

April 30, 2023

Chairman Robert Menendez
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member James Risch
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
423 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Risch,

We write with deep concern over the situation unfolding in Sudan. We commend your leadership on Sudan thus far; we appreciate your statements in support of the Sudanese people and your efforts to hold the Administration accountable for its Sudan policy. With the lives of so many now at risk we urge you to use the powers at the disposal of Congress to help the people of Sudan.

On 25 October, 2021, Sudan's military leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the leader of the Rapid Support Forces, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, took control of the government, bringing an end to the first transitional government established after the removal of former President Omar al-Bashir by a popular uprising in 2019. Negotiations to re-establish a transitional government culminated in the signing of the Framework Agreement (FA) on December 5, 2022. Phase two negotiations, which included security sector reform, increased tensions between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, breaking out into armed conflict on April 15. Over 450 civilian casualties have been reported thus far,¹ though the numbers are likely higher.

We urge you to act in your leadership roles to compel a stepped-up U.S. response to the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Sudan. Specifically, we urge Congress to:

- Hold emergency public hearings that compel the Biden administration to articulate its policy on Sudan and what steps it is taking to protect civilians and make sure all parties to the conflict adhere to international humanitarian law.
- Urgently dedicate additional funding to provide a robust humanitarian response in Sudan as well as in refugee camps in neighboring countries where resources were strained prior to the conflict.
- Press the administration to urgently scale up U.S. support for atrocity prevention and documentation efforts and release additional funding for Sudanese civil society to be able to carry out these efforts. Remind the Administration of its obligations under the Elie Wiesel Act.

1

https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan?_gl=1%2at6ti2x%2a_ga%2aMTYzNTUzNzU1Mi4xNjgyMjAxMTQ2%2a_ga_E60ZNx2F68%2aMTY4MjIwMTE0Ny4xLjAuMTY4MjIwMTE0Ny42MC4wLjA.

- Advance legislation that implements targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for war crimes, including the targeting of critical civilian infrastructure such as water sanitation plants and hospitals.
- Direct the Administration to create a senior Envoy who can engage in regional shuttle diplomacy with partners in the region.

In April 2019 the Sudanese military overthrew Omar al-Bashir after months of sustained protests organized and carried out by the Sudanese people. A transitional government that shared power between security forces and civilians was formed yet civilians continued to be attacked, with over 120 civilians killed between June 3 and June 18 2019.² Despite promises for accountability, no one has been held responsible for these deaths.

On October 25, 2021 the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) jointly removed the civilian Prime Minister from office, ending the first transitional government. A tripartite mechanism was established comprised of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), the African Union (AU), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to negotiate a new transitional agreement, culminating in the Framework Agreement signed on December 5, 2022 between the military and elements of the civilian political parties. Critically, the Agreement left decisions on security sector reform to a second phase to be negotiated in early 2023.

Simmering tensions between the two forces were brought to a head over security sector reform and a timeline for integrating the RSF into the SAF. On the morning of April 15, armed conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), an independent paramilitary force, erupted in Khartoum. Since then, hundreds of civilians have been killed, including some working for humanitarian organizations.

The conflict has quickly spread across Sudan making it difficult for civilians to seek safety. The healthcare system has collapsed, with 60% of Khartoum's hospitals closed.³ Countless civilians are trapped in their homes without access to food, water, medicine, or electricity.

The conflict has emerged on the 20-year anniversary of the atrocities committed in Darfur. Civilians there remain at the mercy of the same security forces who committed crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur and other parts of Sudan. Longstanding impunity has allowed those suspected of war crimes in Darfur to remain in leadership positions today, contributing to the current violence in Sudan.

The United States has a role to play in ensuring accountability for crimes committed. To start, once civilians are protected the United States must support civil society documentation efforts. Furthermore, it is vital that the US advocate for accountability over political expediency and ensure that individuals that have committed war crimes face justice.

² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/11/18/they-were-shouting-kill-them/sudans-violent-crackdown-protesters-khartoum>

³

https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20230427_acaps_thematic_report_update_on_the_humanitarian_situation_in_sudan_with_a_focus_on_the_impact_on_healthcare.pdf

*the signers have various mandates that may not cover the full scope of the recommendations

Sincerely,

Benjamin Barnaba, Executive Director, New Sudan Council of Churches

C4ADS

Center for Civilians in Conflict

Eileen Weiss, NY Coalition for Sudan

Eric Cohen, Co-founder Act for Sudan

Esther Sprague, Founder and Director, Sudan Unlimited

Open Society Foundation

Felicity Gray, Global Head of Policy and Advocacy, Nonviolent Peaceforce

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Human Rights Watch

Humanity United Action

Kate Hixon, Amnesty International USA

Lauren Fortgang, Director, Never Again Coalition

Maddy Crowther, Co-Executive Director, Waging Peace, London, United Kingdom

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Niemat Ahmadi, President, Darfur Women Action Group

Nonviolence International

Paul Carroll, Charity & Security Network

Peace Direct

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Refugees International

Regional Centre for Training and Development of Civil Society – Sudan

Samah Salman, President, US-Educated Sudanese Association (USES)

Savita Pawnday, Executive Director, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Sharon Silber, Ph.D., Co-founder, NY Jews Against Genocide & Member of Advisory Board, Society For Threatened Peoples

The International Civil Society Action Network

The Sentry

William Rosenfeld, Director, Massachusetts Coalition to Save Darfur
Win Without War

Cc: Senator Cory Booker

Senator Tim Scott