

# Policy BRIEF

SYMPOSIUM EDITION

## Situating Non-Military Players in the Sudan Conflict

### Assessing their Role in the Post-Conflict Reconstruction

May 29, 2024

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief is a product of the proceedings of the symposium organized to reflect on the positioning of the civilians in the conflict in Sudan, the peace process and the future of Sudan. The symposium was organized by HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies (HORN Institute) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's (KAS) Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa on May 29, 2024 in Nairobi.

The armed conflict in Sudan between two military factions, Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has been going on for over one year. Approximately 13,900 people have been killed and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 6.5 million Sudanese have been displaced internally and 1.7 million across neighboring countries of Egypt, Ethiopia, Chad and South Sudan. This is on top of 2 million more Sudanese that were previously displaced by, among other factors, drought and hunger. Active hostilities are hampering humanitarian access and assistance leaving 24.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and 14.7 million in need of targeted assistance.

Despite the severity of the conflict on the humanitarian and security fronts, the conflict receives the least global attention and the peace processes have mostly focused on the military parties in the conflict at the exclusion of civilians despite the second goal of transitioning Sudan into a civilian-led democratic state. While the civilian front is fragmented in Sudan, various civilian groupings have emerged to front civilian interests, issues, agenda, positions and principles for a negotiated settlement to the current conflict. Tagadom which is the successor to the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), Sudan Popular Front (SPF), the Democratic Bloc (DB), Forces of National Movement (FNM), and the Radical Change Coalition (RCC) among others may differ ideologically but generally support Jeddah Talks Forum led by the United States (US) and Saudi Arabia, with support from African Union (AU) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

#### BACKGROUND

Given the series of military coups before President Omar Bashir's own coup in 1989, he [Bashir] established RSF for counter-insurgency and coup-proofing SAF. However, RSF over the years acquired more capabilities thus threatening the position of SAF and inviting factional competition between the two military formations. As such, the current armed conflict is basically a fight to the finish which threatens to divide the country into two: the Eastern region under SAF and Islamist militias, and the Western region under RSF. There are three possible scenarios for the conflict in Sudan: two governments formed in the two regions; a low-intensity protracted civil war; or victory for one of the parties.

Discussions from the symposium reveal that the Islamization and Arabization of Sudan despite the country's rich cultural, religious and social diversity, is what created the fragility

of the state. The Islamist political and military elite established control over instruments and institutions of the state including the military for decades. In the ongoing conflict, one of the top pro-SAF Islamist leaders in Sudan expressed the return of Bashir-era Islamist political elite to power as a goal. Further, the center-periphery struggles are foundational to Sudan's fragility. The riverine groups have had dominant control over power and resources in Sudan at the exclusion or marginalization of the peripheral groups in the West and South of the country. The economic collapse of Sudan as a result of the secession of South Sudan [loss of 75 percent oil revenue], decades of international sanctions, corruption and economic mismanagement, dire socio-economic conditions for majority of the people of Sudan add strain to the country's fragility.

Various efforts and actors have attempted mediation to end the conflict in separate processes without notable success. These include: (i) Jeddah Talk brokered by the United States (US), Saudi Arabia and by extension Egypt and United Arab Emirates (UAE), (ii) Inter-governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) Quartet (iii) the African Union (AU) Expanded Mediation Mechanism, (iv) the Troika, and (v) neighboring countries (Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia). However, all peace processes are faltering with ceasefire agreements having collapsed 17 times without meaningful progress in peace talks. With the collapse of the civilian transitional government in October 2022, the space for civilians to participate, be represented, and present non-military issues and pathways to peace has remained limited.

