

JOINT SUBMISSION

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF SUDAN

Submitted by:
Arab NGO Network for Development
and
Gender Studies and Research Centre
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Introduction¹

1. Four years after the last UPR, Sudan continues to face one of the world's most severe humanitarian and human rights crises since the outbreak of the armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023.
2. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions of civilians, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the collapse of essential public services across large parts of the country. Large numbers of people have been forced to flee their homes to relatively safer areas, both within Sudan and in neighboring countries, exacerbating regional instability. More than three million people are classified as refugees, and nearly nine million are internally displaced.
3. As the scale of the humanitarian disaster in Sudan continues to rise. While more than 30 million Sudanese now require humanitarian assistance approximately 12.7 million people require services related to sexual violence and gender-based violence, compared to only 3.1 million people in 2023.
4. Violence against women and girls has not merely been a by-product of the war; rather, it has become an integral part of the patterns of social and military control employed in conflict-affected areas. More than 12 million women and girls face direct risks of sexual violence, while over 17 million women and girls are in need of protection services and humanitarian assistance. This has further exacerbated the vulnerability of women and girls and undermined their fundamental rights.
5. It should also be noted that figures on sexual violence are generally considered to be underreported due to fear of social stigma, insecurity, and limited access to reporting mechanisms and services, particularly in conflict-affected areas such as Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile. However various reports issued by United Nations agencies have confirmed that the number of people requiring response and support services for survivors of sexual violence has quadrupled since the outbreak of the war. The number of people at risk of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, has risen to more than 12 million since the beginning of the conflict. Furthermore, UN organizations have documented a 288% increase in the number of survivors seeking gender-based violence-related services since December 2023, indicating the rapidly expanding scale of the crisis.

a. Legal framework on gender equality

6. Sudan's legal framework continues to institutionalize gender-based discrimination, creating significant barriers to the realization of women's human rights and undermining the country's obligations under international human rights law.
7. Whereas all agreements and treaties signed and ratified by Sudan stipulate non-discrimination between the sexes (i.e. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, etc.) domestic laws are in clear conflict with these agreements.

¹ This joint submission is prepared based on previous monitoring and reporting on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 5.

https://www.annd.org/uploads/publications/sudan_file_vnr.pdf

8. It is worth noting that Sudan has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which calls for non-discrimination, thus limiting the possibility of implementing legal reforms.

9. Equality before the law is fundamental for achieving gender equality. Laws enacted against discrimination that protect women's rights, and domestic laws that align with human rights principles and standards help building just and peaceful societies in which women can fully and meaningfully participate in policymaking and decision-making processes.

Recommendations

10. Promote a societal shift in perceptions of women's rights by affirming that women's rights are human rights. This requires sustained awareness-raising efforts, alongside reforms of the justice system and the amendment of discriminatory laws to ensure full compatibility with international human rights instruments and principles of equality and justice.

11. Provide training for judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officials to ensure impartial, survivor-centered, and gender-sensitive handling of cases involving sexual violence.

12. Ensure accessible and comprehensive legal aid and psychosocial support services for sexual violence victims, guaranteeing confidentiality, protection, and dignity.

13. Adopt and implement a comprehensive legal reform strategy that establishes clear policies and enacts the necessary legislation to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls at all levels of society.

b. The situation of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls

14. Rape in the context of armed conflict is one of the most egregious violations of human dignity, where sexual violence goes beyond individual crimes and becomes a systematic tool targeting entire communities. In the Sudanese war, ongoing since 2023, this phenomenon has emerged at an unprecedented scale and frequency, raising profound questions as to whether these violations are isolated incidents or reflect deliberate and systematic patterns shaped by military and social policies and agendas.

15. Reports by the United Nations and Amnesty International have documented hundreds of rape cases in Khartoum, Darfur, and other cities, revealing recurring patterns of sexual violence accompanied by torture and humiliation. These violations have been reported in private homes, detention centers, and even places of worship. This comes as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) sweep through Gezira State, particularly the city of Wad Madani and its surrounding villages.

16. Survivors of gender based violence face severe barriers in accessing essential medications for the treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C, particularly in contexts where healthcare infrastructure has been destroyed. They also encounter significant legal obstacles in pursuing procedures related to pregnancy and abortion, especially in the absence or collapse of judicial and legal institutions.

