

Update on women, peace and security in Sudan May 23rd 2022¹

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security discussed the situation in Sudan in December 2020 ([S/2020/1319](#)). This update summarizes relevant developments since then.

Developments in the Security Council

The Security Council has adopted **four resolutions** on Sudan since the last meeting of the IEG. In **December 2020**, resolution 2559 terminated UNAMID's mandate, encouraged the signatories of the peace agreement to ensure the full, effective, and meaningful participation of women in its implementation and urged the government of Sudan to provide legal protection to vulnerable communities, including women. In **February 2021**, resolution 2562 extended the mandate of the panel of experts of the sanctions regime for one year and did not address gender issues or other thematic matters. In **June 2021**, resolution 2579 extended the mandate of UNITAMS for one year and included extensive language on women, peace and security, as excerpted below (see Annex). Finally, in **February 2022**, resolution 2620 extended for another year the mandate of the panel of experts and once again did not address gender issues in the short text. The reports of the panel of experts, however, have included detailed sections on sexual and gender-based violence. In addition, the Security Council adopted a **presidential statement in August 2021** marking the completion of the UNAMID withdrawal and encouraging further steps to promote and protect women's rights and the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in all social, political and economic aspects of life.

Both the Secretary-General's periodic reports to the Security Council and the oral statements by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Volker Perthes, have included significant information, analysis, and advocacy on women, peace and security. For example, in May 2020, the Secretary-General presented the **benchmarks** that will be used to track UNITAMS' progress, and approximately one-quarter of the benchmarks and its accompanying indicators can be considered gender-related.

Two Sudanese women from civil society were invited to brief the Security Council during this period. In March 2021, **Ms. Kholood Khair** said that transitions live and die by the space that diverse civil society actors -from women's groups to research centers to organizations fighting for justice- are able to carve out at national and subnational levels. She also warned UNITAMS to learn the lessons of UNMIS and UNAMID when navigating the enduring power imbalance between the armed and civilian components of the government, resist co-optation by various political interests, and enable national civil society to lead on crucial state-building exercised like constitution-making or elections, rather than relegating them to a support role. In September 2021, only a few weeks before the coup, **Ms. Hala Alkarib** provided a bleak picture of the current situation, which was disputed by the representative of the government. Her full statement can be re-visited [here](#). She noted that women had been shut out from participating meaningfully in every step of the transition, that their calls to end sexual violence and enable equal access to resources, education, and employment, had been ignored, and that perpetrators remained in positions of power.

¹ This background note, including the recommendations at the end of this document, is prepared by UN Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, in consultation with other UN entities.

Women's participation in decision-making and public life

Before the coup in October 2021, **women's organizations and activists campaigned tirelessly** for the overdue establishment of a Women and Gender Equality Commission and the Transitional Legislative Council, which the Constitutional Declaration had stipulated should include at least 40 percent of seats filled by women. Women activists also brought attention to the under-representation of women in the governing bodies. For example, only one woman was appointed to the Council Partners of the Transitional Period, formed in December 2020. Women's groups had been meeting with the President and producing lists of suitable female candidates for ministerial posts, but the cabinet announced in February 2021 comprised 26 new ministers and only four women, although one of them was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Women continued to organize vigils and protests against gender-based violence, petitioned for changes in legislation, including on harassment, rape, early marriage, freedom of movement, or equal inheritance rights, and criticized the proposed reservations to articles 2 on eliminating discrimination, article 16 on family and marriage life, and article 29 (1) on arbitration of disputes that the Council of Ministers included in its recommendations to the Joint Council to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

In 2021, UNITAMS facilitated the **next round of the Juba peace talks** and committed to ensuring women's participation in the next round of the Juba peace talks, with the support of UN Women and UNDP. This included the engagement of 30 women's rights leaders conducting advocacy in the margins of the talks and the inclusion of a rotational five-woman team of technical observers to the talks, in addition to dedicated workshops on technical aspects of the talks, such as ceasefire monitoring or security arrangements.

The government had developed a **National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security** (2020-2022), and decreed in June 2021 the establishment of a high-level committee on resolution 1325, composed of line ministry representatives and women's groups. The government had also identified the empowerment of women as one of the five priorities of its programme of work and was reportedly working on amending its legislation on child marriage, trafficking, and family matters, and enacting new legislation to combat violence against women. For example, the law establishing the **Transitional Justice Commission**, adopted in April 2021, stipulated that 4 out of 11 commissioners would be women and included provisions for reparations to victims of gross human rights violations, including sexual violence, and the government adopted a national action plan against trafficking in persons in August 2021.