## KEY FINDINGS

The following findings emerged from presenters' submissions at the conference:

### **Key Finding 1: The Humanitarian Situation in Sudan is Worsening**

The health systems have collapsed with between 70–80 percent of health facilities no longer functioning or facing critical health supplies shortage, as well as disruption and suspension of medical services. Hospitals are under violent attacks including facilities such as Al Nao, Al Saudi Maternity in Omdurman, Al Geneina Hospital in West Darfur, and Babiker Nahar Pediatric Hospital in El Fasher which have experienced looting, shelling and other forms of disruptive violence. Infectious diseases such as Cholera, Dengue and Measles rising in regions such as Khartoum and Gadaref. About 2,000 people are suffering from Cholera. Armed violence is active in Khartoum, Darfur and South Kordofan; the violence is indiscriminate in civilian areas. Maternal healthcare is particularly affected with pregnant women and new-born infants facing malnutrition and poor healthcare.

Levels of civilian protection are critically low as cases of harassment, sexual violence, ethnic violence and gender-based violence. Lawlessness is acutely high with looting, vandalization of telecommunication, education, banking, food and water infrastructure. Sudan is also facing an imminent famine as national cereal production levels continue plummeting by 46 percent in 2023 and 40 percent compared to the last five years. In fact, 15 percent of children aged between 6 months and two years are suffering from severe to acute malnutrition; more than 30,000 children are suffering from acute malnutrition.

About 40 percent of pregnant women and lactating mothers are malnourished.

### **Key Finding 2: The Civilian Front and Civil Society are Disunited but Converge on Key Issues**

The civilian movement in Sudan has factionalized into several civilian groupings holding divergent issues, agenda and principles. The Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) splintered into Tagadom and other groups; Tagadom supports the Jeddah Talks and the non-inclusion of the Bashir-era political party (National Congress Party - NCP) and the Islamic Movement in any peace processes. Sudan Popular Front (SPF) seeks to unify the efforts of as many political parties, civil society organizations, religious Sufi sects, intellectuals and others, to rebuild the country, while the Democratic Bloc (DB) calls for unification of regional and international initiatives, while highlighting the significance of comprehensive Sudanese dialogue with regional and international facilitation. The Radical Change Coalition on its part, seeks to primarily safeguard the October 2019 revolution which ousted President Omar Bashir (1989 – 2019). The Forces of National Movement (FNM) pursues a broad-based national consensus and resolution of the current conflict and political crisis through intra-Sudan dialogue with the assistance of neutral foreign mediators. Nonetheless, the civilian groupings generally support the ongoing Jeddah Talks Forum, immediate ceasefire, an end to the war, an inclusive peace process and democratic transition of power to a civilian-led government.

The civil society movement in Sudan is pursuing the legal path to justice and accountability, by monitoring and documenting violations of human rights during the conflict. The other core issues the CSO sector is focused on, are efforts towards immediate ceasefire, robust peace talks, anti-corruption, pushing for a new and permanent constitution for Sudan, and supporting the urgency for democratic elections as a path to the transition to civilian-led government.

### **Key Finding 3: Women-led Civilian Movements are Driving Bottom-Up Peacebuilding**

Women-led organizations and movements are championing women initiatives which extend support to women in displacement through healthcare provision and psychotherapy. Women movements provide emergency response to women especially to the cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and are steering consultations to address local humanitarian needs and find local solutions. Women in South and North Kordofan are leading efforts counter hate speech and preach peaceful co-existence. Women have submitted a draft memorandum focusing on priorities and needs to the local authorities. Women are also forming coalitions at the local levels across ethnic and religious lines, to campaign for an end to the war and to stop the recruitment of the youth into the fighting groups.

### **Key Finding 4: Current Peace Processes are Exclusive and Focused on Narrow Objectives**

The peace processes in Sudan are focused exclusively on ceasefire hence excluding civilians and failing to broaden the scope of issues. Civilians have lacked representation, participation, inclusion and voice in the ongoing peace processes. The focus on primary fighting parties threatens the middle ground, the comprehensive resolution of the conflict, and the non-military

path to peace in Sudan. The Manama and Paris Meetings were the only notably inclusive forums, which brought together all levels of stakeholders including the civilians; this could be one of the approaches to consider.

