

justice + conflict

UPDATES FROM SUDAN

REDRESS

Hello,

Welcome to this fortnightly roundup of news on justice and conflict in Sudan.

Hyperlinks are underlined.

Friday 16 Feb 2024

BIG STORIES FIRST

- A [major telecommunications blackout](#) has been [ongoing](#) across Sudan for [almost two weeks](#) – though one network is now partially back online. According to [industry sources](#), the RSF [deliberately severed](#) service for [Zain, Sudani, and MTN](#) – apparently to [pressure the de facto authorities](#) into restoring service in Darfur (Darfur has experienced network disruption for months, though many have [attributed](#) this to the RSF’s [failure to facilitate repair, maintenance, and fuel supply](#) for infrastructure in areas under its control). The outages have caused major disruption, including to: (i) [banking](#) ([e-money services](#) are vital for receiving funds and buying basic necessities given bank closures and widespread cash shortages); as well as (ii) the [coordination/delivery of vital assistance](#) by medical personnel, emergency response rooms (‘ERRs’), and humanitarian NGOs. Similar blackouts have previously been deployed in Sudan to obscure large-scale violence against civilians (e.g., the [June 2019 sit-in](#) or more recently in [El-Geneina](#), West Darfur) – though it is not clear that this latest outage was coordinated with a specific RSF attack. While communications services have been down (save for some – mostly commercial – landlines), demand for satellite internet services (e.g., Starlink) has [increased significantly](#). However, the equipment required is prohibitively expensive for many (up to £3,000 + subscription costs) and is mainly supplied via RSF-controlled Nyala, South Darfur (the de facto authorities have [reportedly banned](#) its use in areas under their control). As of writing, Sudani’s service has been [partially restored](#) through a backup data centre in Port Sudan though network fluctuations are being regularly reported.
- Limited public progress has been made towards securing a ceasefire or increased humanitarian access. The UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs/Emergency Relief Coordinator [announced](#) that the warring parties had agreed in principle to UN-brokered talks in Geneva to discuss enabling greater [humanitarian access](#) but that he is “still waiting for the actual meeting to happen”. Around this time, al-Burhan chaired a [joint meeting](#) of the Sovereign Council and the Council of Ministers, following

which a spokesperson for the de facto authorities stated that the “Jeddah platform remains the sole forum for addressing [the conflict]” and that reports of other negotiations are “false and baseless” (possibly referring to the Geneva proposal or [previously reported Manama talks](#)). Days later, al-Burhan [publicly acknowledged](#) the de facto authorities’ [policy of denying aid deliveries into RSF-controlled areas](#), though this has since been [denied](#) by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mediators are reportedly [preparing invitations](#) for the SAF and the RSF to resume the Jeddah talks. If these negotiations are to finally yield any concrete results, the composition of the facilitators will be crucial. The SAF has [apparently requested](#) that IGAD representatives do not participate (the [IGAD Chair recently dispatched a special envoy to Port Sudan](#) as part of ongoing efforts to persuade the de facto authorities to reverse their decision to [suspend Sudan’s IGAD membership](#), though this was [seemingly unsuccessful](#)). Meanwhile, it is not yet clear whether, following their [participation in the Manama talks](#), the Jeddah platform will be expanded to include the UAE and Egypt.

ACCOUNTABILITY CLASHES, GENOCIDE, FFM

RSF/SAF clashes in key contested areas

Clashes have continued between the RSF and the SAF, particularly in [Omdurman](#), [Bahri](#), Gezira, [West Kordofan](#), and [North Darfur](#). [Reports suggest](#) that the SAF has gained [some significant ground](#) in Omdurman in recent weeks, having once again [targeted](#) RSF positions with [air strikes and combat drones](#). Amidst the fighting, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate has [called on parties to the conflict](#) to protect the archives stored at the [Sudan Radio and Television Corporation in Omdurman](#). In Gezira, the [SAF launched several airstrikes](#) against RSF positions. Local resistance committees [reported](#) that, in one instance, an entire family was killed by indiscriminate aerial bombardments. Meanwhile, the RSF is [accused of killing at least six civilians and injuring ten others](#) in separate attacks on a village in Gezira – having targeted the village and threatened violence if civilians failed to hand over their belongings and money. Finally, Gibril Ibrahim (JEM) [announced](#) that his forces would “be at the forefront of liberating [Wad] Madani”, suggesting that the JEM would mobilise to fight the RSF in Gezira. As of writing, Abdelaziz Usher (half-brother/advisor to Ibrahim) [reportedly met today](#) with the SAF’s Yasir al-Atta.

US Senate resolution recognising RSF genocide

[US Senators Risch, Cardin, T. Scott, and Booker](#) have introduced another draft [resolution](#) – this time recognising actions of the RSF and allied militia in Darfur against non-Arab communities as acts of genocide, calling on the Atrocity Prevention Task Force to conduct a comprehensive review of its Sudan response, and urging the US Government to: (i) support documentation of atrocities and genocidal acts in Sudan; (ii) identify mechanisms through which to fund the grassroots organisations currently providing assistance to the Sudanese people in conflict-affected areas that “traditional implementing partners” cannot reach (e.g., ERRs); and (iii) support tribunals and international criminal investigations to hold the RSF and allied militias accountable for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. While any genocide finding by the US Senate would not be legally authoritative, it is hoped that the resolution will help to galvanise and re-shape US foreign policy

in Sudan (as [Congress' declaration of genocide in Darfur](#) did back in 2004). See below in 'Government' for more on the US and Sudan.