Recommendations

17. Establish a Special United Nations Commission of Inquiry to conduct independent and rapid investigations into all incidents of sexual violence and the use of rape as a weapon

of war, with the aim of ensuring accountability and prosecuting all perpetrators, including those bearing command responsibility, while putting in place all necessary international safeguards to prevent impunity.

18. Expedite procedures for addressing reports of sexual violence and the use of rape as a weapon of war, recognizing such acts as war crimes and, in the context of widespread and systematic attacks against civilian populations, as crimes against humanity. These cases should be treated as a matter of the highest priority, with full protection provided to survivors and those reporting such crimes.

19. Develop and implement an intensive emergency program over the next six months to train medical personnel and frontline responders on protocols for managing cases of sexual violence and to adopt standardized procedures for the accurate documentation and reporting of cases.

c. The situation of child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

20. The Sudanese legal framework is deficient in providing adequate protection against child, early, and forced marriage, as there is no explicit criminalization of forced marriage. In addition, laws that continue to be applied allow the marriage of women and minors without requiring explicit consent. Moreover, legal loopholes—particularly in the Personal Status Law for Muslims of 1991, the Sudanese Criminal Law of 1984, the Sudanese Evidence Law of 1994, and the Child Law of 2010—hinder access to justice and fairness.

21. There is a lack of sufficiently deterrent legal provisions that explicitly criminalize forced marriage and clearly and bindingly establish a minimum age of marriage. Oversight of marriage contracts remains weak, particularly in rural areas and conflict-affected zones, allowing informal or coercive arrangements to proceed unchecked. As a result, forced marriage in the Sudanese context effectively persists as a crime without punishment.

22. In light of the armed conflict that Sudan has been witnessing since April 2023, cases of forced marriage have worsened as one of the most serious violations against women, girls and children, as it found a fertile environment in the context of those armed conflicts and the collapse of the legal system. With increasing displacement, poverty, and the absence of legal protection, marriage became used as a means of protection and survival, or in exchange for food and shelter.

23. This situation has left women and girls increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and violence, particularly within a prevailing traditional discourse that promotes marriage as a “solution” to the crisis.

24. Limited awareness and ignorance have contributed to the normalization and acceptance of such practices within society. In times of instability and displacement, some communities revert to harmful coping mechanisms, including viewing the marriage of a girl as a “legitimate” response to economic hardship or insecurity, especially in the absence of protective frameworks and social support systems.

25. Furthermore, the absence of physical evidence and effective legal protection, beginning with the failure to formally acknowledge violations, creates significant barriers to justice. In most cases, there is no conclusive physical proof that a marriage was forced. Survivors are often subjected to psychological and social pressure and may not be able to testify freely before the court. Moreover, there are no reliable mechanisms within Sharia courts or marriage offices to verify free and informed consent. The strong community authority of guardians, coupled with tribal customs, further obstructs the submission of testimony challenging forced marriage. This gap creates serious difficulties for judges and lawyers in the legal characterization of the act. As

a result, many cases are classified as “legitimate” or “legal” marriages, even when they occurred under duress or coercion.

26. The situation is compounded by the absence of official documentation, particularly in rural areas and conflict-affected zones where customary marriages take place without registration. This makes such marriages legally difficult to contest and significantly hinders victims’ ability to seek judicial remedy or hold perpetrators accountable. In some areas controlled by armed groups that do not recognize formal legal systems, models of forced marriage are imposed. In these contexts, there are no police units or judicial bodies specifically trained or mandated to address this type of violation.

Recommendations

27. Align national legislation with international human rights standards and treaty obligations, ensuring the effective protection of women and girls from all forms of violence and discrimination in both times of peace and armed conflict. This requires sustained political commitment and cannot be further delayed.

28. Demonstrate clear political will by establishing effective coordination mechanisms among government institutions, judicial authorities, civil society organizations, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive and survivor-centered response to gender-based violence.

29. Establish accessible and effective mechanisms that empower communities to actively participate in the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls. These should include safe and confidential reporting mechanisms, comprehensive survivor support services, legal assistance, and sustained advocacy initiatives. Practical measures to prevent forced and child marriage should include nationwide awareness-raising campaigns, strategic legal reform and advocacy, and the effective use of traditional and digital media to challenge discriminatory social norms and promote gender equality.

