

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 3 June 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ireland and Mexico, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note on the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in the Sudan (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Annex to the letter dated 3 June 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the Sudan held on 23 May 2022

On 23 May 2022, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held a meeting on the situation in the Sudan. The group was briefed by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Sudan, Khardiata Lo N'Diaye, who was accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked several questions about the participation of women in the political talks being facilitated by the United Nations and regional organizations, whether through their own stand-alone group or as members of the other delegations. They also asked about sexual violence, including in the context of both the intercommunal clashes in Darfur and the crackdown on protests against the military authorities. Several questions from Council members were focused on the engagement of UNITAMS with the authorities and civil society in the current political climate, and whether the Mission had the mandate and resources it needed to fulfil its commitments to advancing gender equality. There were questions in that regard about the Mission's capacity to do more than document acts of sexual violence and about barriers to the deployment of women protection advisers. Other Council members asked about the role of regional organizations and their level of commitment to women and peace and security, the implementation of the national action plan on civilian protection, what could be done in the short term to mitigate the rising violence in Darfur and the linkages between women's development needs, in terms of education, health care and livelihood, and their participation in peacebuilding and political processes. One Council member, noting that the Government had taken several steps to advance gender equality since the conclusion of the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan and the issuance of the Constitutional Declaration, asked about the extent of the Mission's assistance to the authorities, including in response to requests for capacity-building initiatives.

Main points raised in the meeting

As the international community continues to support Sudanese stakeholders to reach a political settlement and return to a civilian-led transition, it is crucial that the forthcoming resolution on the Sudan continue to signal strong support for the integration of gender equality as central to the mandate of UNITAMS.

The country is now facing multiple and intersecting crises – political, security-related and economic – that have derailed the transition, affected women in distinct and often disproportionate ways and made it even less likely that the aspirations that made Sudanese women take to the streets three years ago will be realized.

New patterns of violence have emerged in the aftermath of the military coup, compounding the gender-based violence that was already pervasive throughout the Sudan and takes multiple forms – early marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, harassment and sexual violence – in a context of impunity and continued insecurity. The increased militarization in the country, the proliferation of small arms, the continued activities of armed non-State actors and the excessive use of force against mostly peaceful protestors, including the use of rape as an instrument of repression and political intimidation, have created an environment of fear and intimidation for women’s rights advocates.

In addition, increased crime and ongoing intercommunal clashes in Darfur have resulted in displacement, further exposing women and girls to sexual violence. Darfuri women continue to warn that, while the national political crisis is unfolding and has taken centre stage, the security and institutional vacuum in Darfur has had devastating humanitarian consequences and continues to take a toll on the lives of women.

Because the majority of women work in agriculture and the informal sector, the growing humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by climate change, has had a disproportionate impact on them.

Over a five-week period in January and February 2022, UNITAMS held consultations with a broad range of Sudanese stakeholders on a way out of the crisis. Over 100 women from all regions of the Sudan, including young women and women with disabilities, met with the leadership of UNITAMS to participate in such discussions. Across the board, those women’s groups expressed their fear of violence, detention and the reversal of the women’s rights gains that were made during the revolution and are enshrined in the Constitutional Declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement; and called for international support. They perceived the incidences of violence against women as part of a pattern of violence aimed at deterring women’s active presence and participation in public life, in particular their participation in demonstrations. They also pointed to the appointments of officials of the former regime to national, regional and local government positions as a key indicator that the country’s policies on women’s rights would regress.

Human rights defenders and civil society activists, in particular those who monitor and report on sexual violence, are increasingly under pressure and subject to intimidation. The United Nations is working with partners such as Front Line Defenders to mitigate those risks.

In spite of the heightened risks faced by protestors, women were among the first to take to the streets to protest against the coup in the early hours of 25 October 2021, and they continue to be on the front lines of the street movement. While women continue to be active in all areas of public life, including civil society, resistance committees, political parties and armed movements, few enjoy formal senior decision-making positions. Political parties and armed movements have not regularly brought women in significant numbers when meeting with the Tripartite Mechanism, which is comprised of UNITAMS, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which launched indirect intra-Sudanese talks on 12 May 2022 to address key issues relating to returning the country to a consensual and legitimate constitutional order. For that reason, the envoys of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development have called upon all stakeholders to ensure that women comprise at least 40 per cent of their delegations, in line with national commitments under the Constitutional Declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement.

