

International Peace Bureau

Situational Brief

The Sudanese

Civil War:

*The Victims, The Perpetrators &
The Lifelines*



June 2026

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I. BACKGROUND: HOW THE WAR BEGAN

On 15 April 2023, Sudan descended into catastrophic civil war when the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), commanded by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo –known as "Hemedti"-- turned their weapons on each other. What had been an uneasy power-sharing arrangement following the 2021 military coup collapsed over a fundamental disagreement: the RSF's integration into the national army.

Both Burhan and Hemedti had jointly orchestrated the October 2021 coup that dissolved Sudan's transitional civilian government and ousted its civilian members. For two years, they ruled as co-leaders of a military junta. By early 2023, tensions over the timeline and terms for RSF integration became irreconcilable. When fighting erupted in Khartoum, it spread rapidly across the country, into Darfur, the Kordofans, and the Gezira agricultural heartland. The capital fractured. Al-Burhan relocated his government to Port Sudan in the east. Hemedti's RSF seized most of Khartoum and virtually all of Darfur.

By March 2025, the SAF recaptured Khartoum after a sustained offensive. However, the RSF consolidated total control over Darfur, with catastrophic consequences for civilians, and continued expanding into the Kordofan region. As of April 2026, Sudan has two rival administrations claiming legitimacy, the conflict is entering its third year, and the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.

AT A GLANCE: WORLD'S LARGEST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS:

30+ Million	12.5 Million	21.2 Million	400,000+
People Need Aid	Displaced	Facing Famine	Est. Deaths

Sources: UN OCHA, CFR Global Conflict Tracker, US State Department - figures as of early 2026

II. THE PROXY WAR: WHO IS FUNDING THIS CONFLICT?

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Sudan's war has become a theatre for regional and global power competition. Foreign governments have supplied weapons, drones, financing, and political cover to both sides – dramatically prolonging a war that might otherwise have been contained. The Darfur arms embargo, in force since 2005, has been brazenly violated by multiple states.

Supporting the RSF

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been the most extensively documented external backer of the RSF. UN sanctions monitors named the UAE in 2024 as actively aiding the RSF, and the Sudanese government filed a complaint to the International Court of Justice in early 2025, accusing the UAE of complicity in genocide. U.S. officials confirmed that the UAE used an airport in Chad to support RSF drone operations and smuggle weapons into Darfur — in some cases using humanitarian aid cover. The UAE denies all allegations.

UAE	Supplied armoured personnel carriers, drones, and ammunition to the RSF. Named by UN monitors; subject of an ICJ complaint by Sudan. Used the Chadian territory as a transit route for weapons deliveries.
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Russia has also played a shadowy role on both sides of the conflict. Reports indicate the RSF benefited from Wagner Group influence, while gold smuggled from Sudan's mines – much of which the RSF controls – has helped Russia finance its war in Ukraine and circumvent international sanctions.

Supporting the SAF

The Sudanese Armed Forces have drawn support from Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Qatar. Egypt has supplied weapons and provided political backing for the Burhan government, viewing Hemedti's RSF as a destabilizing force on its southern border. Turkey has provided drones and mediated between the parties. Iran has supplied armed drones that partially contributed to the SAF's recapture of Khartoum. China has sold weapons that have been traced to both sides, while officially calling for peace and protecting its Belt and Road interests.

RSF External Backers	SAF External Backers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAE: weapons, drones, financing • Russia: Wagner Group – gold trade, influence • China: weapons (also supplies SAF) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egypt: weapons, political support • Iran: armed drones • Turkey: drones, mediation leverage • Qatar: political backing

International mediation - including the 2023 Jeddah Declaration, brokered by the United States and Saudi Arabia - has repeatedly failed. The UN Security Council called for an immediate ceasefire in March 2024, but fighting continued unabated. As of April 2026, no durable ceasefire framework is in place.

III. THE PERPETRATORS: THE RSF AND ITS CAMPAIGN OF TERROR

The **Rapid Support Forces** emerged from the Janjaweed militias responsible for the Darfur genocide of the early 2000s, which killed an estimated 300,000 civilians and displaced 2.7 million. Under Hemedti's command, the RSF has replicated and escalated those atrocities on a massive scale across Sudan.

