

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by Ms. Niemat Ahmadi
UN Security Council Open Debate on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
23 April 2024

President, Excellencies, civil society colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Security Council today on conflict-related sexual violence. My name is Niemat Ahmadi, and I am the president and founder of Darfur Women Action Group. As a survivor of the Darfur genocide, I founded this organization in 2009 to empower survivors, both in Sudan and in the diaspora, and to prevent future atrocities.

Today, I would like to recognize the resilience of the women of Sudan—their stories of unspeakable suffering are only surpassed by accounts of their courage and determination.

It has been more than one year since Sudan was engulfed in vicious violence. While the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are still occupying and looting civilian homes, using sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, as a tactic of war,¹ the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) are launching heavy artillery shelling, air strikes, and indiscriminate attacks mainly targeting civilian homes, markets, bridges, essential public services, and evacuation routes with no respect for human life.² The cycle of violence in Sudan exhibits a total disregard for international law, and may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.³

The conflict has so far killed between 10,000 to 15,000 people in El Geneina alone,⁴ left over 10 million displaced,⁵ and condemned 18 million—over one third of Sudan's population⁶—to starvation, with the UN warning that Sudan will soon become the "world's worst hunger crisis."⁷ These statistics are just the tip of the iceberg—the number of casualties is sadly underreported as it has been unsafe to collect data in the middle of the crisis. The conflict has ravaged Darfur, Khartoum, and the Kordofan states. The recent violent takeover of central Sudan and assault in El Fasher risk devastating consequences for civilians and could lead to deadly mass atrocities.⁸

The war has had devastating consequences for women. Thousands of women have been killed. Of the 25 million people⁹ facing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, women are particularly impacted.¹⁰ Women also comprise up to 70 percent of internally displaced people (IDPs).¹¹

Rape and other forms of gender-based violence are a defining feature of the current war in Sudan. In January, the UN Panel of Experts on Sudan reported widespread and escalating conflict-related sexual violence in Darfur, including kidnapping, rape, and sexual exploitation of women and girls.¹² The report underlined sexual violence committed by members of the RSF and allied militias in all areas under their control and the targeting of women due to their Masalit ethnicity. This report has only confirmed the horrific accounts of sexual violence¹³ we have been hearing about for months against women from the Masalit, Fur, and Zagawa tribes, particularly in IDP camps. Some women have been told by their attackers that they should be happy that now "they will have an Arab child". These atrocities, combined with incidents such as the recent massacre in Ardamata, West Darfur,¹⁴ indicate a clear pattern of ethnic targeting of the Masalit people and other African tribes.

Excellencies, I am haunted by the horrific reports of sexual violence that I hear every day. One that shattered my heart and shocked me to the core was that of Noura,¹⁵ who endured gang rape at only 12 years old, leaving her in critical condition. Her family, struggling to survive, had to make an impossible decision: either to seek treatment for her or to feed her youngest sibling. Hearing this, Noura looked up in tears, and told her mother she no longer

wanted to live. These are choices that no family should ever have to make, and no child should ever have to endure.

Noura's story is one of too many. Women and girls have been raped multiple times, sometimes in front of their fathers, husbands, and sons in an effort to break their will and destroy their dignity. These women and girls have no protection, no access to humanitarian or medical assistance, and nowhere to turn for help. Attacks on medical facilities,¹⁶ restrictions on communications¹⁷ and deliberate obstruction of humanitarian aid delivery by the warring parties¹⁸ are making it even more challenging for survivors to access life-saving services, including sexual and reproductive health services.¹⁹ We hear that there are less than a dozen obstetricians and gynecologists left working in Khartoum. Further, the fear of retaliation for speaking up has made it impossible for many survivors to come forward.²⁰

Yet despite these risks, grassroots and women-led organizations continue to be the lifeline for their people. They are helping their communities, documenting atrocities, and ensuring that the international community keeps its eyes on Sudan. It is indeed their bravery that draws the bold line between hope and despair.

But they cannot do it much longer without your help.

Excellencies, this Council must not remain silent as the inhuman acts I have just described continue with total impunity. It is worth noting that without the spread of weapons, the levels of sexual violence we are currently seeing in Sudan would never have occurred. As the Panel of Experts reported to you, the warring parties in Sudan and their external sponsors have continued to violate the Security Council's arms embargo on Darfur.²¹ And as Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo told you on Friday, this is illegal, immoral, and it must stop.²² Yet, the Security Council has thus far failed to explicitly condemn these violations,²³ or taken any action to stop the actors abusing it. Unless the Security Council calls out those who undermine the measures it has put in place, you are signaling to perpetrators that they can continue to violate international law without consequences. Ending impunity in Sudan for past and present crimes, including crimes against women, must be a priority for the Security Council if we are ever to achieve sustainable peace in Sudan.

I urge the Security Council to:

- Demand that all parties commit to an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, stop the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure, and enable full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access, in accordance with international humanitarian law.
- Demand that all parties immediately cease all acts of sexual and gender-based violence, and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Prioritize the creation of a new, well equipped and stronger UN presence on the ground for assuring civilian protection and humanitarian operations across Sudan and documenting violations of international law.
- Ensure that women's rights are central to all criminal accountability processes. Make violation of women's rights, and all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, an explicit criterion for imposing sanctions.
- Maintain and enforce the current arms embargo²⁴ in Darfur and expand it to the whole of Sudan and to all parties to the conflict.
- Demand and support the full, equal, safe and meaningful participation of Sudanese women in all de-escalation, peacebuilding, humanitarian and justice and accountability efforts, and all political processes regarding the future of Sudan.