After the military coup in October, many civilian leaders were arrested, together with the Prime Minister. On the day of the coup, a female student dormitory near the military headquarters in Khartoum was raided, and many students were beaten. More than 120 women and two girls have been arbitrary arrested and detained since the coup, including prominent woman activists. All were released. UN plans on women, peace and security, ongoing consultations on the legislation needed to establish the Gender Commission called for in the peace agreement, and the process of reforming existing laws and enacting other laws to combat discrimination against women and girls, had to be abruptly suspended.

After the Prime Minister was released and signed a **power-sharing agreement** with the military on 21 November, many civil society organizations, including women's groups, expressed their rejection of this agreement. Women continued to play a visible and prominent role in the activism of professional unions and neighborhood resistance committees, despite a crackdown on demonstrations and protests that resulted in hundreds of detentions and casualties in the weeks following the coup. The protests against the coup and military involvement in politics have continued, and so has the excessive use of force against protesters. There have been **targeted arrests of women's rights activists**. For example, Ms. Amira Osman was arrested at her home by security forces on 22 January, held incommunicado, and released two weeks later.

Women are very active in **neighborhood resistance committees**, which are locally autonomous and often organize demonstrations, rallies, marches, hand out information to local residents, monitor incidents of repression, engage with the media, or support the families of killed or detained pro-democracy protesters. Although women are still relatively under-represented in the leadership of these committees, they are often in charge of sub-committees, and their presence in these committees has grown since 2019.

After the resignation of the Prime Minister in January, the UN facilitated **consultations** aimed at mapping out a new political process for Sudan, involving more than 800 participants from the military, the political parties, the armed movements, civil society, the business community, resistance committees, the diaspora, and others, and one third of participants were women. One of the elements of consensus from the consultations was the need for at least 40 percent representation of women in transitional institutions and the establishment of mechanisms to advance women's rights. The UN is now working with the African Union and IGAD in its support to the political process. Elections and a transition to civilian rule are planned for July 2023.

Conflict-related sexual violence

As compiled in the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/272), **the UN documented 61 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan in 2021**, affecting 30 women, 29 girls, and 2 boys. Among the cases, 76 per cent were attributed to elements of the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW), the Sudan Liberation Army/Peace and Development (SLA/PD), which is a splinter group of SLA/AW, armed nomads, and unknown armed men. The Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces were also involved. The persistence of armed clashes between armed groups and government forces and intercommunal violence in Darfur continued to be reported, and survivors cannot seek immediate medical or psychosocial support owing to the widespread violence in the area. Cases of sexual violence were reported during **another wave of violence at the end of 2021 and in March 2022** in Jabel Moon and Serba, **West Darfur**, but the United Nations has not been able to verify these incidents due to insecurity in the area. The United Nations received allegations of at least five alleged incidents of sexual violence involving 18 displaced women and girls in West Darfur from January to April 2022 and is following up with other reported cases of sexual violence during an attack against the town of Kerenik, West Darfur, in April. Increased violence in areas of Darfur and lack of State capacity to fill the gap left by the departure of UNAMID continues to expose the serious gaps in protection of women and girls, while insecurity has also posed serious obstacles to verifying cases and providing support to victims.

Both the ICC prosecutor and the panel of experts of the sanctions committee have sounded the alarm about **continued sexual violence in Darfur**, especially when women and girls conduct livelihood activities, during intercommunal clashes, and as “punishment” by warring factions to local communities accused of siding with their enemies, including targeting the wives of rival commanders. IDPs are especially at risk and the number of IDPs in Darfur increased eight-fold between 2020 and 2021. The implementation of the **national plan for the protection of civilians** has been delayed and the joint security-keeping force for Darfur has yet to be deployed. The reports of the panel of experts document specific incidents of sexual violence, none of them resulting in convictions. In one case where three soldiers were indeed prosecuted for raping a 16-year-old girl at an IDP camp in El Geneina, the trial stopped when all prosecution personnel were removed from the locality. The United Nations documented cases where parents of survivors refused to report cases of rape as a result of coercion by security agents to settle cases of rape out of court, including by marrying child survivors to the perpetrators or paying a fee to the survivor's parents. Access to life-saving services, including case management, clinical management of rape, psychosocial support, safe spaces, and legal aid, were unavailable in 75 per cent of localities in conflict-affected states.