Genocide Determination

In February 2026, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan concluded that the RSF's actions in El Fasher show "hallmarks of genocide" against the Zaghawa and Fur communities. The Mission found evidence establishing that at least three underlying acts of genocide were committed: the killing of members of a protected ethnic group; causing serious bodily and mental harm; and deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction. These findings build on the Mission's earlier documentation and that of the UN Human Rights Office of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing committed by the RSF and allied Arab militias across Darfur since April 2023. The targeting has been explicitly ethnic: the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa communities have borne the brunt of systematic mass murder, sexual violence, and forced displacement.

Documented Atrocities

Human rights organizations, UN bodies, and the International Criminal Court have documented a pattern of RSF atrocities, including:

- **Mass killings of civilian men and boys on an ethnic basis - including infants - in El Geneina, Ardamata, Zamzam camp, and El Fasher**

Documented Atrocities

- **Systematic sexual violence used as a deliberate weapon of war: in 2025 alone, over 500 victims of rape, gang rape, sexual torture, and sexual slavery were identified by UN monitors**
- **The siege and fall of El Fasher (October 2025): over 460 killed at El-Saudi hospital alone, including patients and doctors; satellite imagery confirmed mass graves, door-to-door executions, and burning of human remains**
- **Deliberate blocking of humanitarian aid and looting of relief supplies**
- **RSF fighters filming and celebrating executions, sharing videos on social media**
- **More than 235 villages have been set ablaze across Darfur since April 2023**

Both warring parties (the RSF and the SAF) have been accused of war crimes. The SAF has carried out indiscriminate airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, markets, hospitals, and IDP camps. It has also deployed bureaucratic obstruction to prevent humanitarian aid from reaching RSF-controlled areas, and intelligence-linked militias have threatened, arrested, and killed civilian aid workers. However, the RSF's campaign in Darfur has been identified by multiple international bodies as bearing the clear hallmarks of genocide.



The patterns of atrocities in El Geneina in 2023 have been replicated in El Fasher in 2025. This criminality is being repeated town after town.

- ICC Deputy Prosecutor Nazhat Shameem Khan

ICC Finding: *The ICC Prosecutor presented evidence in January 2026 that war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in El Fasher during the RSF siege: "The patterns of atrocities in El Geneina in 2023 have been replicated in El Fasher in 2025. This criminality is being repeated town after town."*

IV. THE VICTIMS: SUDAN'S CIVILIAN POPULATION

Sudan's 46 million civilians are caught between two armed forces with no accountability and no functioning state. The humanitarian consequences are staggering, widely described by the UN and aid organizations as the world's largest humanitarian crisis and the worst displacement emergency on earth.

Displacement

More than 12.5 million people have been forced from their homes, including over 3.3 million who have fled to neighboring countries, including Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Egypt, overwhelming host communities that are themselves fragile and under-resourced.

Famine

Approximately 21.2 million people face high levels of acute food insecurity. Famine has been confirmed in parts of Darfur and Kordofan. Both parties have weaponized hunger: the RSF by besieging cities and looting aid, the SAF by restricting access to RSF-held territory. In April 2025, the RSF attacked Zamzam camp - where famine was first confirmed in 2024 and which shelters hundreds of thousands - displacing over 400,000 more people. Families in besieged areas have been reduced to eating leaves and animal feed.

Children

A UNICEF nutrition survey in Um Baru, North Darfur, found that more than half of children under five were acutely malnourished - among the highest rates ever recorded in a standardized emergency assessment. Schools have been destroyed or shuttered. Child soldiers have been documented on both sides.

Women and Girls

Sexual violence has been used systematically as a weapon of war. Girls as young as 14 have been documented as victims. One Amnesty International testimony describes a 14-year-old girl raped by RSF fighters who died days later at a clinic after whispering to her mother: "They raped me too, but do not tell anyone." The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated plainly: "The bodies of Sudanese women and girls have been weaponised to terrorize communities."

Healthcare Collapse

The WHO has verified 201 attacks on healthcare facilities since April 2023. El Fasher, which once had 36 clinics and hospitals, had only one partially functional one by the time of its fall. Medical staff have gone into hiding. At El-Saudi hospital alone, over 460 people - patients, doctors, and wounded - were killed when RSF forces overran the facility.