In addition to calling for women's participation in the delegations, the United Nations gender team has supported a process led by Sudanese women to form a stand-alone women's rights group to participate in the political process. The Group is comprised of 22 women from all regions of the Sudan, who have a background in gender equality, experience working on women's empowerment at the local level and technical expertise relevant to the political process. The Women's Rights Group was established after weeks of consultations with gender experts, academics and women's groups on the selection criteria and mechanism. Sudanese women nominated candidates, and an all-female panel of Sudanese academic experts chose the women based on the agreed criteria. The members of the Group are not affiliated with particular political groups and will continue to engage with female members of political parties, the signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement and civil society on priorities of the women's rights agenda. The Group has already engaged with the envoys of the Tripartite Mechanism.

Following disturbing allegations of sexual violence during protests in 2021, the United Nations established a working group on sexual violence with membership including the Unit to Combat Violence against Women and Children of the Ministry of Labour and Social Development and local civil society partners. The working group continues to monitor cases of sexual violence and provide guidance on strengthening measures to meet the support needs of survivors.

In his latest report on conflict-related sexual violence, the Secretary-General documented 61 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2021, affecting 30 women, 29 girls and 2 boys. There continue to be reports of such violence during clashes between armed groups and security forces and in situations of intercommunal violence in various areas of Darfur, including, most recently, in El Geneina. The resulting widespread insecurity has severely limited access for humanitarian organizations and human rights monitors.

Accountability for sexual violence continues to be elusive in the Sudan, where there is limited political will or national capacity to investigate and adjudicate gender-based crimes. For example, a United Nations workshop that would bring together prosecutors from across the country to help them to prioritize sexual violence crimes and receive advice on prosecutorial strategies has been put on hold, pending approval from the Government. The implementation of the framework agreement on cooperation signed by the Government of the Sudan and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict was stalled due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The United Nations has documented cases where security agents coerced the parents of survivors into settling cases of rape out of court, including by marrying child survivors to the perpetrators or paying a fee to the survivor's parents. Of 29 reported incidents of sexual violence against children documented in the annual report of the Secretary-General, only 6 resulted in the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators. The ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the adoption of a law to combat violence against women, remain pending.

The number of people in need of gender-based violence services has risen, from 2.3 million in 2021 to 2.9 million in 2022. Of those, 1.8 million are internally displaced persons, refugees or returnees, which places a huge burden on humanitarian actors, while the protection cluster remains one of the least funded of the humanitarian response plan. The situation is further complicated by the fact that 70 per cent of gender-based violence services are provided by public facilities, and donors are reluctant to work with the military authorities. Approximately 80 per cent of localities lack access to clinical rape-management services.

Recommendations

The recommendations below were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

When renewing the mandate of UNITAMS, the Security Council should retain the relevant language on women and peace and security in its resolution [2579 \(2021\)](#), with special attention to paragraphs 3 and 12. In addition, the Security Council should consider including the following language:

Urges the authorities to respect the commitments made to Sudanese women in the Juba Peace Agreement and the Constitutional Declaration and ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in the prompt transition to civilian rule in the Sudan;

Calls upon the United Nations, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to prioritize women's participation in the political process and any future peace negotiations;

Urges the authorities to resume adequate and independent investigations into the massacres and rapes committed against peaceful protesters in June 2019, accelerate the investigations into cases of sexual violence reported since 25 October 2021, and ensure that all investigations are conducted independently and impartially, without further stigmatizing survivors;

Strongly condemns 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; calls upon the authorities to take measures to prevent such acts and ensure that civic space is effectively protected against threats and reprisals; and requests the Mission to report to the Security Council on this matter;

Urges the authorities to fulfil their responsibility to protect civilians, accelerate the implementation of the security arrangements set out in the Juba Peace Agreement and the national action plan for the protection of civilians, ensure women's meaningful participation in decisions relating to the plan and recognize the important role of the Darfur women's protection networks and other civil society initiatives;

Demands that the authorities do not grant any amnesties for conflict-related sexual violence and that they swiftly investigate all acts of sexual violence committed during protests; urges the authorities to hold perpetrators accountable and remove them from positions of power, and to vet candidates for positions of power effectively, including in the security sector and other public offices; and calls for the full implementation of the framework agreement to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence, with support from the United Nations.

In addition, members of the Security Council and the Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group could:

(a) Advocate increased budgetary allocations to reinforce the Mission's gender expertise and urge the deployment of women protection advisers, as called for in multiple resolutions;

¹ These recommendations are suggestions made by United Nations participants in the meeting, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, or in the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group in advance of the meeting. They are not recommendations of the Informal Expert Group as a whole or of members of the Security Council.

(b) Provide political and financial support to women's civil society organizations in the Sudan, and multisectoral assistance for survivors of sexual violence;

(c) Advocate the deployment of the Joint Security-Keeping Force in Darfur and ensure that the Force prioritizes the protection of women and girls.

The Co-Chairs thanked the participants and encouraged the members of the Security Council to follow up on the important issues raised.
