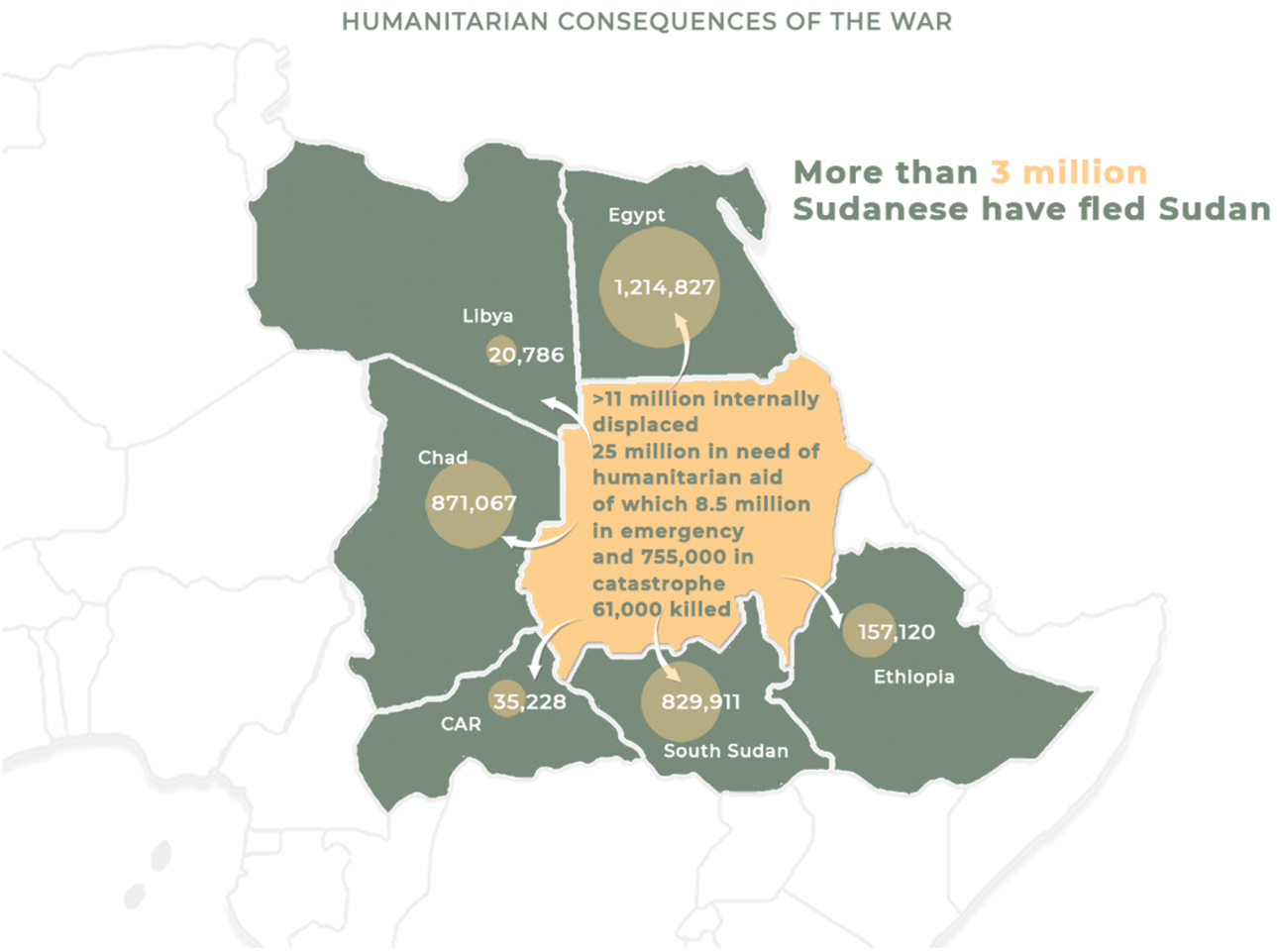
SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT

PRIORITIZING PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN PEACE AND SECURITY DIPLOMACY IN SUDAN: CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS

AMANI AFRICA

Media and Research Services



NOVEMBER

2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. WHY THIS SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT?.....1

II. THE SCALE AND NATURE OF THE NEED FOR AND CHALLENGES TO CIVILIAN PROTECTION IN SUDAN.....2

III. THE IMPERATIVE FOR CIVILIAN PROTECTION: AN END AND A MEANS.....6

IV. SHORT-TERM AND URGENT PROTECTION OPTIONS.....8

4.1. Monitoring, tracking, documenting and reporting.....8
4.2. Restoring critical infrastructure and use of technology for protection.....9
4.3. Support and enhance humanitarian access.....10
4.4. Supporting, sustaining and leveraging local ceasefires.....11

V. MEDIUM-TERM AND INTERMEDIARY PROTECTION MEASURES.....12

5.1. Establishment of safe zones.....12
5.2. Internationally monitored humanitarian corridors.....13
5.3. Bolstering of commitment of parties to minimum principles for civilian protection and humanitarian action.....14

IV. MORE IDEAL AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTION MEASURES.....14

6.1. Ceasefire.....15
6.2. Deployment of a protection force.....15
6.3. Rehabilitation and reconstruction.....16
6.4. Political settlement.....17

I. WHY THIS SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT?

The African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting of Heads of State and Government held on 21 June 2024 characterised the disastrous war in Sudan that erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) as involving 'unprecedented catastrophic humanitarian situation, indiscriminate killings of civilians, and wanton destruction of infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, water purification and electricity generation plants... in clear violation of IHL and IHRL.'[1] The PSC is not alone in vividly capturing what the war between the SAF and RSF turned into for ordinary Sudanese during the 18 months since its outbreak. United Nation's (UN) Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan, in its first report on the raging war in Sudan, revealed that both parties, as well as their respective allies, have committed harrowing human rights violations and international crimes.[2] This is on top of the various reports from Sudanese and other human rights organisations on the scale of the tragedy unfolding in Sudan.[3]

