

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Hala Al-Karib to the UN Security Council 14 September 2021

Madam President, Excellencies,

My name is Hala Al-Karib and I am the Regional Director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA). SIHA is a feminist organization that advocates for the rights of grassroots women across Sudan, including in Darfur.

Sudan today stands on the verge of mounting crises. The removal of Omar al-Bashir's regime in 2019 revealed a rotten structure that must be urgently transformed. While there are frameworks for reform, slow implementation is contributing to ongoing violence, and impacting Sudan's already fragile economy, governance system and public institutions.

As was the case before the revolution, women are disproportionately impacted by the ongoing violence, deterioration of services and slow pace of reform. The economic recession and worst food crisis in Sudan's history are pushing families to desperation. This is especially true for women who are mostly confined to informal labor, where they also face violence. Women in conflict-affected areas such as Darfur, Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains and Kordofan suffer from ethnic marginalization and poverty due to the previous regime's discriminatory policies. Furthermore, they remain at risk of rape, displacement and death due to ongoing armed conflict. COVID-19 is worsening all these challenges for women, especially gender-based violence.

Despite women leading the revolution, we have been shut out from equally and meaningfully participating in every step of the transition. Our calls to end sexual violence, ensure just family laws, and enable equal access to resources, education and employment continue to be ignored. Instead, disrespect for women's rights has encouraged those who seek to violate them. Earlier this year, groups of men attacked women in the streets of Khartoum for 'lack of modesty'. Such occurrences have generated a real fear for safety, and are pushing women out of public life; they are also making an inclusive and democratic transformation in Sudan more difficult.

Madam President, this is Sudan today — where women wonder if they are better off than they were under al-Bashir's oppressive regime. I would like to highlight three areas for the Security Council that must be urgently addressed.

The first is the need to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership throughout the Transitional Government bodies, and in the ongoing peace processes. Despite the 40% quota demanded in the Constitutional Declaration, women are still fighting for representation. Only one woman sits on the Sovereign Council. Women serve as only four out of 26 ministers in the cabinet, and two out of 18 state governors. In addition, in Darfur and elsewhere, officials from the former regime dominate the local authorities and executive administrations, conveying little hope that reform is on the way. How can we take the Transitional Government's commitments seriously when women are so poorly represented politically, and perpetrators of violence remain in positions of authority?

Madam President, women continue to advocate for representation in the country's peace processes. Yet the modern history of Sudan is littered with peace agreements that have failed because they excluded women. We must learn from our past mistakes, or else risk making them again. Women must be given the space to speak to the impact of war on their communities and to share their vision for Sudan's future.

The second is the need to urgently reform the legal system to ensure protection for women's rights, including prevention of gender-based violence. This is critical to enable women to fully participate in public life.

The Transitional Government's efforts to enact legal reform have so far failed to adequately tackle systemic discrimination against women and girls in Sudan. For example, Sudan's Criminal Act and Personal Status Law both continue to protect perpetrators of violence against women and girls. This includes permitting child marriage

for girls as young as ten years old and empowering male guardians to control women's right to marriage, divorce, custody and citizenship.

Furthermore, women continue to be arrested for so-called morality transgressions, despite the repeal of Sudan's Public Order Law. The punishments are brutal, including flogging, imprisonment and in certain cases execution. Other inhumane forms of punishment and torture, such as amputation and crucifixion, are still practiced under Sudanese law. Women and girls who are poor, internally displaced, refugees, or live in areas of armed conflict are the most vulnerable to these punishments. Such laws and practices fly in the face of Sudan's international and regional obligations to uphold human rights law.

Thirdly, the Transitional Government of Sudan must ensure inclusive and gender-sensitive security sector reform is urgently operationalized.

Since the Transitional Government came into power, extrajudicial killings and rape of civilians have continued to occur in Darfur, as well as in Kassala and Port Sudan in the East. The uncontrolled presence of armed militia in civilian areas in Darfur and other parts of the country has led to an increase in sexual violence, which is perpetrated with impunity. Such concerning trends not only compromise Sudan's chances of achieving a peaceful transition, but risk the country slipping back into chaos.

I welcome the National Plan for the Protection of Civilians as a framework for mitigating the ongoing violence. However, I am concerned that only the political elite will be involved in its execution. UNITAMS must ensure that the design and implementation of the Plan's activities include women as leaders and active participants. UNITAMS must support the Transitional Government to work with existing platforms, such as the Darfur Women's Protection Networks and women's civil society organizations who have intimate knowledge of good practice interventions, grounded in decades of experience.

Critically, women's rights must be central to enacting any and all security sector and legal reforms if we are to achieve meaningful change. The Transitional Government plays an important role in this regard, and must set a precedent for the nation by calling for investigations into crimes and ensuring justice. This is particularly important in Darfur, where just last week a 17-year-old girl was gang raped by seven men. This also holds true for the Khartoum Massacre on June 3, 2019, where over 100 peaceful protesters were killed and at least 70 women protesters were raped.

Madam President, I would like to remind the Council that Sudan is currently under the control of a hybrid government of Sudanese civilians, politicians and military, whose mandate was given to them by millions of Sudanese people who took to the streets in 2019. The legitimacy this government holds will be erased if it fails to build the foundation needed for a new inclusive, democratically elected government in 2024.

In closing, I urge the UN Security Council, to:

- Call on all parties to fulfill their obligations and commitments under the Constitutional Declaration, the Juba Agreement for Peace and the National Plan for Protection of Civilians, and continue to use all available tools to ensure accountability and compliance.
- Call for the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of diverse women, youth and civil society, at all stages of peace and political processes.
- Demand the Transitional Government realize the 40 per cent quota for the Transitional Council in line with the Constitutional Declaration, and apply the quota to the broader government bodies, as well as the upcoming election laws.
- Call on the Transitional Government to fulfill the intention articulated by the Council of Ministers to ratify CEDAW, and ensure harmonization of domestic laws with the Convention without delay, in order to ensure protection and promotion of the full scope of women's rights in Sudan.
- Call for accountability for all violations of human rights, including gender-based violence, that occurred before, during, and after the revolution, for which there has been little to no progress.

Thank you, Madam President.