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To the attn. of:

Mr Josep Borell Fontelles

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President European External Action Service (EEAS)

8 May 2023

Dear High Representative Borrell,

EU AND MEMBER STATES MUST ACT FOR SUDAN'S CIVILIANS AT RISK

With increased fighting across Sudan and mounting violence against civilians left without assistance and protection, Amnesty International urges you to lead the European Union (EU) and its member states in a robust response to ongoing human rights and humanitarian law violations in the country.

On 15 April 2023, fighting erupted in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) after weeks of tensions between the SAF and the RSF over security force reform during negotiations for a new transitional government.

The parties to the conflict are blatantly violating international humanitarian law by using heavy and often indiscriminate weaponry including artillery, tanks and jet aircraft in densely populated areas in Khartoum. Civilians in the capital and in other locations including Darfur are bearing the brunt of the clashes, with millions trapped in their homes and humanitarian workers unable to deliver supplies to civilians affected by the conflict. Amnesty International continues to receive credible allegations of indiscriminate attacks and unlawful killings of civilians across Sudan. We are also receiving reports of attacks on medical and humanitarian facilities and sexual violence against women.

As of 2 May, the United Nations (UN) [reported](#) over 400 hundred people dead, including at least five aid workers. Humanitarian agencies warn that the health system in Sudan is on the brink of collapse, and there is an unfolding displacement crisis. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 1 May, almost 115,000 people had fled to neighbouring countries, mainly to Egypt and Chad. At the same time, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that at least 75,000 people have been internally displaced between 15 and 22 April, while Sudan already hosts 1.13 million refugees from other countries in the region. More displacement could take place as the conflict and its violence intensify.

There is a deepening humanitarian situation at the Sudan-Egypt border, with major delays in letting people through, as [reported](#) by UNHCR. The [media](#) also reported that people without visas are being denied entry. In addition, Amnesty International has been made aware of several cases in which people who were in the process of applying for visas at EU embassies before the crisis, could not get their travel documents back due to the hasty closure of offices. These

people are now stuck within Sudan without any papers to travel to safety and therefore need to have access to copies of documents and/or letters recognizing their situation so they can make their planned or emergency trips abroad, including to Europe.

Both the SAF and the RSF have a history of committing [serious international human rights and humanitarian law violations in Sudan](#), particularly in Darfur. Following the ouster of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and the [October 2021 coup](#), Sudanese security forces including the RSF and the SAF continued to commit crimes under international law and human rights violations, including [unlawfully killing](#) over a hundred protestors and injuring [thousands of others](#) since the 2021 coup. Sudanese security forces also regularly unlawfully [arrested and detained protestors](#).

This new conflict is unfolding at the same time as the 20-year anniversary of the Darfur conflict. Sudanese authorities have continually [failed to protect civilians](#) and to establish any form of accountability and justice for past and recent violations.

Against this background, over 90 Sudanese, African and international non-governmental organisations including Amnesty International [urged](#) states to address Sudan's human rights crisis by supporting the convening of a special emergency session of the UN Human Rights Council.

The EU and its member states must now redouble their engagement up to the highest level with their Sudanese counterparts, including the parties to the ongoing conflict, calling on them to:

- **Protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.** The parties to the conflict must immediately stop using explosive weapons with wide area effects in the vicinity of concentrations of civilians.
- **Ensure immediate, unrestricted and sustained access for humanitarian actors** to monitor and assess the needs of civilians and to deliver assistance to those impacted by the conflict. In parallel, they should ensure the safety and protection of civilians on the move to access assistance and protection.
- **Allow safe exit and passage for people fleeing Sudan** to seek safety and protection in other countries.

At the same time, the EU and its member states must ensure that all their engagement with the parties to the conflict prioritizes the respect of international humanitarian law and the protection of the human rights of civilians impacted by the conflict, in line with recent statements by the High Representative on [15 April](#) and [26 April](#):

- **Publicly call on the parties to the conflict to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure** and publicly denounce violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the conflict.
- **Lead and support efforts to convene a [special emergency session](#) of the UN Human Rights Council**, establishing an independent investigative and accountability mechanism addressing all alleged human rights violations and abuses in Sudan since the October 2021 coup, whose mandate would complement the work of the existing “designated Expert” on Sudan.
- **Step up cooperation with regional and international partners** to engage both parties to the conflict on human rights and humanitarian concerns resulting from the conflict, and issue joint calls for them to respect international humanitarian law and protect civilians.
- **Engage with states neighbouring Sudan to ensure that they keep their borders open** and that those fleeing the conflict are not rejected at the border and are protected against *refoulement* and have safe and timely access to asylum. Ensure that people fleeing Sudan have safe and prompt access to asylum.
- In parallel, **open new safe and regular pathways to European countries** to ensure that Sudanese nationals who wish to seek international protection can do so as quickly and safely as possible, and have unimpeded access

to their territory and asylum procedures. This should include suspending visa requirements, removing unnecessary documentation requirements for travel and providing people fleeing Sudan with emergency travel documents within Sudan or in neighbouring countries, including to those who had left their passport at embassies that are now shut down.

- **Halt returns of Sudanese nationals to Sudan** or any transfer to a third country where they may be at risk of being returned to Sudan.
- **Urgently review cooperation programmes aiming at the reinforcement of border management in third countries**, to address human rights violations that may have resulted from such collaboration, and to prevent future human rights violations.
- **Provide immediate support and humanitarian assistance** to those impacted by the conflict including the internally displaced and those seeking refuge in other countries.
- In line with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), **act to protect and promote the work of human rights defenders, activists and civil society still in Sudan** and at risk of attacks and violence. This should include concrete support and emergency travel documentation for those who need to leave Sudan for their safety. In parallel, pro-actively foster contact and ensure longer-term support to Sudanese HRDs in exile to be able to continue their important work.

We thank you in advance for your action for human rights in Sudan and for people seeking assistance and protection in this conflict.

Yours sincerely,

Eve Geddie



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