Recent events in El Gezira state of Sudan where reports show heinous acts of violence being unleashed by RSF on civilians offer further evidence that this war has become a war on people.[4] Rather than being a war between the two warring parties, almost from the start of the fighting that erupted in Khartoum, **the two sides used as battlefields not only the land and air space of Sudan but also the bodies and lives of the civilian population and the infrastructures on which civilians depend for their survival.** Despite the catastrophic level of suffering that the Sudanese have been subjected to for the past 18 months, there is no sign of the war slowing down, let alone ceasing. **With both sides receiving new supplies of arms and weapons in recent months and peace talks failing to secure any breakthrough, the war is on a path to further and bloodier escalation.**

The escalation of the war has entered a new phase as both the SAF and the RSF deepen campaigns of delegitimising each other and vow to keep on fighting. While the SAF launched a new offensive in Khartoum and other areas in September 2024, its leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, pledged to defeat the RSF. On his part, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo ('Hemedti'), in a televised address in which he accused Egypt of direct involvement, threatened to expand fighting and vowed not to negotiate with the SAF. This escalation is already unfolding in various fighting hotspots from Khartoum to Darfur and El Gezira. Further exacerbating the situation, the internationalisation of the war is also accelerating, with fears of regional countries directly supporting the warring parties growing. Burhan himself

1 PSC Communiqué 1218th PSC/HoSG/COMM.1218 (2024) 21 June 2024. https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-1218-hosg-communique-sudan-en.pdf

2 United Nations (UN) Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan 23 October 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session57/A-HRC-57-CRP-6-en.pdf

3 See Human Rights Watch https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/sudan Sudanese Human Rights Groups https://www.huqoug.org/report-of-violations-against-civilians-in-south-khartoum-al-kalakla/

4 Farouk Chothia, New wave of mass killings in Sudan alarm UN, (27 October 2024) available on https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8rll0xv8gko

has warned that the war could spill over into neighbouring countries.

In view of the foregoing, **the most profound and pressing policy issue for peace and security diplomacy in Sudan is how to advance the protection of civilians.** While there is growing appreciation of the need for protection of civilians,[5] there remain lack of policy clarity on how this can be achieved practically in a war where conditions are lacking for the use of conventional mechanisms for protection of civilians, such as notably the deployment of an international protection force. The purpose of this special research report, which draws on a series of meetings held with Sudanese civilians and experts in Kampala, New York and Addis Ababa during the past few months, is to provide analysis of various options for the protection of civilians in Sudan that can be pursued with urgency as the search for successful negotiation for a ceasefire and final political settlement continues.

II. THE SCALE AND NATURE OF THE NEED FOR AND CHALLENGES TO CIVILIAN PROTECTION IN SUDAN

The war in Sudan is exacting enormous costs to the civilian population in Sudan. By conservative estimates, the war has led to the killing of over 61,000,[6] while some put it to be as high as 150,000.[7] **If not by direct physical violence, Sudanese are losing their lives and enduring agonizing pain from diseases, some of them easily preventable, and starvation.** The breakdown of sanitation systems has contributed to the spread of cholera and other waterborne diseases, particularly impacting child mortality rates.[8] Sudan is the largest hunger crisis in the world. Parts of Sudan are under the grip of famine.[9] About 8.5 million people are in 'emergency'. Over eleven million Sudanese are forcibly displaced from their homes, with over three million of them seeking refuge in neighbouring states. As the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, Sudan is also home to 25 million people, nearly half of the country's population, that are in need of humanitarian assistance. Announcing that the war precipitated the largest child displacement in the world, a statement by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report dating back to the end of 2023 indicates that children are bearing the 'heaviest brunt of the violence' with a recorded 3 million children fleeing the violence in search of safety, food, shelter

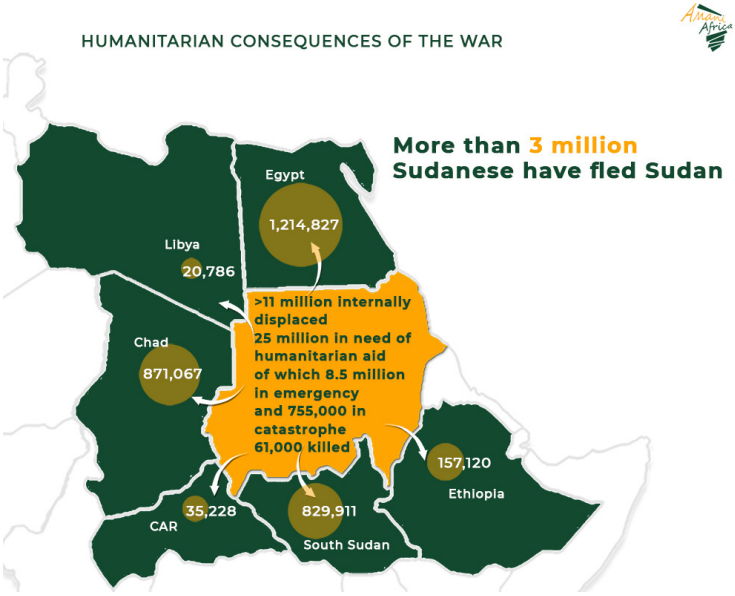
5 *As the analysis in this special research report shows, the PSC, the UN Security Council and the UN's Independent Fact Finding Mission for Sudan have all called for protection of civilians, with the PSC and the UNSC calling for options for achieving this end.*

6 *Civil War Increase Death Rate by 50%. (16 November, 2024) The Continent. https://www.thecontinent.org/_files/ugd/287178_b21c7604d4e84c219a86c54b57930058.pdf?index=true*

7 *Fatin Abbas, "Apocalypse Sudan," 4 August 2024. https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/sudanese-war-sudan-fatin-abbas-hunger-in-sudan-lux.XLkTNMqLZx1n42HLtFfh2X*

8 *Save the Children, "Major Cholera Outbreak as Heavy Rains Hit Camps in Sudan," Save the Children UK, 5 September 2024. https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/major-cholera-outbreak-as-heavy-rains-hit-camps-in-sudan#:~:text=Cholera%20spreads%20rapidly%20due%20to,for%20the%20past%20three%20months.*

9 *Alex de Waal, Famine hist Sudan as peace talks fall short yet again, (24 August 2024) https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c623levznxjo*



Sudanese analyst Kholood Khair aptly summed this dire situation, 'Sudan's catastrophe can now only be described in superlatives: it is the world's largest humanitarian catastrophe, is home to the world's largest displacement crisis, and the world's hunger crisis.'[11] State structures responsible for providing essential services have collapsed, with more than two dozen millions left in dire need of assistance, most particularly access to food, water, and healthcare.[12] With hospitals bombed, health care workers attacked, and critical supplies looted, the conflict has severely damaged the healthcare infrastructure. International humanitarian organisations face significant barriers in reaching those in need due to security concerns, obstruction by armed groups, and bureaucratic impediments. Next to the occupied Palestinina Territories, Sudan, with 25 aid workers killed by warring parties, recorded the second largest number of aid workers killed in the world in 2024.