Seventeen years after the Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the **ICC**, there has been no tangible accountability or justice. However, the first-ever trial stemming from a Security Council referral

began in April 2022, after 31 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity (including rape) were confirmed in last July against a senior leader of the Janjaweed militia. The ICC’s Prosecutor has been able to travel to Sudan after the military takeover, and the new authorities have given him assurances that the ICC’s work can continue. The Darfur Agreement between the Transitional Government of Sudan and Darfur Parties to Peace within the Juba Peace Agreement stipulates that the Parties “acknowledge their preparedness for full and unlimited cooperation with the ICC concerning persons for whom arrest warrants have been issued.”²

Following the **military coup in October**, mass protests erupted across the country, with numerous protesters killed and injured. On **19 December**, serious allegations of rape and gang rape against women, girls and men by elements of the security forces were reported. Most of the incidents reported occurred close to the Republican Palace, where protesters attempted a sit-in that was violently dispersed by the security forces. 24 cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the context of the protests were documented, including 15 cases of rape. While four survivors filed judicial complaints and sought immediate medical assistance, others opted not to, owing to stigma and the fear of reprisals. The patterns of sexual violence reported in the context of the protests suggests that it was used to punish women for their role in the protests and intimidate them and others to stay away from future protests. This trend has also been manifested in the reported ill-treatment of and threats against many women by members of the joint security forces during and after arrests. The heightened insecurity after the coup also affected women and girls not participating in demonstrations, including women relying on the informal economy such as tea sellers, as well as displaced and non-Sudanese women. Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, issued a statement calling for the immediate and complete cessation of sexual violence, for the authorities to ensure survivors’ access to medical, legal and psychosocial support and for the immediate launch of an independent and thorough investigation. In a joint statement, the United States and the European Union, joined by the UK, Norway, Switzerland, and Canada, condemned the use of sexual violence and also called for an independent investigation into the allegations.

On 29 December 2021, following instructions of Lt. General Al-Burhan, the Attorney-General announced the creation of an **investigation committee** composed of eight prosecutors, including four women, and headed by a senior prosecutor, to investigate the allegations of rape during the 19 December demonstrations. However, this committee has not been operationalized and was reportedly merged with another committee set up to investigate all human rights violations and “criminal acts” since 25 October 2021. The authorities reported that the Office of the Public Prosecutor has “verified” two cases of rape during protests.³ No information of arrest of perpetrators has been reported. In the meantime, in March 2022, **the committee investigating the mass violence that took place on 3 June 2019** in Khartoum, including allegations of sexual violence against dozens of women, announced that it had **suspended its work after security forces took over the committee’s offices**.

On 7 April 2022, the **General Director of the government’s Unit for Combatting Violence Against Women**, Dr. Sulaima Ishaq Khalifa, reported that a 19-year old woman was gang-raped by security forces. On 7 April, the Director was summoned by the Office of the Prosecutor of Crimes against the State and informed that she was being investigated based on article 47 of the Sudanese Criminal Procedure Act for “crimes against the state,” and asked about information shared with the UN. The Working Group on Sexual Violence, comprising the UN, local civil society partners, and this government’s unit, meet regularly to

² Paragraph 24, “International Criminal Court”, Chapter 3: Justice, Accountability, and Reconciliation Protocol, under Title 2. Darfur Agreement between the Transitional Government of Sudan and Darfur Parties to Peace, *Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan between the Transitional Government of Sudan and the Parties to Peace Process*, 3 October 2020.

³ Paragraph 7; letter dated 22 March 2022 from the Chargé d’affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, 28 March 2022 (S/2022/256).

coordinate on issues relating to sexual violence. The deployment of **women protection advisors** was called for in the resolution setting out the mandate of UNITAMS, but this has not happened yet.

The **culture of silence** due to stigma and shame and lack of trust in the justice system continues to hinder reporting of cases of sexual violence by survivors, whether in Darfur or in Khartoum. They also face constraints in accessing timely medical treatment and documentation, psychosocial support, and free legal aid, posing severe constraints on both civil society's work, which have been offering life-saving support to survivors with limited resources, and on lawyers who have undertaken work in a pro-bono basis while themselves facing threat of arrest and harassment by the authorities.