Sudan FFM affected by UN hiring freeze

The [ongoing liquidity crisis and hiring freeze](#) at the UN threatens to hinder the operation of the recently established Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan ('FFM'). The FFM was established four months ago and only has an initial mandate of one year to investigate atrocities and make recommendations on accountability. However, [owing to a hiring freeze imposed last year](#), it has not yet been able to properly staff its investigative team or secretariat. Despite these challenges, FFM representatives recently met with various CSOs (including REDRESS) to discuss the status of its operationalisation and its [call for submissions](#).

Asylum seekers killed after boat capsized

At least 13 Sudanese asylum seekers have [died](#) after their boat capsized off the coast of Tunisia. The boat (which was "[fragile and hastily made with metal scraps](#)") was carrying 42 people, all of them Sudanese. Two people were rescued, and an investigation is ongoing into the status of the remaining 27 people. A court spokesperson in Tunisia noted that the individuals were likely "exploited in a human trafficking case or in the formation of a criminal group to reach Europe". Since 15 April 2023, at least 7.7 million people have been [forcibly displaced](#) due to the armed conflict in Sudan.

GOVERNMENT COUP RUMOURS, IRAN, US ENVOY

Rumours of foiled SAF coup attempt

Military Intelligence [arrested four mid-ranking commanders](#) in Omdurman, prompting [speculation of a foiled coup attempt](#). Various explanations have been given for the arrests, including that they [disagreed with the tactics](#) used in battles against the RSF, conducted military operations against the SAF without permission, and criticised SAF leadership. Yasir al-Atta soon attempted to dispel the coup rumours, emphasising publicly that the SAF "[operate\[s\] with one heart behind the leadership, following an organized hierarchy](#)". Al-Burhan, al-Atta, and other senior SAF officials later [met in Omdurman](#) to discuss "operational progress". The outcomes of this meeting are unclear.

Acting Foreign Minister travels to Iran

The acting Foreign Minister, Ali al-Sadiq [travelled to Iran](#), meeting with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi as well as its Foreign Minister. This is the first such high-level diplomatic visit in seven years, and the latest move to strengthen relations between the Sudanese de facto authorities and Iran. See [here](#) and [here](#) for further context to the trip, including: (i) SAF efforts to secure additional weapons via Iran (al-Sadiq visited [Iran's House of Innovation and Technology](#), an [agency that promotes Iranian exports including drones](#)); (ii) ties between Iran and the al-Bashir-regime; and (iii) responding to the UAE and Israel. On relations with other States, see also: (i) [gold exports still flow from Sudan to UAE](#); and (ii) [Russia postpones plans for Sudan naval base indefinitely](#).

US to appoint special envoy for Sudan

The US is [finally set to appoint a new special envoy for Sudan](#), Tom Perriello, following months of [scrutiny](#) for failing to do so. The current US ambassador to Sudan, John Godfrey (presently acting as the informal envoy) will [reportedly step down](#) in the coming weeks. See [this article](#) for detailed consideration of the context of Perriello's appointment, the US policy deficiencies that he should address, and the challenges he is likely to face. Meanwhile, a US delegation including Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Molly Phee, [met with representatives](#) from Taqaddum and some resistance committee/civil society actors. Phee (already seen by some as [emblematic of US policy failings on Sudan](#)) faced criticism for meeting with [Taqaddum](#) (the coalition has been accused of being a rebranded FFC-CC, [failing to hold the RSF to account](#), and lacking sufficient civilian backing). Phee was also pictured with an individual [who some claim is affiliated with the RSF](#). Finally, the [US delegation also met with other stakeholders](#), including IGAD leadership and Ramtane Lamamra (the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan).

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION FAMINE, FUNDING SHORTAGE

Urgent action required to address growing humanitarian crisis

The UN has [appealed](#) for \$4.1 billion in funding to provide humanitarian assistance inside Sudan (OCHA requires \$2.7 billion to support 14.7 million people) as well as those who have been displaced (UNCHR requires \$1.4 billion to support 2.7 million people). Relatedly, a [policy brief by Clingendael](#) explains that according to the most likely scenario, seven million people will face catastrophic levels of hunger by June. Clingendael's recommendations include that: (i) key actors should declare a risk of famine for Sudan and take the lead in coordinating an appropriate response; and (ii) direct financial support should be channelled via e-money transfer mechanisms/mobile credit into affected regions – both to maintain the still functioning market structures and to provide ERRs and local volunteers with direct financial support. Finally, MSF has reported on the [ongoing malnutrition crisis in Zamzam IDP camp](#), North Darfur – finding that an estimated one child is dying every two hours.

**weekend
read**

[War on women](#) (and [combat training camps](#)); Darfur: [The New Massacres](#) (and [worsening conditions](#)); Egypt [smuggling routes](#); [private](#) sector humanitarian response; [UNSC should act](#) against abusers (and UAE role [backfiring](#)); [civilian mobilisation](#) (and [Ukrainian forces](#) in Sudan) [reporting](#) challenges; [Houthi attacks](#) in Red Sea and Sudan aid; and tributes to [Mahgoub Salih](#) and [Souq Omdurman](#).

Thanks for reading, and see you in two weeks.

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