Threats to the security of civilians in conflict situations has deep gender dimension. Sudan is not an exception to this. Indeed, **one of the disturbing features of the current war in Sudan is the widespread perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence targeting mostly but not exclusively women and girls.** The violations reported include rape, gang rape, attempted rape, trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced prostitution.[13] Some of these violations involve the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war.[14]

These conditions are not an indirect product of a war. As noted above, these are conditions brought about by the direct and deliberate actions of the warring parties. While **RSF has been reported to be engaging in some of the most atrocious violence against civilians and bears the most responsibility as its actions in El**

10 https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/almost-3-million-children-sudans-al-jazirah-state-risk-violence-escalates

11 Kholood Khair, "The World Once Tried To Stop a Genocide in Sudan. Now It Looks Away," Time, 4 September 2024 https://time.com/7017127/sudan-darfur-crisis/

12 OCHA Situation report https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/#:~:text=The%20International%20Organization%20for%20Migration,RSF)%20on%2015%20April%202023.

13 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Sudan: Horrific Violations and Abuses as Fighting Spreads – Report," 23 February 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/sudan-horrific-violations-and-abuses-fighting-spreads-report. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/sudan-horrific-violations-and-abuses-fighting-spreads-report

14 United Nations, "A War Waged on the Bodies of Women and Girls: Following Visit to Chad, UN Special Representative Ms. Pramila Patten Calls for the Immediate Cessation of Sexual Violence by Parties to the Conflict," 24 July 2024, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/a-war-waged-on-the-bodies-of-women-and-girls-following-visit-to-chad-un-special-representative-ms-pramila-patten-calls-for-the-immediate-cessation-of-sexual-violence-by-parties-to-the-conflict-in/

Gezira attest, both the SAF and RSF have been engaged in hostilities with little regard to international humanitarian law and international human rights law. With no one willing to check on the warring parties' repeated breach of the rules of war, an environment of impunity has emerged. This new pattern of impunity adds on existing layers of impunity from earlier conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur in which millions perished with no one held accountable. **The channelling of weapons and other forms of support to these parties is not only fuelling the fire of war in Sudan but also enabling the impunity that has become the hallmark of this war.**

The SAF, which claims to be the government of Sudan has failed to protect Sudanese and is itself actually engaging in the perpetration of some of the violence. Following the liquidation of UNAMID and the departure of its successor UNITAMS, there is no international presence to come to the rescue of civilians caught up in the cross fire of this war. Together with the above conditions, the result is **the emergence of an unprecedented vacuum of protection of civilians in Sudan**. The situation on the ground is made worse due to the national telecommunication blackout since February 2024, cutting millions of Sudanese from information critical to the safety of civilians. Making matters worse, apart from the impediments that the war puts on the provision of protection support, the parties deliberately obstruct the provision of assistance to Sudanese in need as part of their Weaponisation of humanitarian access. In a report aptly titled 'A war on people', Medicine San Frontiers described this situation as follows:

> Unremitting violence unleashed against the population fuels further suffering. The collapse of protection guarantees and mechanisms for those affected by the conflict has exposed millions of people in Sudan to abuse and violence. Despite commitments made in Jeddah in May 2023, parties to the conflict continue to disregard their obligation to protect civilian lives and infrastructure, with catastrophic effects on the health and protection of the population. Despite human rights organisations' efforts to warn against rights violations, the scale and nature of violence remains insufficiently addressed and documented, partly due to self-imposed and state-led access restrictions for international humanitarian organisations and limited media coverage.[15]

The recent escalation of the war is a further factor that militates against the protection of civilians. It is reported that airstrikes have spiked from 2 in August 2023 to 26 in August 2024.[16] Fighting expanded and escalated in Darfur and in El Gezira, with RSF forces reported to engage in acts of retaliation against civilians, perpetrating acts that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Hostilities continue in parts of Khartoum

15 MSF, A war on people: The human cost of conflict and violence in Sudan, (22 July 2024) available on https://www.msf.org/war-people-human-cost-conflict-and-violence-sudan

16 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Artillery Shelling and Airstrikes Surge in Sudan: September 2024," 16 September 2024, https://acleddata.com/2024/09/16/artillery-shelling-and-airstrikes-surge-in-sudan-september-2024/

and in North Darfur. The continuing deteriorating security conditions on the ground and the apparent conviction of each of the warring parties that it can achieve its ends through military means militates against the deployment of a conventional civilian protection force. There are no indications that these conditions will improve in the short term either.

On top of the foregoing and despite the urgent need for an effective mechanism of protection of civilians, consent of the parties is also lacking. Following the call of the UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission's for the deployment of an independent and impartial force with a mandate to safeguard civilians without delay,[17] Sudanese authorities expressed their rejection of any deployment of a protection force to Sudan. This is a case of those with the responsibility not only lacking the will and ability to protect and are themselves implicated in perpetrating violence against civilians but also of actively defying and obstructing relevant continental and international bodies from discharging their obligations of protection.

If history is anything to go by, it was following the signing of the Ndjamena humanitarian ceasefire that the AU deployed military observers that evolved into the AU Mission in Sudan, with a civilian protection mandate, which ran until it was folded into the joint UN-AU Mission to Darfur (UNAMID). No such humanitarian ceasefire is in the pipeline at the moment, nor are the warring parties amenable to consenting to the deployment of a protection of civilians' mission.

In terms of the regional and international environment as well, this is a time that is characterised by the lack of unified voice and consensus for collective action for the protection of civilians in Sudan. Despite the kind of institutional and normative progress that has been achieved since the Darfur war twenty years ago such as the establishment of the UN Office for the Prevention of Genocide, the kind of public mobilisation and expression of solidarity as well as political will that was in full display in the early 2000s are today in very short supply. International institutions with the responsibility for mobilising action are rendered ineffective by division and fast-expanding and intensifying geopolitical tussles among various powers.

