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Protect civilians and respect international humanitarian law, says UN Special Adviser as she raises alarm on Sudan conflict

Statement by Alice Wairimu Nderitu, United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the conflict in Sudan

(New York, 13 June 2023) – The United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu strongly condemns the ongoing fighting in Sudan between Sudan’s military and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the blatant disregard for ceasefires which has caused, so far, the death of hundreds of people and injured thousands in Khartoum alone. The Special Adviser is particularly alarmed by the total disregard by the parties to the conflict of international humanitarian and human rights law.

“It is of the utmost importance that all parties to the conflict, including armed groups, lay down their weapons and cease their targeting of civilians immediately,” noted the Special Adviser.

The Special Adviser is also gravely concerned by the renewed fighting in Khartoum, particularly with the targeted missile attacks on the Al Azhari and Al Salama neighbourhoods on 11 June, in which 18 civilians were killed and many others injured – the third largest killing of civilians in a single day in one area. The dire humanitarian situation, including the lack of access for humanitarian assistance, which could have potentially catastrophic rippling effect across the country, is also to be taken extremely seriously.

In addition to human rights violations and abuses committed in Khartoum, the Special Adviser is alarmed by reports that the security vacuum and the protection gap in several states has been exploited by armed groups, including the Janjaweed and other rebel armed groups. These groups have allegedly been retaliating against ethnic communities on the basis of their ties to the main parties to the conflict, the Sudanese armed forces and the RSF. These attacks, if confirmed, could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In Darfur, hundreds have been killed and many more injured in reported clashes between members of different tribes, including looting and burning of houses as well as an attack on El Geneina’s hospital, in West Darfur. With thousands of civilians of all communities fleeing the conflict, reports also indicate that homes abandoned by Masalit communities have been occupied by Arab communities. The Special Adviser stressed that while tensions between ethnic communities, including ethnic Arabs and ethnic Masalit are not new in Darfur, they could not be used as a justification for reprisal.

“The violence in West Darfur is shocking. If it continues, it can develop into renewed campaigns of rape, murder, and ethnic cleansing amounting to atrocity crimes,” the Special Adviser warned.

Outbreaks of violence and tribal clashes have also been reported in other parts of the country, including in North and South Kordofan as well as in the Blue Nile states. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has already voiced her concern in a joint statement issued in November 2022 on hundreds of civilians killed in intercommunal clashes over land disputes among the Hausa, Funj and Berta ethnic communities of the Blue Nile state. In recent months, similar clashes have also been taking place in Kordofan states, involving the Misseriya and Nuba ethnic communities. The Special Adviser warns that if left unaddressed, this violence could engulf the entire country in a civil war, with high risks of atrocity crimes being committed.

In this context, the Special Adviser stresses that leaders of parties to the conflict, Sudan's military and the RSF, have a responsibility to protect civilians as well as respect international human rights and humanitarian law. She also calls for an urgent and consolidated ceasefire, and for accountability for human rights violations and abuses.

Twenty years ago, millions of people in Darfur were displaced and thousands killed in violence perpetrated by the Government of Sudan and the Janjaweed militia. The International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur defined these crimes as serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that might amount to crimes against humanity. Recalling her statement made in September 2022 supporting the ICC's efforts to hold accountable perpetrators of atrocity crimes in Darfur, the Special Adviser stated:

“When perpetrators of past atrocities are not held accountable for their action, we are doomed to see history repeat itself. We need to unequivocally support accountability processes as we witness the resumption of violence across Sudan, including in Darfur, Blue Nile, and North and South Kordofan states. Whilst the International Criminal Court continues its work in Darfur, perpetrators should know that their actions will not go unpunished. The world is watching. We urge human rights violations and abuses to be immediately investigated, and perpetrators to be brought to justice”, the Special Adviser added.

Commending the efforts by local civilian committees and authorities, regional governments, mayors and sheikhs for cessation of hostilities and reconciliation, the Special Adviser called on all the people of Sudan, including political, community and religious leaders, and representatives of civil society to contribute to preventing atrocity crimes and the incitement to violence that could lead to such crimes, in line with [the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent and Counter Incitement to Violence](#) and [the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#).

“We can and must do more, to save lives and prevent Sudan from collapsing and descending into horrific violence,” concluded the Special Adviser.

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