### **Key Finding 5: Peace Processes are Inherently Challenged**

UN efforts face certain limitations. First is political consideration or balancing diverse national interests and views, which may hinder multilateral action. Second, there is a likelihood of resistance from conflicting parties, against the involvement of the UN. Thirdly, the UN is challenged by the complexity of the conflict itself; the conflict is multi-faceted, multi-layered and rapidly changing. Lastly, resource constraints may impact the ability for the UN to ensure the conflict is resolved comprehensively.

Peace processes are narrow in scope of issues. However, there is need to broaden the scope of issues and narrow differences thereof. There is need to interrogate the role of multi-culturalism in Sudan as a source of conflict for example and find a workable form of federalism as did Ethiopia. The center-periphery struggles need to be looked at and see the most stable formular of economic, social and political inclusion for the peripheries and address the dominance by the riverine groupings.

The peace processes are also faced with interference from external actors. Since the onset of the war, foreign powers have been involved on both sides, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) supporting RSF and Egypt supporting SAF. Peace processes further lack the most unifying mediation approach. There is need to include consequential actors in the mediation process under the chairmanship of AU, such as UN, IGAD, the League of the Arab States.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Sudanese people are the most important stakeholders and must be at the center of peace efforts for lasting peace and stability in the country. The regional peace and security mechanisms have largely been symbolic institutions with least political effectiveness especially in this conflict, given the powerful role of external actors in both the conflict and the peace processes. The regional mechanisms have also failed because of the lack of inclusive processes.

Tagadam, DB, NM, SPF and RCCare more or less the most important civilian political actors in the Sudanese arena. Given that the security situation in the country is not conducive to political activism, most actors operate from outside the country, mostly in Egypt and other neighboring countries. Civilian actors' agenda and strategies differ but converge on three points: ending of the war, support for Jeddah Talks forum and the call for Sudanese-Sudanese dialogue. However, the civil society movement is

faced with a myriad of challenges such as the internet black-outs, the collapsed banking system, the lack of internal cohesion in the country, polarization across the country's ethnic and religious groups, and poor communication channels. As such, the civil society organizations in Sudan need support to be able to document atrocities, as well as better networking to be able to reach out to other partners in order to enhance their role the peace process as well as in the possible post-conflict reconstruction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations lay out the actionable strategies to engage in the resolution of the conflict in Sudan.

### **AU, IGAD and UN should:**

- Ensure the peace processes are inclusive and broad in terms of issues and local stakeholders at level of mediation, in recognition that sustainable peace will only take place through an intra-Sudan process.
- Ensure that the peace processes of Sudan are civilian-driven and people-centered as opposed to the exclusive focus ceasefire and military factions.
- Lobby for access to humanitarian assistance and resources for humanitarian response in Sudan.
- Should lobby for Sudan's mineral resources such as Gold to be certified for sanctions in the international markets to help defund the militant groups in the country.

### **External Actors [United States, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, European Union ...] should:**

- In partnership with AU, IGAD and UN, develop a unified approach to the peace process in Sudan.
- Leverage on experiences in other similar conflict set-ups such as Rwanda on the participation of civilians in peacebuilding, national dialogue and reconciliation as well as on the questions of justice and accountability.
- Prioritize security sector review or reform to limit the role of the security agencies in Sudan's politics and allow transition to civilian-led democratic governance.
- Prioritize constitutional review to grant equal rights, non-discrimination, equitable governance and distribution of resources, among other objectives.

### **Local and International Media should:**

- Enhance the coverage of the conflict in Sudan to mobilize global consciousness around the gravity of the conflict in Sudan.

### **Local and International Civil Society Movements should:**

- Enhance political activism, monitoring and documentation of atrocities, and strengthen the campaign for ceasefire and an end to the conflict in Sudan.
- Present civilian-centered memoranda to enrich the peace processes in Sudan.
- Build a local unified civilian front to lobby for space and representation of civilians in the ongoing peace processes in Sudan.