At the continental level, the AU is unable and/or failing to fulfil its commitment to the principle of non-indifference. It is paralysed by the technical ineptness of those entrusted with the responsibility to mobilise support for this principle and the total dominance of national interest and its routine deployment by member states in their actions in AU processes at the expense of the collective interest encapsulated in various AU instruments. At the level of the UN, the confrontation between the permanent members and the use of veto power leaves little space for the Security Council to agree to the deployment of a protection force. Leaving aside the deployment of a protection force, what is worse is the failure of the AU and other international bodies including the UN to mount the minimum measures necessary to mitigate the suffering of Sudanese through facilitating

17 *UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Sudan: UN Fact-Finding Mission Outlines Extensive Human Rights Violations," 6 September 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/sudan-un-fact-finding-mission-outlines-extensive-human-rights-violations.*

humanitarian support, even for those seeking refuge in neighbouring countries such as Chad. Even by this minimalist threshold of mitigating suffering, the AU and international actors are performing dismally.

Despite the collapse of the conditions and institutional arrangements for the protection of civilians in Sudan, **there are local resources and actors providing a lifeline of support for Sudanese who otherwise would have been completely bereft of any source of survival**. While they are unable to meet the huge needs of Sudanese, local communities and responders such as, notably but not limited to, Sudan Emergency Response Rooms, have stepped up to fill in, albeit at small scale and under hugely constrained conditions, the vacuum left by collapse of national protection mechanisms and the missing international attention and support.[18]

Sudanese civic actors, the unsung heroes,[19] rose to the occasion, once again demonstrating their organisational agility to serve the public good even in the midst of fierce fighting between the SAF and the RSF through humanitarian action, local peace activism and peacemaking. They mobilised themselves to identify safe passages for enabling civilians caught in the crossfire to escape from harm's way into safer areas, thereby serving not only Sudanese civilians but also foreigners including members of the diplomatic community. They organised humanitarian assistance involving the provision of food and medical help for civilians cut off from access to basic necessities due to the heavy fighting. Leaders of local communities in parts of Sudan signed local peace agreements to avoid being drawn into the fighting. Similarly, various civic actors rejected the war and campaigned for keeping Sudanese people from taking side in the war that they never chose.[20] Apart from the creativity and organisation they showed in coordinating support and delivering humanitarian assistance, they have turned to innovative methods of sourcing finances for sustaining their life saving interventions such as crowdfunding and community donations, primarily from the diaspora, to address the urgent needs of civilians.[21]

III. THE IMPERATIVE FOR CIVILIAN PROTECTION: AN END AND A MEANS

Despite the hostile conditions and perhaps, because of them, protection of civilians has become the most pressing policy imperative in the current peace

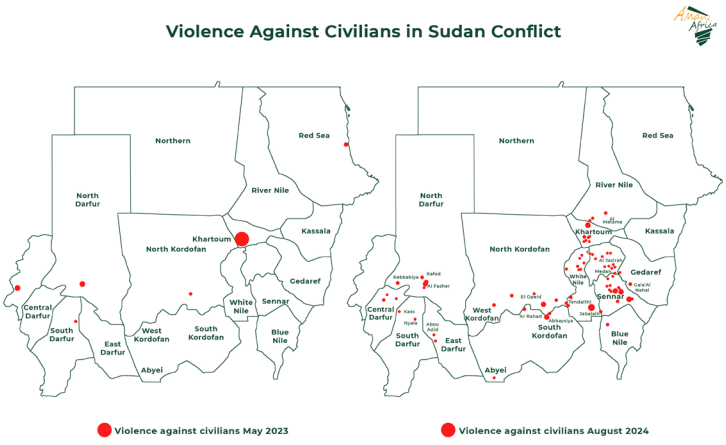
18 The New Humanitarian. "How Mutual Aid Networks Are Powering Sudan's Humanitarian Response." The New Humanitarian, 2 August 2023. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/08/02/how-mutual-aid-networks-are-powering-sudans-humanitarian-response.

19 Mohamed Hashim and Lucy Fleming, Sudan fighting: The unsung heroes keeping Khartoum residents alive, (21 April 2023) available on https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65344673

20 Amani Africa, "Why the Idea of the Establishment of a Civilian Transitional Authority in Sudan Should Be Taken Seriously and How It Can Be Realized." Ideas Indaba, 15 June 2023. https://amaniafrica-et.org/why-the-idea-of-the-establishment-of-a-civilian-transitional-authority-in-sudan-should-be-taken-seriously-and-how-it-can-be-realized/.

21 ACAPS. Humanitarian Response by Local, National Actors and the Diaspora: Sudan Analysis Hub. 23 January 2024, available on https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20240123_ACAPS_Sudan_analysis_hub_Humanitarian_response_by_local__national_actors_and_the_diaspora.pdf.

and security and humanitarian diplomacy on Sudan. First, it is an imperative on and of itself owing to the conditions described above and the prospect of further expansion of the civilian protection vacuum due to the escalation and expected prolongation of the war. It is true that these conditions imped the deployment of a conventional civilian protection mechanism. This does not mean that other options are completely lacking and should not be explored. In the light of the growing need for protection and as this war turned out to be a war against people, such options are a necessity as the map below illustrates, despite their limitations to give full satisfaction for protection of civilians in Sudan.



Source: ACLED

Map Comparing Violence Against Civilians in the Sudan War in 2023 and 2024

Second, protection of civilians may also be the other possible path for building the conditions against the continuation of the war and more ideally for peace. The continental and international investment in the warring parties for the past more than 18 months, as lacklustre and poorly coordinated as it might have been, did not yield the expected results. Instead of disincentivising them, the urging and the courting of the warring parties seem to have only further emboldened them as they view themselves as exclusively holding the key to bringing Sudan back together. At the same time, it is widely recognised that there is no prospect of either party able to militarily defeat the other. Sudan's wars are rarely amenable to outright victory. It is a country that has a history of inconclusive fighting leading to some form of truce or agreement for silencing the guns rather than for making peace. In this context, one way of breaking the stalemate between the warring parties and the firm hold they have on Sudan's security is to direct continental and international attention and efforts to Sudanese civilians with a primary focus, at this particular point, on protection.

