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Briefing by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu
Under-Secretary General / Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of
Genocide

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to join this enhanced interactive dialogue at the Human Rights Council on responding to the human rights and the humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan. This has been, and continues to remain, tremendously concerning from the perspective of my mandate.

As the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, I am mandated to raise early warning and make recommendations to the Secretary-General, and the United Nations Security Council, on potential situations that could result in genocide, and on actions to prevent or halt genocide.

I do not investigate, conduct human rights monitoring, or legally qualify situations – either ongoing or from the past – as genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. Instead, I assess whether there is risk of genocide occurring in a given situation, with the objective of preventing the commission of this crime, or of halting it when it is suspected to be already occurring.

With this mandate, I have relentlessly raised alarms on this situation, issuing nine statements since September 2022, on Khartoum, Darfur, Kordofan, Blue Nile and Gezira – grave violations and abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law. My statements have expressed concern, particularly, at the intercommunal and identity-based dimension of the violence. I have also briefed the United Nations Security Council on the situation on Sudan from the perspective of my mandate, in May this year.

Today, I need to reiterate this again: we see all the risks and indicators for the crime of genocide, with serious allegations that this crime has already been committed, in Sudan.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have now had more than 500 days into the war in Sudan. The fighting persists with no end in sight. Regrettably, the violence is only expanding.

From Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan to Gezira, Sennar and elsewhere, Sudanese civilians continue to face systematic and indiscriminate attacks, including by the main warring parties.

All parties to the conflict continue to fight without distinction, proportionality and precaution. The evident intent is to win, rather than to protect civilians.

Heavy weaponry has been used in densely populated areas. Airstrikes continue. Properties have been destroyed and looted. Civilians persist to be disproportionately impacted – they are killed, detained, tortured, and dispossessed of their homes and land. Disturbing videos and photographs of these violations and abuses are being posted on social media.

Violence against women and children, including conflict-related sexual violence, remains rampant, and used as a tool of terror.

According to the International Organization for Migration, over 10.7 million people are displaced within the country – with many displaced twice or more times.

In August, famine was declared in Zamzam camp near El Fasher, North Darfur. Many other areas in Darfur and beyond are assessed to be at high risk, with more than half of the population facing crisis levels of hunger.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the crime of genocide is defined as any of a series of acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.

The hate speech and ethnic-based attacks that unfolded in front of our eyes in Darfur, especially in West Darfur in 2023, suggested elements that are relevant to the considerations of whether the crime of genocide has been committed.

Deliberate and systematic attacks have been committed against the ethnic Masalit group especially by the RSF and allied militias.

Entire villages have been burnt.

Prominent community leaders have been killed.

Conditions of life have been deprived, including with medical and transportation facilities bombed.

Access to water and electricity has been deliberately limited.

Rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence have been persistently used as a weapon of war.

Age pyramid statistics in the Chadian refugee camps, which I visited last year, suggest that young men and boys have been particularly targeted.

Derogatory language, such as ‘blacks’ and ‘slaves,’ has been prevalently used as an element of incitement to violence, amplified through social media platforms. My Office has received reports of rampant hate speech and incitement of violence campaigns, with large-scale information operations glorifying the commission of violence, including against specific protected groups.

Leaders have called upon civilians to take up arms.

The attacks in and around North Darfur potentially suggest similar dynamics, with reports of indiscriminate violence, including sexual violence, shelling, looting, and razing of residential and commercial structures. Internally displaced persons camps, as well as medical facilities, have not been exempt from such attacks.

Civilians are impacted disproportionately. They include a large number of non-Arab communities, including the Zaghawa, the Fur, the Masalit and others. They also include Arab civilians, with reports of targeted attacks against them. As the fighting continues, the risks of reprisals and deepening ethnic cleavages are only escalating.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Impunity for serious violations of international human rights, of genocide and related crimes, or of their incitement, constitutes a risk factor for the commission of such crimes.

Twenty years ago, in Darfur, the same communities were targeted. They were targeted for who they were – ethnically and racially. The accountability for the past crimes in Darfur is still at large; and the absence of accountability managed to create fertile grounds for the current violence.

It is imperative that we urgently hold perpetrators accountable for the ongoing crimes in Darfur and beyond. This decades-long violence has shattered the social fabric, and it is time for decisive action. All avenues for protection and for accountability must be identified and supported.

For this, the work of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan remains crucial. Collecting and preserving evidence, as well as establishing the root causes of these grave violations, is essential for achieving justice.

Continued support for, and cooperation with, the Fact-Finding Mission is vital. Accountability can provide the countless victims and survivors with the sense of justice they deserve and lay a sustainable foundation for rebuilding their future in Sudan.

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to once again emphasize: All marks of the risk factors and indicators of genocide and related crimes are still present in the country, only aggravating as the fighting prolongs.

Against this backdrop, the international community, including UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan, Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, and key regional institutions like the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the League of Arab States, continue to persevere with their efforts to protect the Sudanese civilians and to create conducive environment for a peaceful and durable resolution of the conflict.

Just last month, the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) Group gathered in Switzerland, building upon the foundation of the Jeddah process that commenced last year. The talks facilitated the re-opening and expansion of critical humanitarian access routes and the receiving of commitments from the warring parties to improve the protection of civilians, among others.

The Human Rights Council's contribution to preventing genocide in the country remains ever more critical today for the country and for the ordinary Sudanese civilians. I encourage this Council's continued support to the Fact-Finding Mission and its engagements on the situation in Sudan.

I assure you of my continued and sustained support.

Thank you.