V. THE LIFELINES: SUDAN'S EMERGENCY RESPONSE ROOMS (ERRs)

Amidst the catastrophic vacuum left by a collapsed state, fleeing international agencies, and a deliberately obstructed aid, Sudan's Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) have become the primary and sometimes ONLY lifeline for millions of Sudanese civilians, operating in all 18 of Sudan's states. They are, in the most literal sense, what stands between survival and collapse for communities whose formal system has failed.

Origins

The ERRs grew out of the Neighbourhood Resistance Committees (NRCs) that led the 2018-2019 Sudanese revolution, which ousted Omar al-Bashir's regime. These grassroots networks had already mobilized communities for civil disobedience, humanitarian logistics during the 2019 crackdown, and mutual aid during the COVID-19 pandemic.



But to understand the ERRs is to understand something even deeper in Sudanese civic culture: the tradition of *nafeer* - an ancient, community-rooted call to mobilize in times of hardship. *Nafeer* is a moral response mechanism, rather than a bureaucratic one. The ERRs inherited solidarity from existing local civic systems and channeled it into a momentous humanitarian movement.

What ERRs Do

The ERRs provide emergency food distribution and community kitchens (takaya), medical care, including running hospitals and supplying medicines for chronic illnesses; clean water distribution and infrastructure repair; evacuation coordination: including the evacuation of over 3,000 people from Al Jazeera, psychosocial support and safe spaces for women and children; burial services for the deceased, documentation of human rights abuses; and negotiation for the release of detained civilians.

Within this broader network are the **Women's Emergency Response Rooms (غرف الطوارئ النسوية)**, a dedicated office operating across Sudan that has specialized in clinical care for survivors of sexual violence, provision of reproductive health supplies, safe evacuation coordination, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment through livelihood projects including nutrition programs, daycare, and handicraft cooperatives. The WERRs established women's break rooms, women's social spaces that functioned during active conflict as emergency support centers for survivors of gender-based violence, and that have since become rare protected social spaces for women in communities where such spaces are scarce. With a plan to support over 90 women's rooms, the WERRs have moved into a thriving phase. Critically, where the broader ERR network may phase out as Sudan stabilizes and state institutions are rebuilt, the Women's ERRs are expected to thrive, not as an emergency intervention, but as a transformative justice mechanism for the country's recovery.

Structure and Scale

The network operates as a decentralized, volunteer-led movement, with approximately 800 neighborhood-level Rooms spread across all 18 states, each one embedded in and accountable to its own community. There is no ERRs headquarters. There is no CEO. There is no single spokesperson who can negotiate on behalf of all rooms. Each committee designs its own strategy in response to the specific resources, geography, and needs of its neighborhood.

A national Localisation Coordination Council, formed in late 2023, was created to bring together ERRs and national and international NGOs for coordination and resource-sharing - but the spirit of the movement remains rooted in the same solidarity and volunteerism from which it was born.

This horizontal structure has been criticized as lacking definitive leadership and risking fragmentation. But this critique misunderstands the mode's nuance. One resistance committee member described the ERRs as introducing a new form of decentralized service delivery, where grassroots councils built on people's demands, not the demands of war leaders. The very characteristics that make the ERRs difficult to map are precisely what make them the most responsive and impossible to dismantle. Formal hierarchical organizations, both National and international, have failed to match their reach, speed, or legitimacy with the communities they serve. This model has proven indispensable. **As of December 2024, ERRs had directly assisted over 11.5 million people.**

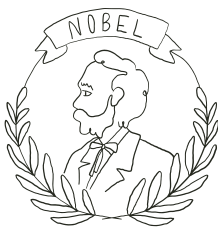
The Threats They Face

ERRs volunteers operate at enormous personal risk of murder, looting, abduction, rape, or being forced into exile. Both warring parties have targeted them. The RSF has murdered aid workers and looted supplies. Three volunteers were killed in Khartoum in 2023. SAF-linked intelligence operatives and Islamist militias have detained, threatened, and killed ERR's activists. Many volunteers coordinate their work remotely after being displaced from Sudan entirely. Sudan's civilians continue to face famine, displacement, and violence, while ERRs volunteers continue to operate with minimal resources, immense risk, and shrinking civic space.

For local organizations operating in active conflict zones without formal legal status, international visibility and recognition carry practical weight. Recognition as a humanitarian actor, whether through international forums, intergovernmental bodies, or international awards, can generate political accountability and provide

a degree of protection under international humanitarian law. It also facilitates access to certain funding mechanisms and documented legitimacy that may offer a shield against arbitrary targeting. The ERRs pursued this path primarily to formalize and enforce volunteer protection.