The fighting is entering a new phase of escalation and is expected to make the humanitarian situation even more dire. The protection of civilians caught up in such war, which is pushing Sudan to state collapse and an accelerated process of internationalisation, is a matter that cannot wait the emergence of conditions that allow a conventional civilian protection mechanism. **Given the lack of an effective peace process, what the situation in Sudan demands is to bring the protection of civilians from being at the margins to the centre and front of the effort for halting the raging war in Sudan.**

This policy shift towards bringing the protection of civilians to the front and centre of peace and humanitarian diplomacy on Sudan offers the pathway for pursuing the decisions of the AU and the UN for finding ways of advancing the protection of civilians. It is to be recalled that the PSC during its 1213th session tasked the High-Level Panel on Sudan to work with the newly appointed AU Special

Envoy for the Prevention of Genocide, to develop proposals on how to address ongoing atrocities and to prevent further escalation in Sudan, as well as ***to develop a plan for the protection of civilians.*** Similarly, the UN Security Council through its Resolution 2736 tasked the Secretary-General of the UN to propose measures for the protection of civilians in Sudan. While it is not feasible to implement it in the short to the medium term, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan's call for the deployment of an independent and impartial force with a mandate to safeguard civilians also underscores the imperative for protection. While the options presented seek to respond to the challenges to civilian protection, they are not meant to reduce the protection question to addressing these immediate challenges only. The options thus cover both the intermediary and non-ideal avenues for civilian protection and the long-term and more ideal pathways for protection.

IV. SHORT-TERM AND URGENT PROTECTION OPTIONS

The short-term and urgent protection options are mainly meant to respond to the prevailing protection vacuum and the enormous challenges to implementing in the near-term effective protection mechanisms. These include those that do not provide any form of direct protection such as monitoring, documenting and reporting and those whose role is in mitigating human suffering and limiting fighting.

4.1. Monitoring, tracking, documenting and reporting

For the AU and the UN, the civilian protection mechanism that is readily available for speedy activation is monitoring, tracking, documenting and reporting. While such a mechanism would work effectively when it receives the cooperation of responsible actors including the warring parties, the absence of such cooperation does not completely impede it.

As with other options, the starting point for this should be local and national initiatives for documenting and reporting incidents and developments affecting civilians not just in terms of physical violence but also in terms of the conditions that threaten the basis for their survival. Following the outbreak of the war, various local actors have taken the mantle of documenting and reporting violations under hugely difficult conditions.[22] These include Emergency Lawyers, the Darfur Bar Association, the Youth Citizens Observers Network, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, and the Roots National Human Rights Monitoring Organisation .

Considering the absence of international presence on the ground in Sudan for purposes of monitoring and documenting, these local mechanisms serve as avenues for bringing to light the plight and suffering of the civilian population in Sudan. **The least that can be done in pursuit of the AU's principle of non-indifference and the obligation of the international community to advance protection is to amplify the work of these Sudanese local actors and affirm**

22 The New Humanitarian. "How Sudanese Rights Defenders Are Risking Their Lives to Document the War." The New Humanitarian, 11 March 2024. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2024/03/11/sudan-how-sudanese-rights-defenders-are-risking-their-lives-document-war.

their importance. Going further, there is a need for channeling support, including technical support for enhancing effective and factual documentation, to these local documentation and reporting activities. Those engaged in initiatives for advancing ceasefire, humanitarian access and peacemaking including from the AU and the UN should establish standing arrangements for communicating and consulting with the local Sudanese first responders and documenters of violence against and threats to civilians. Such a standing arrangement for engagement with local humanitarian and human rights actors is also critical to highlight regularly in their engagement with conflict parties the need to protect these groups from violence.

The burden of monitoring and reporting should not be left exclusively to local actors. The nature of the conflict and the civilian protection needs are such that they necessitate international mechanisms. As such, of necessity is the establishment and effective functioning of international monitoring, tracking, documentation and reporting mechanisms. In this respect, the decision of the AU Peace and Security Council tasking relevant AU entities to initiate monitoring and reporting is notable. However, the lack of effective activation of such monitoring and reporting mechanisms needs to be addressed.

- The AU should facilitate the effective functioning of the Special Envoy on the Prevention of Genocide and other atrocities. Considering his extensive experience, Adama Dieng can play a critical role in providing the AU a platform for documenting and reporting on violations and proposing policy options for enhancing civilian protection in Sudan. Despite being tasked under the 21 May 2024 PSC Statement, he is reportedly advised to avoid making statements as it is feared wrongly that such could undermine the work of those tasked with peacemaking. In this respect the publication of a statement by the Envoy for the first time on the situation on Sudan is a welcome development.[23] This should be elevated to closely tracking, monitoring and documenting on issues affecting civilians for purposes of reporting on the situation whenever the PSC meets on the situation on Sudan.

- Of equal importance is also the effective operationalisation of and full support for the UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan. The AU and its member states should support the work of this UN Fact-Finding Mission. As such, the support that Ghana and South Africa extended for the renewal of the mandate of the UN Fact-Finding Mission is very commendable.

4.2. Restoring critical infrastructure and use of technology for protection

Since February 2024, Sudan has been in a nationwide telecommunication blackout. Prior to this period, ordinary Sudanese tapped into the opportunities that telecom access presents for purposes of communicating with loved ones, sharing information on safe routes for moving from high-risk areas to low-risk areas

23 https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/statement-of-the-african-union-special-envoy-on-the-prevention-of-genocide-on-the-situation-in-sudan-29-october-2024

and mobilising support for addressing the protection needs of most affected people. They also expanded their reliance on mobile bank transfers both to pay for accessing basic necessities and to receive transfers of funds critical for accessing lifesaving necessities. It has also been through the instrumentality of communication networks that Sudanese were able to organise local responses to the humanitarian crisis ensuing from the outbreak of the war.

The telecommunication blackout has robbed Sudanese of an infrastructure critical to civilian protection. It has severely limited the ability of local humanitarian responders to undertake their lifesaving activities. It has cut millions of civilians at risk of violence the means of accessing information that is critical to enable them to take steps to keep themselves out of harm's way. The blackout is aggravating the already inadequate attention that is given to the war in Sudan. It is also undermining efforts for documenting and reporting on actions that threaten the well-being of civilians, accentuating the environment of impunity that has Characterised the conduct of the war almost from the very beginning.