Other humanitarian issues affecting Sudanese women and girls

14.3 million Sudanese are expected to need humanitarian assistance across Sudan in 2022, and 8.4 million of them (**almost 60 percent**) **are women and girls**. The humanitarian crisis is made worse by the protracted economic crisis, characterized by high inflation and food prices, the effects of the pandemic, the spillover effects from neighboring conflicts, such as in South Sudan and Ethiopia, and natural disasters, including the worst floods in more than three decades. Sudan hosts more than one million refugees, most of them from South Sudan, and **52 percent of refugee households are headed by women**.

In general, female-headed households were **12 percent likelier to be food insecure**. The overall number of people in need of nutrition support has increased by 8.8 percent since 2021, and 23 percent of them are pregnant and lactating women in need of life-saving treatment. 50 percent of people reported that it takes more than 50 minutes to fetch water, exposing them to security risks, especially for women and girls.

Only 17 percent of Sudan's population has access to basic emergency obstetric care, as many trained and qualified paramedics leave the country in search of better income opportunities. In 2021, only 13.4 percent of women delivered newborns in health facilities. About 40 percent of home deliveries were not attended by a qualified healthcare person.

The pandemic affected women's employment and livelihoods disproportionately. Before the pandemic, women were **more than twice as likely to be unemployed**, compared to men, and only 3 percent of firms in Sudan had a woman as a top manager. Most women work in agriculture and the informal sector, and women working as daily-wage earners suffered the most.

The impact of COVID-19 and the deteriorating economic situation resulted in **increased levels of domestic violence and forced marriage**. **Female genital mutilation** also increased during school closures. Sudan already had one of the highest prevalence in harmful practices in the world: 60.2 percent of girls aged 20-24 were first married or in union before the age of 18, and 87 percent of women aged 15-49 have been subjected to female genital mutilation.

There are **2.9 million people in need for gender-based violence prevention and response in 2022**, especially in localities prone to conflict and natural disasters and hosting refugees. According to a 2021 nation-wide qualitative assessment, physical and sexual violence are prevalent both inside and outside the home, and intimate partner violence is not considered a crime, so most women do not report or seek legal redress. 43.6 percent of women and girls avoid areas in their current location because they feel unsafe. Among refugees and IDPs, gender-based violence risks were aggravated by inadequate lighting in camps and settlements, lack of gender-segregated latrines, and long distance to water or firewood collection points. Encampment policies and movement restrictions often compel many refugees and asylum-seekers to resort to smugglers to facilitate their travel, which often exposes them to trafficking and gender-based violence. According to a service mapping conducted by the GBV sub-cluster in May 2021, specialized services such as clinical management of rape, psychosocial support, legal aid, safe houses, case management, and referral

mechanisms, are still unavailable in more than 80 percent of localities. There are also few localities with functioning community-based networks and women centers offering help to survivors. Sudan does not yet have the GBV Information Management System in place, with limited use in selected locations in refugee settings.

Recommendations

When renewing the mandate of UNITAMS, the Security Council should retain the relevant language on women, peace and security in resolution 2579 (2021), with special attention to OP 3 and OP 12 (see annex). In addition, the Security Council should consider the following language:

- Urge the authorities to respect the commitments made to Sudanese women in the Juba Peace Agreement and the Constitutional Declaration and ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation in the prompt transition to civilian rule in Sudan.
- Call on the United Nations, the African Union, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa to prioritize women's participation in the political process and any future rounds of peace negotiations.
- Urge the authorities to resume adequate and independent investigations into the massacres and rapes committed in June 2019 against peaceful protesters, accelerate the investigations into sexual violence cases reported since 25 October 2021, and ensure that these are conducted independently and impartially, without further stigmatizing survivors.
- Strongly condemn any killings, use of excessive force, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence against peaceful protesters and civil society organizations, including women peacebuilders and those who protect and promote human rights, call on the authorities to take measures to prevent these acts and ensure the effective protection of civic space against threats and reprisals, and request the Mission to report to the Security Council on this issue.
- Urge the authorities to fulfil their responsibility to protect civilians and speed up implementation of the security arrangements in the Juba Peace Agreement and the National Action Plan for the Protection of Civilians, ensure women's meaningful participation in decisions about this plan, and recognize the importance of the role of Darfur Women's Protection Networks and other civil society initiatives.
- Demand the authorities ensure that no amnesty is granted for conflict-related sexual violence, urge that perpetrators are held accountable and removed from positions of power or effectively vetted, including the security sector and other public offices, and call for full implementation of the Framework of Cooperation to address conflict-related sexual violence, with support from the United Nations.

