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Webinar: Exacerbating Humanitarian Crisis Due to Military Conflict in Sudan

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](https://www.aohr.org.uk)) has organised a successful webinar on the current human rights situation in Sudan, with a focus on the armed clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Hamdan 'Hemetti' Dagalo. The clashes, between the formerly allied groups, began in mid-April and have so far resulted in 100s of civilian deaths and many more injuries.

The [webinar](#) brought together a panel of Sudan experts from across the world.

Speaking first, Ernst Jan Hogendoorn, a former senior advisor at the U.S. Department of State, warned the audience that Sudan is now facing a major humanitarian crisis due to the fighting between the SAF and the RSF; the situation in urban areas, including Khartoum, is particularly bad, he added.

Hogendoorn presented three medium-term scenarios for the country. The ideal scenario is a ceasefire and transition to civilian government, but the more likely futures are either a 'Lebanon' or 'Darfur'-type disaster. The first would involve massive numbers of refugees, and the second would see Sudan splinter into various autonomous regions.

Diplomatic pressures on both sides may not be enough to get the parties to negotiate in good faith, said Mr. Hogendoorn. Actions such as freezing the bank accounts of the leaderships of both sides may be necessary, he said. The international community must come together and provide aid and support to those affected by the crisis, he added.

Speaking next, Anette Hoffmann, a senior research fellow at the Conflict Research Unit of Clingendael, also called on the international community to stop the ongoing violence in Sudan.



Hoffman noted that the SAF controls a large part of the country's economy, estimating that military-affiliated companies account for 80% of economic activity in Sudan. The RSF, backed by regional powers including Egypt and the UAE, also has business interests in transport, construction, agriculture, and real estate.

Hoffman called for targeted sanctions on these business networks, as well as pressure on regional sponsors like Egypt and the UAE to withdraw their support.

Hoffman also identified the importance of civilian participation in the shaping of the path towards peace and stability. "The situation in Sudan is complicated, but we cannot allow the complexities to prevent us from taking action", she said.

Speaking after Ms. Hoffman, Newcastle University Senior Lecturer in History, Dr Willow Berridge, criticized the continuing impunity of various actors in Sudan, which they enjoyed partly because of their shared business interests with groups and nations outside the country.

Berridge noted the history of the dominance of small cadres of military officers with social roots in the northern river area, and their exploitation of marginalised regions. Berridge added that the SAF, which is historically responsible for aggression against populations in the country's peripheries, is now bombing heavily populated areas in Khartoum. This represents a profound change, Berridge added.

Justin Lynch, a researcher and co-author of the book Sudan's Unfinished Democracy, spoke about the the current state of grassroots resistance in the country. Lynch emphasized the importance of the role of Sudan Professional Association (SPA), one of the leading groups during the 2019 protests, and of other grassroots groups such as Resistance Committees, in the current conflict.

Lynch said that he believes that the international community only has a limited ability to stop the war in Sudan, but that it can try to prevent an increase of its intensity and its spread to other countries. He stressed the importance of humanitarian aid and of preventing its politicization by armed groups.

Taher al-Moatasem, a spokesperson for the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate (SJS), highlighted the grave violations that journalists have been subjected to as a result of the armed conflict.



Several hundred Sudanese journalists have been forced to leave the profession over the last period, “and the truth was hidden from the citizens”, said the SJS spokesperson.

Both sides in the current conflict have bombed newsrooms in central Khartoum, and journalists have been subjected to repression while covering the clashes, he added

Professor Alex de Waal, Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation, expressed his condolences to the people of Sudan, and criticized the “warlords” and “gangsters” currently ruling the country. De Waal noted recent egregious violations of international humanitarian law in the country, including attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. He called on military commanders to be held accountable for their actions.

None of the current belligerents represent the Sudanese state, de Wall told the webinar. Instead, they are non-state actors; what is unfolding in Sudan is more like a “mobster shootout” than a civil war.

De Waal criticised the Jeddah Protocol, signed last week by both belligerents, since it failed to recognise the role of local civilian actors in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Speaking after Prof. de Wall, Kholood Khair, Founder and Director of Confluence Advisory, praised the Resistance Committees for refusing to sign an agreement that would have given impunity to the various belligerent sides.

The Resistance Committees cannot rely on the international community, actors in the region, or the UN’s Human Rights Council for support, Ms. Khair said, adding that they are the most important popular political force in Sudan.

Khair criticized the UN’s Sudan mission for refusing to engage with the Resistance Committees, undermining them as a potential source of political change. Rather than engage with Resistance Committees on their own terms, there is a push for them to become “implementing partners” for NGOs and the UN.

Khair stressed the importance of including civilians in mediation efforts for a lasting ceasefire in Sudan, and called on the international community to engage with Resistance Committees on the Committees’ own terms.



Journalist Husam Hanafy stressed the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Sudan, and pointed out that the country was in a very difficult position even in the years prior to the ousting of Omar al-Bashir. Since then, the country has faced a number of crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and one-in-one-hundred-years flooding. Prior to the current conflict, 11 million people were suffering inadequate food provision; it is now thought that 15.8 million people are in need of humanitarian relief.

Access to that aid will be made more difficult due to general insecurity, and the possibility of politicisation of aid provision is high, Hanafy added.

However, despite the challenges, many humanitarian workers are still on the ground delivering aid to those in need, said Hanafy. He urged the international community to increase its support for local NGOs and community-based organizations.

In her contribution, Hiba Morgan, a correspondent for Al Jazeera English, spoke about the current political and economic situation in Sudan, with a focus on the lack of accountability in government spending. The defense sector took up to 70% of Sudan's recent budget, though details of this spending remain opaque, Ms. Morgan said.

Morgan also criticized the manner of foreign engagement with the leaders of warring sides. Many countries, including the US and Saudi Arabia, have treated these commanders as legitimate leaders, despite the fact that they are not recognised as such by the Sudanese people.

Morgan argued for a greater role for qualified mediators between grassroots groups and members of the international community, and for the need for accountability for any crimes that have been committed.

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK thanks all of the evening's speakers and the audience, and renews its call for a just, rights-based solution to the current conflict in Sudan.

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