Darfur in the early 2000s.

Militia

A collective of civilians who are organized to engage in armed conflict or maintain security, often operating alongside or in opposition to official state military forces.

Genocide

The systematic extermination of a particular ethnic, racial, or national group.

Ethnic Cleansing

The attempt to establish a region or area as ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove people of certain ethnic groups.

Crimes Against Humanity

Attacks against civilians.

UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

A UN official responsible for monitoring and advising on issues related to potential genocide.

Masalit People

An ethnic group in Darfur that has been targeted by violence and discrimination during the current conflict.

Tribal Dispute

The term used by the RSF to describe the conflict.

UNAMID

The United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur, a peacekeeping force that ended its mission in 2020.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Sudan

The country at the center of the conflict, where the civil war between the SAF and RSF is unfolding. They are facing significant human right violations and extensive displacement have resulted from the conflict, worsening the already fragile humanitarian situation.

United States

Engaged in diplomatic efforts, humanitarian aid, and sanctions related to the human right abuses in Sudan. The U.S. has been vocal in calling for an immediate ceasefire and the protection of civilians. Humanitarian aid efforts are focused on providing relief to those

displaced by the conflict, while sanctions aim to pressure the warring parties to negotiate peace. The U.S. is also working with international partners to support conflict resolution initiatives and strengthen monitoring of the situation on the ground.

China

Involved diplomatically and has economic interests in Sudan, including investments in the oil sector. China's approach includes encouraging dialogue between the conflicting parties and promoting stability to safeguard its investments. China has provided limited humanitarian aid and has supported United Nations efforts to address the crisis. Its diplomatic stance reflects a balance between protecting its economic interests and advocating for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Russia

Participates in diplomatic discussions and supports the Sudanese government. While it has called for a resolution to the conflict, its support for the Sudanese government is seen as part of its broader strategy to maintain influence in the region. Russia's role also involves engaging in arms trade, which raises concerns about the potential escalation of violence.

South Sudan

A neighboring country affected by the conflict due to cross-border issues and displacement of people. The conflict in Sudan has led to an influx of refugees into South Sudan, weighing down its resources whilst making the difficulties that exist worse. In order to resolve the situation, South Sudan has called for regional collaboration and is working to manage the humanitarian consequences. The peace process and security situation in South Sudan are also affected by the instability in Sudan.

United Nations (UN)

Key player in addressing the conflict through: UN Security Council, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

African Union (AU)

Previously supported peacekeeping through the UNAMID mission and continued regional diplomatic efforts.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Documents human rights abuses, including crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Darfur.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

Investigates and prosecutes individuals for crimes committed in Sudan, including those in Darfur.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Provides humanitarian aid and support to victims of the conflict.

Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)

The national military of Sudan, one of the main combatants in the civil war.

Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

A powerful paramilitary group involved in the conflict, with historical ties to the Janjaweed militia implicated in earlier genocidal actions in Darfur.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
2003-2005	The Janjaweed militia commits widespread atrocities against non-Arab populations in Darfur.
July 9, 2011	South Sudan becomes an independent country after a public vote, resulting in the partition of Sudan.
April 11, 2019	Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir is removed from power after months of protests against his government. This leads to the

	change of Sudan's government and policies
June 30, 2020	The United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), ends its operations after 13 years.
October 25, 2021	Sudan's transitional government is dissolved, leading to a military takeover and political instability.
April 15, 2023	Armed conflict breaks out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This marks the beginning of a major escalation in violence and instability in Sudan.
May 2023	Nearly 15,000 people are reported killed, and over 8.2 million are displaced due to the conflict.
January 2024	The UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide warns of the potential for ongoing genocide in Darfur, citing severe concerns over the situation in El Fasher.
February 2024	Human Rights Watch reports evidence of ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity by the RSF and its allies against ethnic Massalit and other non-Arab communities in Darfur.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

UN Security Council Resolution 1556 (2004)

A pivotal international response to the escalating violence in Darfur. It conveyed stress on the humanitarian crisis and the Janjaweed militia's activities. The resolution called on the Sudanese government to put a stop to the fighting and grant humanitarian relief to the areas impacted by the conflict without limitations. It established the framework for additional international action and indicated the UN's solution to resolve the Darfur conflict

UN Security Council Resolution 1706 (2006)

UNAMID, the UN-African Union hybrid peacekeeping force, was authorized for deployment to Darfur. In the worldwide effort to protect people, maintain peace, and make humanitarian relief possible, being an important development. The international community's resolve to begin a coordinated peacekeeping operation in Darfur to address the security and humanitarian situation in the region was reinforced in the resolution

UN Security Council Resolution 2649 (2023)

Addressed the severe escalation of violence and humanitarian crisis following the outbreak of the Sudanese civil war. It called for an immediate ceasefire and ensured unrestricted humanitarian access

Establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (2005)

The Rome Statute created the ICC and gave the world a global legal system for war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. It has been vital in addressing crimes committed in Darfur, leading to the issuance of arrest warrants and investigations for important players in the conflict. An important advancement in global justice and accountability lies in the ICC. It resolves Sudan's security issues and humanitarian needs

UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Report (2023)

The UN Special Adviser's report brought significant concerns about the possibility of genocide in Darfur, especially in El Fasher. In order to prevent more crimes and safeguard civilians, it became obvious that the international community needed to pay notice and step in. The report is a reflection of the continued concern and attention throughout the world about the situation in Darfur

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

UN Security Council Resolution 1591 (2005)

This resolution placed asset freezes and travel restrictions on parties and people engaged in the Darfur crisis. It was intended to restrict the perpetrators' capacity to carry out their actions and put further pressure on them for the violence. The fundamental dispute continued despite its attempts to apply pressure on a global scale

UN Security Council Resolution 2003 (2011)

The resolution aimed to stabilize the region by acknowledging the continued difficulties in maintaining the presence and benefit of peacekeeping operations

UN Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)

Although this resolution is primarily focused on Lebanon, it is notable for its broader impact on international resolution of disputes and regional stability. It demanded that foreign forces leave Lebanon and eliminate militias, which had an indirect impact on regional security dynamics, particularly those in Sudan. The resolution emphasized how committed the international community is to using diplomacy and peacekeeping operations to resolve disputes

International Criminal Court (ICC) Investigations (2005-Present)

The ICC initiated investigations into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, issuing arrest warrants for individuals such as Omar al-Bashir. The ICC's involvement represents an ongoing effort to seek justice and accountability for atrocities committed in the conflict, aiming to deter future crimes and provide a measure of justice for victims

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Peacekeeping and Security

Establishing a strong and well-equipped international peacekeeping force to guard civilians and maintain security. This will entail further international security measures, such as reinforcing or relaunching a hybrid UN-African Union mission, with an emphasis on efficient operational capabilities and coordination

Equitable Resource Management

Formulating strategies to achieve fair resource management and economic growth in regions impacted by war. This entails resolving economic dissatisfaction, reducing rivalry for resources, and developing economic possibilities

Global Mobilization

Raising global awareness and advocating for sustained international attention and action on the Sudanese conflict. This entails gaining public support, influencing policymakers to ensure that the conflict stays high on the global agenda

Immediate and Long-Term Aid

Providing comprehensive humanitarian assistance including long-term development and reconstruction projects as well as food, shelter, medical care, and education

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