



SOS - El Fasher, North Darfur, Sudan

The Lemkin Institute looks with dismay at the continuing crisis in Sudan and the international community's virtual silence about it. For more than a year now, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General al-Burhan, have squared off with the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohammed Dagalo, known as Hemedti. The battle between the two armies has wrought tragedy across Sudan, from the capital, Khartoum, to the Darfur region. Over 8 million Sudanese have been displaced by the 13-month-old war. Over 2 million of those have fled the country entirely, with many seeking refuge in the neighboring countries of Chad and South Sudan, taxing their resources and threatening to destabilize the entire region.

The war that began on April 15, 2023, was initially confined to the capital, Khartoum. Since then, the entirety of Sudan has been engulfed by violence. In the Darfur regions, which are located along the western flank of the country, the RSF's war effort has taken on genocidal characteristics, resurrecting ghosts of the 2003-05 genocide in Darfur. Then, the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity were the Janjaweed, an ethnically Arab militia. Today, the RSF are the main perpetrators of crimes in the Darfur region; though the Janjaweed were disbanded, its former fighters make up the bulk of soldiers fighting under the RSF banner. For victims of violence, there is little distinction, if any, to be made between the Janjaweed and the RSF. In this light, the renewed and escalating violence in Darfur, particularly the North Darfur region and its capital, El Fasher, is of grave concern.

The military situation in the Darfur regions is dire. Ethnic-based identity crimes and targeted killings are rampant in areas the RSF advances and controls. El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, is the lone remaining capital of the Darfur regions that the RSF has yet to seize. One of the last SAF military bases in the country's west is located near El Fasher. In previous months, the RSF has overrun the capitals of West, Central, South, and East Darfur, largely controlling the entire western flank of the nation. The capture of other Darfuri capitals, most notably West Darfur's El Geneina last year, saw the targeting of non-Arab, ethnically African, Masalit, Fur, and Zaghawa communities by the RSF. The atrocities that resulted included the execution of over 1,000 Masalit men and boys, the rape and sexual assault of non-Arab women, and the looting of homes belonging to non-Arabs. Reports of extrajudicial killing and looting of Arab neighbors by Masalit militia should also be investigated. However, the bulk of violence has targeted the Masalit and other ethnically African communities.

We at the Lemkin Institute are deeply troubled by the developments in North Darfur and El Fasher; we implore the international community, the UNSC, the African Union, and other regional powers to compel the RSF and SAF to agree to an immediate ceasefire. In response to the dire situation in North Darfur, previously unaligned Darfuri militia groups joined forces and allied with the SAF, hoping to beat back the RSF advance. El Fasher, home to over 1.5 million, is now largely encircled by the RSF and its allied militias. *El Fasher must not be allowed to fall to the RSF.*

Most recently, on 27 May, RSF fighters briefly captured El Fasher's lone water source, with the RSF commander declaring, "From now on they will have to get water from the Red Sea." The Red Sea is located well over 1,000 kilometers from El Fasher, displaying the genocidal intent of the RSF leadership and fighters as they seek to eradicate non-Arabs from Darfur and claim the last capital in the region. Members of the 'Joint Forces,' Darfuri rebel groups aligned with the SAF, dislodged the RSF from the Golo Reservoir, ensuring the residents of El Fasher have access to water. After being evicted from the Reservoir, RSF fighters reportedly laid siege to several villages in the countryside surrounding El Fasher, explicitly targeting villages of non-Arabs. Tactics such as these are reminiscent of those employed during the early 2000s Darfuri Genocide and have been employed by the RSF around El Fasher and the Northern Darfur state since early April.

While the RSF explicitly targets civilians and non-combatants, the SAF, too, has engaged in criminal and dangerous behavior, often using explosives and airstrikes in densely populated areas with little to no regard for civilians. In January of this year, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim Khan, and his team found "grounds to believe" that genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes were being committed in Sudan by both the RSF and SAF. Further, on 21 May, the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Nderitu, asserted, "The risk of genocide exists in Sudan. It is real and it is growing, every single day... In Darfur and El Fasher, civilians are being attacked and killed because of the color of their skin, because of their ethnicity, because of who they are."

The situation continues to deteriorate; on 28 May, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) reported the shelling of South Hospital in El Fasher and the death of an MSF team member. Fighting has entered the city, and both sides are utilizing heavy weaponry, with the SAF carrying out airstrikes in and around the city. Echoing what has become the grim mantra of humanitarian organizations in Gaza, there is nowhere safe in El Fasher.

We at the Lemkin Institute call on the UNSC and African Union to step in immediately to prevent the expansion of genocidal violence in Sudan, particularly in the Darfur regions. We are witnessing in real-time as history repeats itself in Darfur; in the words of Claire Nicolet, MSF Sudan Programme Manager, "We see a bloodbath unfolding before our own eyes in El Fasher." For months, genocide has been ongoing in Gaza, with the international community standing idly by. We call on the United Nations and its member countries to immediately step in to stop the expansion of the ongoing genocide in Darfur. If this means sending in peacekeepers with a proper mandate to protect civilians, then that is what should be done – immediately. Never again must genuinely mean never again, regardless of race, ethnicity, country of origin, religion, or sexual orientation.