In light of the foregoing, **restoration of the national telecommunication networks needs to be acted upon as part of the urgent measures for the protection of civilians in Sudan**.

The other option for advancing civilian protection involves **the use of satellite technology for keeping an eye and documenting incidents affecting civilians.** The use of satellite technology enables and complements other monitoring mechanisms. As rightly noted, 'satellite monitoring provides several advantages, including the ability to cover vast areas, operate continuously, and offer objective data.' By utilising satellite imagery and analytics, it is possible to identify areas of heightened activity, detect the movement of armed groups, and predict potential attacks of safe zones or civilians. This early warning system can facilitate proactive responses, including by alerting civilians at risk and by triggering engagement of international actors, on such impending attacks.

4.3. Support and enhance humanitarian access

Considering that more than half of the population of Sudan has become in need of humanitarian assistance and the war has rendered Sudan the largest internal displacement crisis in the world, access to humanitarian assistance is of paramount significance for the safety and wellbeing of Sudanese civilians. Here as well the starting point should be local initiatives. Of significance in this respect is the role of the Emergency Response Rooms. In view of the protracted challenges for international humanitarian assistance, one of the critical actions that the AU, the UN and others can adopt is Mobilisation of voluntary funding for **channeling resources for bolstering the role of the Emergency Response Rooms, in addition to according them diplomatic recognition.**

For the AU, UN and other international actors, **there is nothing more pressing than prioritising the focus on humanitarian access.** As such, the recent initiatives on the part of the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General and the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) need to be sustained and capitalised upon. As such,

there is a need to maintain open the border crossing from Chad to North Darfur via Adre crossing indefinitely beyond the initial three-month period and the commitment for allowing humanitarian delivery to Darfur and Kordofan through Dabbah. There is also **the additional need of opening further border crossings and use of air corridors for facilitating humanitarian access**. Not any less significant is the need for the removal of security and administrative impediments for humanitarian actors and civilians, thereby defeating the purpose of the opening of border crossings. Various consultations with Sudanese also revealed that access challenges also tend to be localaised. This underscores the importance of the on-the-ground presence of international humanitarian actors to negotiate access effectively. The other critical issue is addressing the gap between the humanitarian needs and the funding and resources available for meeting these needs. The activation of an Information Management and Analysis Cell (IMAC) by humanitarian agencies is also deemed essential.

Finally, **the significance of ending attacks on civilian infrastructure critical to humanitarian assistance such as hospitals and medical facilities and on local and international humanitarian actors should take Centre stage in the engagement of international actors with the waring parties.**

4.4. Supporting, sustaining and leveraging local ceasefires

Following the outbreak of the war and the grave peril it posed to civilians, one of the ways through which Sudanese local actors sought to mobilise and use non-state mechanisms for advancing the protection of civilians have been through local ceasefires negotiated between local actors and the warring parties. Local actors initiated these efforts at the onset of the war, such as the local truce brokered by regional actors in West Darfur during the early days of the conflict, which led to a degree of de-escalation in the region. [24] These localised peace processes have previously involved the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), as demonstrated in El Fasher, where local authorities and leaders facilitated a ceasefire agreement between the SAF and RSF.[25] **It was this local truce that helped fend off the potential expansion of the fighting into El Fashar until the RSF launched an offensive for capturing it in April 2024.**

The pursuit of such local ceasefires or truces should leverage on the role of non-state sources of public authority and influence such as community/religious leaders and local dispute settlement and peacemaking structures and processes. Not any less important are local armed groups and militias that exercise a level of autonomy from the main warring parties, despite at times having varying levels of alliance with the RSF or SAF.

Building on these initiatives undertaken by local actors, it is essential for the AU, the UN and the wider international community to engage not only with the

24 Dabanga Sudan. "Cautious Calm in West Darfur Capital After Tribal Truce." 04 May 2023 https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/cautious-calm-in-west-darfur-capital-after-tribal-truce.

25 Dabanga Sudan. "Darfur Update: Clashes in El Geneina, Extended Truce in El Fasher, and Popular Initiatives in Nyala." 25 April 2023 https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/darfur-update-clashes-in-el-geneina-extended-truce-in-el-fasher-and-popular-initiatives-in-nyala.

RSF and SAF but also with local armed groups and militias to identify pathways for localised ceasefires for the protection of civilians. Having a localised ceasefire agreement and peace process with armed groups with or without linkages to the two main warring parties can create some spaces for civilians to be spared from being direct attacks and to work on ways of supporting themselves.

Understandably, local ceasefires are as strong as the level of sustained engagement of critical local actors and the degree of influence that they are able to exert over warring parties to support and abide by such ceasefire measures. Experiences from the various areas where they were implemented also shows that they are vulnerable to changing local and regional dynamics as well as battle field trends. As such, their significance lies in the fact that in some circumstances other options are not immediately feasible and such local ceasefires may be all that is available.

The AU, the UN and other international actors can advance and support the role of local ceasefires as mechanisms for civilian protection through various ways. First, as part of their role in advancing various initiatives including for humanitarian access, ceasefire and peace talks, representatives of the AU, UN and other international actors should establish and utilise contacts with local actors for advancing local ceasefires. Second, they can, based on the needs communicated from local actors, avail supporting initiatives. Third, they can lend diplomatic support whereby as part of their engagement these interlocutors impress on warring parties and other Sudanese stakeholders at the very least not to frustrate the efforts of community actors. **They can also facilitate support through enabling the deployment of technical support through non-state mediation organisations and practitioners.** In a place such as El Fasher, these actors can call for a return back to the ceasefire that was in place until the outbreak of fighting in April or for the renegotiation of a new ceasefire.

