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*To the attn. of:*

**Mr Josep Borell Fontelles**

High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission

**Foreign Affairs Ministers of the EU member states**

11 April 2024

Dear High Representative Borrell,

Dear EU Foreign Ministers,

## **JOINT NGO LETTER: THE EU MUST URGENTLY ACT AT ONE YEAR OF CONFLICT IN SUDAN**

One year on from the start of the conflict in Sudan on 15 April 2023, and as the Foreign Affairs Council meets on Sudan on 22 April 2024, our organizations call on the European Union and its member states to take urgent, strategic and concrete steps to respond to the massive cost on civilians of the dramatic human rights and humanitarian crisis in the country and prevent further violations.

Since fighting broke out in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, both the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have repeatedly used heavy explosive weapons in densely populated areas of the capital and conducted indiscriminate attacks, resulting in numerous civilian casualties and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure including schools, hospitals, mosques and churches. Aid workers and humanitarian convoys have also been targeted by parties to the conflict.

From late April 2023, [West Darfur state](#) has been the site of some of the worst attacks on civilians and serious violations of international humanitarian law, some amounting to war crimes. Large-scale attacks by RSF forces and allied forces primarily [targeting](#) the ethnic Massalit population took place in multiple towns in the region.

The fighting and attacks on civilians have spread to other regions, including South Kordofan and Aj Jazirah State, prompting a dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation. United Nations (UN) experts, NGOs and civil society have [raised](#) concerns about the surge of sexual violence, primarily against women and children, including in [Khartoum](#) and Darfur. Survivors' access to urgent services was hampered by attacks on medical facilities and organizations providing care, exacerbated by deliberate obstruction of assistance and looting of aid by the warring parties. Sudan now has the highest rate of internal displacement in the world, with over 10.7 million people uprooted from their homes, including 9 million internally displaced, and over 20 million facing severe hunger, according to the UN.

In the midst of the conflict, human rights defenders (HRDs) and aid workers, including health care workers, have bravely continued their human rights and humanitarian work, including documenting and reporting on conflict-related human rights violations and violence and providing lifesaving assistance and services to affected and hard-to-reach populations. Human rights defenders have been targeted and subjected to kidnapping, detention, torture and sexual violence, with [at least eight HRDs killed](#) since the outbreak of this latest conflict. Many human rights defenders have experienced threats and intimidation and lost their work equipment such as computers in lootings, forcing them to flee Sudan. Humanitarian workers from both local and international NGOs have also suffered significant losses. As of 19 October 2023, 45 aid workers – mainly Sudanese – have been [detained or killed](#), according to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

In addition, the crucial work of independent media to inform the population is hampered as journalists are targeted and forced to flee. At the same time, the regular use of internet blackouts not only prevents communication at a personal and communal level, but also interferes with the ability of local and international humanitarian organizations to adequately respond to the growing humanitarian needs.

In July 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor [announced](#) that his office is probing recent atrocities in Sudan's Darfur region as part of its ongoing Darfur investigation, underscoring the gravity of current abuses. Despite the findings of its Panel of Experts on Sudan, the UN Security Council is still falling short of fulfilling its mandate to address and prevent future atrocities. A UN Fact Finding Mission [established](#) in October 2023 with support of EU members of the UN Human Rights Council

faces continued operational delays and under-staffing, undermining its critical role in documenting human rights violations.

As civilians across Sudan continue to bear the brunt of the fighting and warring parties continue to disregard the rules of international humanitarian law, our organizations urge the EU and its member states to respond to this conflict with renewed urgency:

- Engage with the warring parties and their regional backers to end all attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, end the deliberate obstruction of aid and allow unhindered, safe and immediate humanitarian access, cooperating with the UN, African Union (AU), the Troika (Norway, United Kingdom and the United States) and like-minded states to this end.
- Decide to issue Council Conclusions laying out the EU and member states' strategy to use all instruments available to deliver concretely on their commitments on human rights, humanitarian law and justice and accountability in Sudan and to make it clear to those responsible that they will be held accountable for the grave violations committed.
- Increase emergency funding for the humanitarian response in Sudan, including for local responders, and ensure specific support for the protection, care, treatment and support mechanisms for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Seize the opportunity of the humanitarian donor pledging conference in Paris on 15 April to reinforce humanitarian aid to the country with a view to fully funding the urgent humanitarian response in Sudan, and call on all parties to the conflict to ensure unfettered, safe humanitarian access for all who need it.
- Work in support of efforts at the UN Security Council to enforce its existing arms embargo that applies to Darfur, to take action in response to the UN Panel of Experts' recent report on arms embargo violations and to expand the arms embargo to the rest of Sudan, fulfilling the Council's mandate to protect civilians and monitor human rights and international human rights law violations.
- Ensure the necessary resourcing and full political backing for the UN International Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan, call on the African Union and African states to fully support its work, in line with the [resolution](#) of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights of 29 December 2023, and keep human rights in Sudan high on the agenda of the UN Human Rights Council and other UN bodies.
- Ensure that the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has adequate resources for its activities, including to investigate ongoing violations in the Darfur region, and in parallel give full political backing for the ICC's work.
- Ensure genuine, broad-based consultation with Sudanese human rights defenders and civil society organizations (including local humanitarian responders) – and the inclusion of their views and concerns in any peace process or other decision-making that affects them.
- Ensure there are safe and regular pathways, including out of Africa, for Sudanese displaced by the conflict and that nobody is forcibly returned to Sudan.
- In line with the EU Guidelines on HRDs, protect and promote 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.
- Urge all warring parties to restore communication services in all of Sudan, ending internet blackouts that violate Sudanese people's right to information, 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.

We thank you for your attention and remain available should you have any additional questions.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International  
Brot für die Welt  
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)  
Christian Solidarity Worldwide  
Finn Church Aid, Finland  
Free Press Unlimited  
Front Line Defenders  
Human Rights Watch  
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)  
International Service for Human Rights  
Protection International