30. Strengthen the recognition, protection, and meaningful participation of feminist and women-led civil society organizations, including survivor-led initiatives, as essential actors in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Expanding support for these initiatives will enhance the reach and effectiveness of protection services, support centers, and human rights networks at the local, national, and international levels, including in conflict-affected areas, displacement settings, and refugee camps.

d. Women’s Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making

31. In Sudan the continued underrepresentation of women in peacebuilding processes and efforts at the policy-making and decision-making levels across all peace forums and talks remains a prominent feature. This persists despite the significant role women play at the grassroots level, whether through emergency response teams or community centers that have addressed this catastrophic crisis and contributed to preserving the social fabric.

32. It is worth noting that this marginalization has persisted in previous periods, particularly during the transitional government of 2020–2023, despite the constitutional mandate stipulating 40% female representation at all levels. Even in the best-case scenarios, women’s participation has not exceeded 20%. Despite the prominent role of Sudanese women in the revolutionary and political movement since 2019, and the expectations of greater progress in their participation in leadership positions at the policy-making level, this participation has remained limited in both

quantity and quality. Women were mainly assigned service-oriented ministries with restricted mandates and limited influence over strategic decision-making.

33. When women were appointed to two ministerial positions in the transitional government—Foreign Affairs and Finance—they encountered institutional resistance, political rejection, and, at times, a lack of cooperation that contributed to their early departure. This confirms the dominance of a patriarchal institutional culture that works to limit the active role of women in all structures and institutions of government.

Recommendations

34. Adopt and enforce legislative, institutional, and policy measures to eliminate discrimination and structural barriers that restrict women's access to leadership and decision-making positions in political and public life, ensuring equal opportunities and protecting women leaders from political intimidation, harassment, and gender-based discrimination.

35. Ensure the full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation of women at all levels of peacebuilding, conflict prevention, mediation, peace negotiations, and post-conflict recovery.

e. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

36. Since the beginning of the war, the humanitarian crisis has had a devastating impact, as reflected in alarming statistics. Currently, 198,000 pregnant women are suffering from malnutrition, and 860,000 breastfeeding mothers are malnourished. In addition, 53,000 children have died from malnutrition, while 680,000 pregnant women have died during childbirth. Furthermore, in the besieged South Kordofan region, more than 67,000 women are suffering from malnutrition and tuberculosis. Approximately 12,000 pregnant women and 6,000 breastfeeding mothers lack adequate nutrition. Around 21,000 children are without sufficient food or access to vaccinations. In North and Central Darfur, cholera is spreading within displacement camps, with 500 confirmed cases. This situation significantly affects the health of women and children—particularly pregnant women, who are at heightened risk due to weakened immunity and limited access to health services.

Recommendations

37. Strengthen coordination between national authorities, humanitarian actors, women's organizations, and local emergency response networks by establishing an effective coordination mechanism, including through the Women's Organizations Unit, to develop and implement a comprehensive action plan for the delivery of essential health, nutrition, and protection services, while safeguarding and supporting community-led volunteer initiatives.

38. Ensure safe, timely, and non-discriminatory access to healthcare, including by facilitating the safe evacuation and transfer of women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other civilians requiring urgent medical care to functioning health facilities, and guaranteeing uninterrupted access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency obstetric care and skilled birth attendance.

39. Adopt targeted measures to protect girls from gender-based violence, including harassment, abduction, sexual violence, and exploitation, by establishing safe spaces, strengthening community-based protection mechanisms, ensuring safe access to water and essential services, and expanding access to education and vocational training in displacement sites and refugee camps.

40. Strengthen community-based protection and humanitarian coordination by supporting the establishment and capacity of local organizations in displacement camps and ensuring effective collaboration among community-based organizations, women's groups, first responders, humanitarian actors, and international organizations through sustainable partnership mechanisms.

41. Recognize, protect, and support the meaningful participation of women's organizations and women peacebuilders in humanitarian response, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and peace negotiations, and promote their leadership in efforts aimed at ending the conflict and achieving a just, inclusive, and sustainable peace.