V. MEDIUM-TERM AND INTERMEDIARY PROTECTION MEASURES

5.1. Establishment of Safe Zones

While safeguarding and supporting local ceasefire efforts is necessary, it is not adequate to meet the demand for civilian protection. As noted above, local ceasefires are also by their nature precarious. Thus, there is a need to go beyond safeguarding and supporting these local initiatives. Thus, the local peace processes and ceasefire agreements can be leveraged to advance another and stronger mechanism for civilian protection. This involves the establishment of safe zones or green zones that are off-limits to armed hostilities.[26] Accordingly, directly engaging with the leadership of various armed groups, whether they operate independently or in alliance with warring parties, focused engagement should be deployed to secure concession from the warring parties on identifying and designating certain areas, such as those with significant civilian populations, IDPs and key civilian infrastructure critical to

26 *European Council on Foreign Relations. "Time for Action: Envisioning a New Approach to Protect Civilians in Sudan." 24 September 2024, https://ecfr.eu/article/time-for-action-envisioning-a-new-approach-to-protect-civilians-in-sudan/*

the survival of civilians including areas with large farming activities or other economic activities or those key for facilitating humanitarian access such as regional airports, as safe zones. This entails disengagement of warring parties from hostilities in such zones and major civilian population centres.

Beyond refraining from any military operations in the identified areas, the designation of safe zones requires the prohibition of the presence of armed groups in such safe zones. Such limitation serves to avoid the targeting of civilians by armed groups within the areas as seen in the case of the IDP camp in North Darfur.[27]

It is not enough to designate safe zones if there are no mechanisms for securing commitments. Thus, an important consideration in this respect is the monitoring of these safe zones and the agreements facilitating their establishment incorporating a joint monitoring committee. This committee should draw on recognised local representatives, whether these are community or religious leaders and Sudan Emergency Repones Rooms, and representatives of warring parties. To enhance its effectiveness, it can be supervised/supported by a joint support cell jointly established by representatives of the AU, IGAD, LAS and the UN.

Similarly, **it is also not enough to designate safe zones without ensuring that such zones have access to basic necessities**. In this respect and both for proposes of enhancing access to social services and facilitating support for and rehabilitation of IDPs in such zones, the AU, UN and others should facilitate support for local actors, who operate as the first responders, including through cash transfer, logistics for the establishment of rehabilitation centres, market revival, and sustainable livelihood initiatives. Additionally, steps should be taken for guaranteeing humanitarian corridors that facilitate humanitarian access for civilians within the safe zone. A corollary of this is the commitment of all armed parties to refraining from not only attacks on humanitarian convoys but also from the imposition of impediments on such convoys. These are the issues to which those engaging in peace and humanitarian diplomacy should channel all their energies.

5.2. Internationally Monitored Humanitarian Corridors

The situation in Sudan requires civilian protection through humanitarian diplomacy that goes beyond the efforts for humanitarian access discussed above. In terms of enhanced and more secure access, there is a need for the establishment of **internationally monitored** humanitarian corridors.

A humanitarian truce or ceasefire elevates the current precarious humanitarian access efforts discussed earlier. Such truce/ceasefire involves negotiation of a ceasefire or truce for humanitarian purposes. In the context of the war in Darfur, such a ceasefire agreement was negotiated and signed in N'djamena, Chad in April 2004, which provided for a monitoring mechanism. To backstop and reinforce the humanitarian ceasefire, the PSC at its 10th session held on 25 May 2004, the day of PSC's official inauguration, adopted a decision authorising the

27 Sudan Tribune. "Sudan's Government Denies Reports of Political Detainees." 27 June 2024, https://sudantribune.com/article287498/

AU Commission Chairperson to take all necessary steps to ensure effective monitoring of the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement, in particular through the deployment of an AU observer mission and, if necessary, a Protection Force, to support the Ceasefire Commission established under the N'djamena ceasefire agreement. It was on this basis that the AU deployed its first PSC-mandated peace support operation in the form of the AU Mission to Sudan (AMIS).

As a pathway to a full-fledged ceasefire, the actors engaged in peacemaking in Sudan need to focus their efforts, in the interim and as urgent priority, on the establishment of humanitarian corridors that is internationally monitored and facilitated.

5.3. Bolstering of commitment of parties to minimum principles for civilian protection and humanitarian action

Those who assumed the role of peacemaking in Sudan need to focus on enhancing the disposition of the parties to commit to and abide by certain minimum principles. First, **it is important that those leading peacemaking initiatives, particularly on ceasefire and humanitarian access secure the recommitment of the SAF and RSF and their respective allies to the Jeddah commitment to the protection of civilians**. Second, they should focus on the establishment of structure in both SAF and RSF for monitoring and instituting corrective measures on acts of violence against civilians by their troops and allied forces.

In addition to the foregoing, the work of monitoring, documenting and reporting threats to civilian protection needs to be further bolstered. This would entail creating conditions for enabling regional and international monitors to have access to affected areas. It also necessitates that the UN Security Council, the Peace and Security Council and those leading the peacemaking effort in Sudan to systematically support and make use of the work of those engaged in monitoring and reporting for informing and constantly updating their policy decisions and peacemaking plans.

IV. MORE IDEAL AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTION MEASURES

As the report of the Secretary-General under Resolution 2736 (2024) on recommendations for the protection of civilians rightly pointed out, the 'most effective way of ensuring the comprehensive and sustained protection of civilians in Sudan is for this devastating conflict to end and for the parties to heed the Security Council's call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, leading to a sustainable resolution of the conflict through dialogue.'[28] While this report was legitimately criticised for lacking the level of ambition Sudanese called for and putting forth few concrete recommendations,[29] this statement of the report is incontrovertible.

---

28 UN, Recommendations for the protection of civilians in the Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/759 para 40.

29 Jenna Russo and Bitania Tadesse, With tens of millions of Sudanese at Risk, Does the UN Secretary-General's Report offer enough?, IPI Global Observatory (31 October 2024) available on https://theglobalobservatory.org/2024/10/with-tens-of-millions-of-sudanese-at-risk-does-the-un-secretary-generals-report-offer-enough/

6.1. Ceasefire

As noted above, the first area of focus for bringing a much-needed respite for civilians and creating the conditions for ending the violence and various other threats facing civilians in Sudan is the establishment of an effective humanitarian ceasefire. A humanitarian ceasefire in Sudan is essential for several reasons. First, it would provide a much-needed break from violence, enabling humanitarian organisations to safely reach those in need and deliver vital aid. Second, it could help prevent further escalation of the conflict and its potential spread to other regions of the country, thereby contributing to preventing the war from becoming protracted and hence too difficult to resolve. Third, a ceasefire would create a more favorable environment for political dialogue and negotiations between the warring parties. Fourth, it would facilitate the resumption of economic activity and the rebuilding of infrastructure, both of which are critical for Sudan's economic recovery and the well-being of its citizens. Finally, it would minimize the deepening entanglement of third parties in the conflict and the deepening of the internationalisation of the conflict, accelerating risks of regional and international destabilisation .

