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To the attn. of:

Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles

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

Foreign Affairs Ministers of the European Union (EU) member states

8 April 2024

Dear High Representative Borrell,

Dear EU Foreign Ministers,

SUDAN: EU MUST STEP UP RESPONSE AT ONE-YEAR MARK OF CATASTROPHIC WAR

One year on from the start of the conflict in Sudan on 15 April 2023, and ahead of the 22 April Foreign Affairs Council, Amnesty International urges you to ensure the European Union (EU) and its member states step up action on continuing human rights violations, including war crimes, in the conflict in Sudan.

What began in April 2023 as a conflict between the rival Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has evolved into a catastrophic nationwide war pulling in [militia](#) and [international backers](#). Over [14,600 people](#) have been killed, including in deliberate and indiscriminate attacks. About [10.7 million people](#) have been displaced by the conflict, the largest internal displacement crisis globally. Some [14 million children](#) – half the country’s children – require humanitarian assistance. These ongoing violations are part of a long history of impunity in Sudan, with the lack of accountability for past crimes emerging as one of the root causes of renewed violence.

In August 2023, Amnesty International published a report, [‘Death Came To Our Home’: War Crimes and Civilian Suffering In Sudan](#), documenting mass civilian casualties in both deliberate and indiscriminate attacks, as well as sexual violence against women and girls, targeted attacks on civilian objects such as hospitals and churches, and extensive looting. Some of these very serious human rights violations amount to war crimes and demand an urgent international response.

More recently, Amnesty International [has documented](#) ethnically motivated attacks by the RSF and allied Arab militias in Ardamata, West Darfur, that killed and injured [hundreds](#) of civilians. Amnesty International also [documented](#) how the communication blackout in the country following all network and internet shutdown in early February 2024 has posed serious challenges to the coordination of emergency assistance and humanitarian services to millions of people caught up in the conflict.

In October 2023, the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) voted to establish a much-needed independent [International Fact-Finding Mission](#) on Sudan, one of the only concrete steps to address the country’s conflict. The mission has the mandate to preserve evidence and identify suspected perpetrators, opening pathways to justice for victims and survivors and - equally importantly – provide reporting that can reveal the magnitude of the human rights catastrophe unfolding in Sudan and galvanize momentum to resolve it. Yet six months later, and on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the conflict, the UN Fact-Finding Mission is still woefully underfunded, understaffed and therefore [unable to meaningfully fulfil its mandate](#).

Your recent [speech](#) in the European Parliament plenary on the threat of famine in Sudan underscored the catastrophic humanitarian situation, the need for safe access to humanitarian aid and the protection of civilians. Another recent [statement](#) on behalf of the EU cites the “dramatic escalation of violence and the irreparable cost to human life in Darfur and throughout the country, as well as violations of International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law”, including sexual and gender-based violence, mass violence, and attacks on civilian infrastructure. In response, the EU calls for “unrestricted, timely and safe humanitarian access across Sudan”, underlines the importance of “accountability for all perpetrators of crimes” and commits to “spare no effort with international partners on monitoring and documenting human rights’ violations and abuses.”

In this spirit, together with the wider international community, the EU and its member states must urgently take steps to protect civilians in Sudan, investigate relevant crimes, and ensure accountability for human rights violations taking place in the country:

Protect civilians in Sudan by:

- Engaging with the warring parties up to highest level to end all attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and ensure unhindered and immediate humanitarian access.
- Urging all warring parties to end internet blackouts that hinder the delivery of humanitarian and emergency services, impact on the safety and protection of civilians and obstruct crucial monitoring and reporting on ongoing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Calling for all countries to respect the UN Security Council's arms embargo regime on Darfur by refraining from transferring weapons and ammunition to the SAF, the RSF and other armed actors; and advocating in support of efforts at the UN Security Council to expand the arms embargo that applies to Darfur to the rest of Sudan.
- In line with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), protecting and promoting the work of human rights defenders, activists, journalists and civil society actors still in Sudan and at risk of attacks and violence. In parallel, the EU should pro-actively foster contact and ensure longer-term support to Sudanese HRDs in exile to be able to continue their important work.
- Championing Sudanese civil society and the inclusion of its views and concerns in any peace process in Sudan, in particular ensuring that any EU-hosted meeting with civil society is an inclusive, genuine and broad-based consultation and free from reprisals.
- Increasing emergency funding for the humanitarian response in Sudan and ensuring specific support for the protection, care, treatment and support mechanisms for survivors of sexual violence.
- Fully utilizing the opportunity of the humanitarian donor pledging conference in Paris on 15 April to reinforce humanitarian aid to the country and calling on all parties to the conflict to ensure unfettered, safe humanitarian access for all who need it.

Welcome and protect refugees by:

- Opening 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.
- Refraining from returning Sudanese nationals to Sudan or to any third country where they may be at risk of being returned to Sudan.
- Engaging with states neighbouring Sudan to ensure that they keep their borders open and that those fleeing the conflict are not rejected at the border, are protected against *refoulement* and have safe and timely access to asylum.
- Increasing emergency funding for the humanitarian response in refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

Champion efforts toward justice and accountability by:

- Ensuring that justice and accountability are a key pillar of EU and member state relations with Sudan and of any peace process supported by the EU and its member states.
- Ensuring the necessary resourcing and full political backing for the UN International Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan and keeping human rights in Sudan high on the agenda of the UN Human Rights Council and other UN bodies.
- Engaging with the African Union and African states to fully support the work of the UN International Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan, in line with the [resolution](#) of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights of 29 December 2023.
- Providing the International Criminal Court (ICC) with additional resources to investigate ongoing violations in the Darfur region, and in parallel giving full political backing for the ICC's work in this context.

Thank you in advance for your action for human rights in Sudan and of all those affected by the conflict in the country and the wider region.

Yours sincerely,

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