That recognition has, to a meaningful extent, extended some protection to volunteers and unlocked modest funding streams. But it has also come at a cost of increased risk; as the entry of external actors into the movement's ecosystem has, in some quarters, raised questions about autonomy, neutrality, and the moral coherence of a movement that was born in radical independence from state and institutional power.



*The International Peace Bureau is proud to announce that the **ERRs have been officially nominated** for the **2026 Nobel Peace Prize**. They were previously nominated in both 2024 and 2025, and have received the Chatham House Prize, the Rafto Prize for Human Rights (2025), and the Right Livelihood Award (2025). They represent what many experts describe as a pioneering model of decolonized, locally-led humanitarian action.*

VI. THE INTERNATIONAL FAILURE

Despite the scale of the catastrophe - the world's largest humanitarian crisis, a formally determined genocide, and the world's largest displacement crisis - international attention and funding have remained woefully inadequate.

- **The UN's \$4.2 billion 2025 humanitarian appeal for Sudan was only 27% funded as of late 2025**
- **The United States, which funded nearly 44% of all humanitarian assistance to Sudan in 2024, began slashing foreign aid in early 2025 under the Trump administration, leading to the shutdown of numerous food assistance programs and health centers.**
- **The UN Security Council voted to terminate its political mission to Sudan in December 2023, with the Sudanese government calling its performance "disappointing."**
- **All mediation efforts, including the 2023 Jeddah process, have collapsed without producing a ceasefire**
- **Former AU mediator Thabo Mbeki described international responses as "woefully inadequate."**

Sudan's civilians, trapped between the RSF's genocidal campaign and the SAF's obstructive control, have received insufficient protection, attention, and relief from the international community. The ERRs have filled this gap with their own lives and resources.

VII. IPB POSITION & CALL TO ACTION

The International Peace Bureau (IPB) recognizes the Sudan Emergency Response Rooms as among the most extraordinary examples of civilian-led humanitarian action in recent history. In a context of state collapse, genocidal violence, and international neglect, ERR volunteers have sustained millions of lives at extraordinary personal risk.

The IPB calls on the international community to:

- **Formally recognize and protect ERR volunteers as humanitarian actors under international humanitarian law, ensuring that protection is enforced and that both warring parties are held accountable for attacks on civilian aid workers**
- **Immediate scale-up, direct, and flexible funding to the Emergency Response Rooms and local Sudanese humanitarian organizations, allocating a minimum of 10% of all Sudan-directed humanitarian aid directly to community-led mutual aid networks, with fast-tracked disbursement mechanisms that meet the pace of an active famine crisis**
- **Pressure all foreign states – in particular the UAE – to cease arms transfers to parties engaged in documented genocide and war crimes**
- **Support the expansion of ICC jurisdiction and the existing Darfur arms embargo to cover all of Sudan**
- **Urgently restore and increase humanitarian aid funding for Sudan, reversing the devastating cuts of 2025**
- **Call for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire and the protection of humanitarian corridors**

Moreover, IPB calls on civil society organizations to:

- **Devote time, strategic capacities, and resources to spreading awareness and advocating for Sudan, including through public actions, media coverage, and centering Sudan in all discussions around genocide and international humanitarian failure**
- **Build sustained solidarity with the ERRs and Sudanese civil society movements, creating platforms for exchange, mutual support, and long-term partnership beyond the immediate crisis**
- **Pressure institutional donors - foundations, universities, pension funds, and faith-based organizations- to redirect funding toward direct support for local Sudanese humanitarian networks.**
- **Document and publicize violations against humanitarian workers and civilians, so that accountability mechanisms and international bodies have the evidence needed to pursue justice and protection**
- **Organize sustained resource mobilization campaigns for the ERRs and other Sudanese grassroots humanitarian organizations, with particular attention to the Women's Emergency Response Rooms**

Support grassroots Sudanese activists by raising their advocacy in discussions, ensuring that Sudanese leadership - particularly women and youth - shapes the narrative around Sudan's future.

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**"They are the only ones who can help us.
It's thanks to them that we eat.
They bring us flour, pills, sometimes
just a kind word."**

— Emgahed Moussa, 22, resident of Dilling, South Kordofan, Sudan

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