There is a need for bolstering and changing the approach to diplomatic efforts with a singular focus on achieving a humanitarian ceasefire. For this, **it is necessary that all those engaged in peace-making in Sudan operate on the basis of a shared strategy and plan with a dedicated and singular focus.** While the establishment of the ALPS group is a step in the right direction, the constitution of this group on its own is unlikely to change the course of events witnessed so far. It is of paramount importance that those making up the group negotiate and agree on a shared strategy and plan with clear commitments. Central to this is also the assumption of responsibility by each of the members of the ALPS group for specific deliverables on the basis of the shared strategy, including in using the leverage each has on the warring parties for limiting the suffering of civilians.

6.2. Deployment of a protection force

The deployment of protection force is seen as an imperative by Sudanese civilians. This can serve both as an end on itself as it avails physical protection presence on the ground and as a means considering that it can help to facilitate the creation of a civilian protection environment as part of the political settlement of the conflict in the country. Echoing the views of Sudanese civilians, Joice Banda, former president of Malawi recently wrote that deploying a protection force may not be easy, but 'the scale of Sudan's crisis, the intransigence of the warring parties, and the clear and consistent demands from Sudanese civilians and civil society demand that we take action.'[30] The UN Fact-Finding Mission also stated that 'Ways must be found to create conditions for the immediate deployment of an independent protection force.'[31]

30 *The East African. "The African Union Must Ensure Sudan's Civilians Are Protected." 22 October 2024, https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/opinion/columnists/african-union-must-ensure-sudan-civilians-are-protected-4799370.*

31 *OHCHR. "Sudan: UN Fact-Finding Mission Documents Large-Scale Sexual Violence." 29 October 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/10/sudan-un-fact-finding-mission-documents-large-scale-sexual-violence-and*

Although a peace support operation and troop deployment on the ground may not be feasible in the short term, **the AU can proactively prepare a plan for deployment of troops to support the implementation of a humanitarian ceasefire.** This plan should provide a clear framework for deployment, addressing key considerations such as defining the specific tasks and goals of the troop deployment; ensuring alignment with the commitments of the parties involved and the broader peace and security objectives in Sudan; establishing effective communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including Sudanese political and military actors, humanitarian organisations, and other regional actors regarding the nature of the deployment in Sudan; and identifying potential challenges and risks associated with the deployment, such as security threats, logistical difficulties, or resource constraints.

Beyond planning for a full-fledged protection force, consideration should be given to deployment of a mission for safeguarding and supporting humanitarian corridors and supporting the mechanism that is instituted for monitoring the safe zones that are identified earlier as key avenue for protection of civilians as part of the intermediary protection measures in the foregoing section.

6.3. Rehabilitation and reconstruction

The rehabilitation and reconstruction process in Sudan requires a comprehensive and multifaceted strategy to address the devastating impacts of the conflict. Key options include prioritising humanitarian assistance by providing immediate support to the 24 million civilians in need. This involves scaling up humanitarian aid efforts, granting access to independent and impartial organisations, and ensuring the safe and unimpeded delivery of assistance. It is also essential to protect IDP returnees and refugees during their return, avoiding exposure to landmines and targeted violence. Furthermore, there should be an equitable distribution of resources in areas affected by armed conflict, along with substantial technical and financial support for local responders who have been providing essential services since the onset of the war. The provision of psycho-social, medical and livelihood support for victims of violence needs to be prioritised. In this respect, action should be taken to implement the recommendation of the UN Fact-Finding Mission for the urgent establishment of a 'dedicated victim's support and reparations office.'[32]

Regarding reconstruction, it is of paramount importance that those with expertise start undertaking assessment of the reconstruction and rebuilding needs and priorities of Sudan. Based on such assessment, consideration should be given on developing plan for short-medium- and long-term reconstruction interventions in Sudan. Investing in rebuilding critical infrastructure destroyed during the war is crucial for economic recovery and social development, with a particular focus on infrastructure for social services including health, education, livelihood support, justice and rule of law. Attention should also be given to rebuilding critical physical infrastructure that were destroyed during the war including rebuilding roads, bridges, airports and other communication infrastructures.

32 *Ibid.*

6.4. Political settlement

Ultimately, violence against and threats to civilians arising from the ongoing war would find final resolution only through a comprehensive political settlement. One of the features of the current diplomatic environment on Sudan is the proliferation of forums for peacemaking. As such, peacemaking diplomacy in Sudan is currently characterised by competition and fragmentation. This has made forum shopping possible. Additionally, it has deprived peacemakers of the possibility of achieving any progress.

As part of advancing the protection of civilians, which is critical to saving Sudan from collapse, there is a need for course correction of the current peacemaking diplomacy in Sudan. First, there is a need for developing a shared mediation and peacemaking strategy in which the role of various actors is organised and activated complementarily and in a way that mutually reinforces respective leverage and comparative advantages. Second, the various initiatives are integrated into a common mediation arrangement wherein various actors take lead specific process of the mediation but with participation of all others. Any peace process in Sudan for permanent political settlement needs to be informed by the lessons from the various peace processes in Sudan that did not lead to comprehensive political settlement and have eventually failed. The lessons that should inform the development and implementation of a comprehensive mediation strategy need to include the failure to center the interest of Sudanese civilians and the lack of accountability for violations that created the environment of impunity which constitutes one of the factors that facilitated the eruption of the current war and the direct targeting of civilians.

Africa_amani
www.amaniafrica-et.org

MEDIA AND RESEARCH SERVICES

ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African union.

We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training, strategic communications, technical advisory services, and convening and facilitation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Amani Africa acknowledges with appreciation the contributions from Ireland, Norway, Open Society Foundations, Finland and Switzerland towards the publication of this special research report and for their support to our work in general.

ADDRESS

On the Corner of Equatorial Guinea St. and ECA Road, Zequala Complex,
7th Floor, Addis Ababa
Tel: +251118678809
Mobile: +251944723204 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

©2024, Amani Africa Media and Research Services
Copyright in this volume as a whole is vested in Amani Africa and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission in writing of Amani Africa.