In addition, Security Council Member and the IEG co-chairs could:

- Advocate for increased budgetary allocations to reinforce the gender expertise in the Mission and urge for the deployment of women protection advisors, as called for in multiple resolutions.
- Provide political and financial support to the women's civil society organizations in Sudan and services to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence.

ANNEX: Relevant excerpts of resolution 2579 (June 2021) extending the mandate of UNITAMS for one year.

Stressing the need for the Government of Sudan to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights, including conflict related sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence (...),

Stressing the primary responsibility of the Government of Sudan to address the longstanding drivers of instability and inequality in Sudan, and to engage with other stakeholders, including civil society, women (...),

Recognizing the important role that women played in the peaceful political transition in Sudan, welcoming the steps taken to increase the role of women in public life, government institutions and decision-making processes, further welcoming the decision of the Cabinet of the Government of Sudan to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), encouraging completion of all milestones in the roadmap for implementing the new law criminalising female genital mutilation (FGM), further encouraging the Government of Sudan's to implement swiftly and fully the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, calling upon the Government of Sudan to take further steps to promote and protect women's rights and full, equal and meaningful participation in all social, political, economic aspects of life, including by repealing all laws that discriminate against women and girls, and by meeting the 40% quota for women's participation in the Transitional Legislative Council, recognizing the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and calling upon on the Government of Sudan to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in, implementation of the JPA and the negotiation and implementation of future peace agreements, conflict prevention and decision-making and reform processes related to governance, peace and security,

OP 3. Decides that UNITAMS, as part of an integrated and unified United Nations structure, shall, in full accordance with the principles of national ownership, continue to have the following strategic objectives: Support the implementation of the human rights, equality, accountability and rule of law provisions of the Constitutional Document, in particular those provisions that guarantee women's rights (...); Provide good offices and support to ongoing and future peace negotiations between the Government of Sudan and Sudanese armed groups, including supporting the meaningful participation of civil society, women (...); Provide scalable support to the implementation of the JPA, and including for acts of sexual and gender-based violence (...) and taking into account the different needs, experiences, and safety of female and male ex-combatants, including children; (...) Assist, advise and support the Government of Sudan to establish a secure and stable environment within which the JPA(...), supporting the Government of Sudan in implementing the National Plan for Civilian Protection ([S/2020/429](#)) and developing measurable benchmarks, (...) and through deploying mobile monitoring teams, facilitating local crisis mediation, early warning mechanisms, including Women Protection networks (...); Support the strengthening of the respect, promotion and protection of human rights, in particular in conflict affected areas, including by supporting protection for women and for children from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and other violations and abuses, through monitoring and reporting of violations of international humanitarian law and international refugee law and violations and abuses of human rights, urgent implementation of the Framework of Cooperation between the United Nations and the Government of Sudan on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), support to the development and implementation of action plans and a national prevention plan on violations and abuses against children, through women and child protection advisers and supporting the provision of medical, psychosocial, legal and socioeconomic services to all survivors of sexual violence;

OP 4. Further decides that, in line with its strategic objectives and support to the Government of Sudan's national priorities, UNITAMS should prioritise support to the following areas during this mandate period: (...) Inclusive implementation of the power sharing provisions of the JPA, including through facilitating the participation of civil society, women,

OP 12. Requests that UNITAMS integrates gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and assists the Government of Sudan in ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of peace and political processes, and in all social and economic aspects of life, and reaffirms the importance of gender expertise, including the deployment of gender and women protection advisors, gender analysis, including the collection and use of sex- and age-disaggregated data, and capacity-strengthening in executing the mission mandate

in a gender-responsive manner, and requests the Secretary-General to include gender analysis in the reports requested in paragraph 19 of this resolution;

OP 15. Welcomes the commitment of the Secretary-General to enforce strictly his zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), requests the Secretary-General to continue to implement a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, further requests the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to ensure full compliance of all UNITAMS personnel with this policy and approach, stresses the need to prevent such exploitation and abuse and to improve how these allegations are addressed in line with resolution [2272 \(2016\)](#), urges all member states who contribute uniformed personnel to take appropriate preventative action, including vetting of all personnel, pre-deployment and in-mission awareness training, and ensure full accountability in cases of such conduct involving their personnel, including timely investigations and holding perpetrators to account and further requests the Secretary-General to keep the Council fully informed about the mission's progress in this regard.