Excellencies,

Two decades ago, when this Council first began to grapple with genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur, you did what was right. You mobilized humanitarian assistance, referred the situation to the International Criminal Court,²⁵ set up a peacekeeping mission to protect the vulnerable,²⁶ created a sanctions regime to designate and hold responsible those who violate international law,²⁷ and imposed an arms embargo

where it was needed.²⁸ Now, there is no UN mission left in the country,²⁹ no new individuals have been listed under the sanctions regime³⁰ and your arms embargo is both limited³¹ and being flouted with impunity. In this current context, we see little solidarity with the people of Sudan.

For more than 23 years, we have heard your promises to uphold women’s rights and to end conflict-related sexual violence. Regrettably these promises have yet to be realized. I reiterate today: all violations of women’s rights, regardless of perpetrator and wherever they occur, deserve your condemnation and warrant action and accountability. Be it in Gaza or in Israel, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Myanmar, in Afghanistan or the many other conflicts where women pay the price of war. The international community’s failure to act in my country, Sudan, and in all these other contexts should be a stain on our collective conscience. Only you have the power to change this. Please act now. Thank you.

¹ OHCHR, “Sudan: UN experts appalled by use of sexual violence as a tool of war,” 30 November 2023,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/sudan-un-experts-appalled-use-sexual-violence-tool-war>.

² 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>.

³ See Statement by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the renewed escalation of violence in Darfur, Sudan, 14 November 2023,

https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN_Special_Adviser_statement_Sudan_14_Nov_2023.pdf; see also Amnesty International, “‘Death came to our home’: War crimes and civilian suffering in Sudan” at 47-50, 3 August 2023,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr54/7037/2023/en/>; Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan, S/2024/65 ¶56, 15 January 2024,

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⁴ ACLED, “Sudan Situation Update: April 2024 - One Year of War in Sudan,” 14 April 2024,

<https://acleddata.com/2024/04/14/sudan-situation-update-april-2024-one-year-of-war-in-sudan/> and Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan.

⁵ IOM, “Dire Plight of More Than 10 Million Now Displaced by Conflicts in Sudan Must Not be Ignored,” 26 January 2024,

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⁶ World Food Programme, “Sudan Emergency,” accessed 18 April 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/sudan-emergency>; OCHA,

“OCHA warns Security Council Sudan will soon be the world’s worst hunger crisis,” 20 March 2024,

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⁷ UN News, “11 months into Sudan war, ‘world’s worst hunger crisis’ looms,” 6 March 2024,

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147287>.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Civilians at Risk as Large-Scale Fighting Looms in Darfur,” 18 April 2024,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/18/civilians-risk-large-scale-fighting-looms-darfur>.

⁹ OCHA, “Sudan: One Year of Conflict - Key Facts and Figures (15 April 2024),” 14 April 2024,

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-one-year-conflict-key-facts-and-figures-15-april-2024>.

¹⁰ OCHA, “Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024,” at 2, 20 December 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023>.

¹¹ UN Women, “Sudan Crisis: In-Depth Gender Assessment Report” at vii, February 2024,

https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/sudan_crisis_-_in_depth_gender_assessment_.pdf#page=9.

¹² Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan, S/2024/65 ¶65-68, 15 January 2024.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, “Darfur: Rapid Support Forces, Allied Militias Rape Dozens,” 17 August 2023,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/17/darfur-rapid-support-forces-allied-militias-rape-dozens>.

¹⁴ CNN, “‘We will not leave any black skin here’: Refugee describes alleged ethnic cleansing in El Geneina,” 16 November 2023,

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¹⁵ Names have been changed to protect identities.

¹⁶ WHO, Surveillance System for Attacks on Healthcare - Sudan,

<https://extranet.who.int/ssa/LeftMenu/PublicReportList.aspx?start=2023-04-15&end=2024-04-18&countryList=205&typeList=0>;

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¹⁷ Amnesty International, “Sudan: Internet shutdown threatens delivery of humanitarian and emergency services,” 8 March 2024,

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¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: Urgent Action Needed on Hunger Crisis,” 15 March 2024,

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¹⁹ UNFPA, “One Year of War in Sudan - April 12, 2024,” April 2024, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/one-year-war-sudan-april-12-2024>.

²⁰ Amnesty International, “‘Death came to our home’: War crimes and civilian suffering in Sudan” at 28, 3 August 2023,

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²¹ Final report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan, S/2024/65, 15 January 2024.

²² UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, “One year after the outbreak of conflict, Sudan's warring parties continue to ignore calls to cease hostilities, tells USG DiCarlo,” 19 April 2024, <https://dppa.un.org/en/mtg-sc-9611-usg-dicarlo-sudan-19-apr-2024>.

²³ Human Rights Watch, “UN Security Council Should Act Against Abusers in Sudan,” 6 February 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/06/un-security-council-should-act-against-abusers-sudan>; Security Council Meeting Record, S/PV.9581, 19 March 2024, <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15632.doc.htm>.

²⁴ Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1591>.

²⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005).

²⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 1769 (2007).

²⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1591 (2005).

²⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 1556 (2004).

²⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2715 (2023).

³⁰ UN Security Council Resolution 2676 (2023); Sanctions List Materials, 1591 Sanctions List, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1591/materials>.

³¹ Amnesty International, “Demand an arms embargo in Sudan,” accessed 18 April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/petition/demand-an-arms-embargo-in-sudan/>.