

Grave Violations Against Civilians Fleeing the Hell of Violence

October 31, 2022 | El Fasher; Tawila: North Darfur

Current Situation:

In light of the military operations that have escalated recently since Sunday, October 26, in and around El Fasher, a mass forced displacement of civilians continues towards the northern and western regions of the state as a result of the intensifying brutal violence against them. A field monitor from the Sudan Rights Watch Network visited the Tawila al-Umda camp, a major reception point for those forcibly displaced and subjected to grave violations, who are fleeing El Fasher via several secondary routes, most notably:

1. El Fasher – Madfa'iya – Hilla Hashaba – Qarni – Jabal Wana – Tura – Azqarfa – Kurma – Tawila.
2. El Fasher – Hilla Sheikh – Qarni – Kurma – Tawila.
3. El Fasher – Madfa'iya – Shaqra – Jabal Wana – Qarni – Tawila.

Survivors and eyewitnesses told the network that these roads witnessed acts of violence and serious human rights violations committed by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied groups as civilians fled the city.

According to the network's monitoring, more than 3,000 civilians, mostly women and children, have arrived in the Tawila al-Umda camps and surrounding areas north of El Fasher, according to initial field estimates. These displaced people are living in catastrophic humanitarian conditions without adequate shelter, potable water, or medical services, and with a near-total lack of food and medicine, indicating a disastrous deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Documented patterns of violations:

A. Sexual and physical violence:

The network's field monitor documented horrific testimonies of gang rape committed against women and girls during their forced displacement. In one case, a survivor reported



that three RSF members took turns sexually assaulting her in the Qarni area after they stopped a group of fleeing people and questioned her about her father's connection to the army. The forces also carried out a sexual, physical, and psychological assault on a mother and her daughter.

These facts clearly demonstrate the systematic and targeted nature of sexual violence, which constitutes a crime against humanity under certain provisions of international humanitarian law, the four Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and certain articles of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guaranteeing the right to dignity and physical integrity, in addition to numerous articles in regional and international human rights laws and various United Nations conventions.

B. Killings and Exterminations:

Field sources, as documented by the network's monitoring, have recorded systematic killings of civilians in and around El Fasher, including summary executions and the direct targeting of unarmed civilians, accompanied by blatant racist insults. These acts constitute a flagrant violation of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits attacks on persons not participating in hostilities, as they are legally and morally protected civilians.

C. Gender-Based Violence:

Reports, as documented by the Network's field monitor, indicate that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) used discriminatory and gender-based inflammatory rhetoric targeting men, youth, women, and children alike based on their ethnic, political, and social affiliations, employing derogatory terms such as "Kizan" or "Abladah." This pattern of violence constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights to non-discrimination and equality before the law, as enshrined in Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

D. Widespread Looting, Theft, and Destruction:

According to the Network's field monitor, civilian property and livelihoods were subjected to systematic looting and widespread destruction, a practice known as "shafshafa," in which food supplies and personal belongings were stolen, and homes were destroyed. These acts constitute a violation of articles of the Rome Statute that criminalize pillaging in non-international armed conflicts.

E. Use of Starvation as a Weapon of War:





Field reports from the network's monitor confirmed that the attacking forces prevented food and water supplies from reaching those fleeing, in addition to subjecting them to widespread and serious violations along displacement routes. This constitutes a violation of Article 14 of Additional Protocol II to the 1977 Geneva Conventions, which prohibits the use of starvation as a method of warfare.

F. Arrest, Abduction, and Forced Separation:

According to the network's monitoring, hundreds of men and young people were arrested and forced to remain in areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces after the army withdrew from the city. Women and children, however, managed to escape on their own with great difficulty and amidst horrific violations. This led to the disintegration of thousands of families and widespread cases of disappearance and family separation, amounting to forced displacement of the population in violation of international humanitarian law.

G. Psychological Trauma:

All survivors and displaced persons in Tawila al-Umda camp suffer from severe psychological disorders such as trauma, depression, and persistent anxiety, etc., as a result of the violence they witnessed, including executions and sexual violence. This necessitates an urgent response in the form of psychosocial support.

Human Rights Review and Analysis:

The repeated and systematic pattern of these violations—from gang rape, murder, and looting to the use of starvation as a weapon—demonstrates a deliberate and systematic policy targeting civilians as part of a military strategy aimed at subjugating civilians to the coercive authority of the Rapid Support Forces in the region. It also represents an attempt to depopulate El Fasher and its surrounding areas of their original inhabitants who resist forced displacement through intimidation, brutal violence, and mass terror.

These acts constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity according to international and regional standards, and in some cases amount to acts of ethnic cleansing, given the targeting of specific groups based on their cultural identity, social composition, political orientation, or other characteristics. Despite the gravity of these crimes, the response of the international and regional community remains limited and ineffective, as the accountability





mechanisms stipulated in Security Council resolutions or in the African Union's human rights system have not been activated.

Humanity. Continued impunity fuels the cycle of violence and entrenches a culture of brutality that threatens civil peace and the social fabric of Darfur.

Network Recommendations:

In light of this horrific and increasingly dire situation of human rights violations against civilians, the Sudan Rights Watch Network calls for and recommends the following:

1. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) must immediately cease targeting civilians in and around El Fasher.
2. The recent and ongoing violations committed by the RSF must be urgently referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation into crimes committed against civilians in North Darfur.
3. The mandate of the joint African Union-United Nations Independent Investigation Mission (AU-UN) must be expanded to gather evidence and protect witnesses and survivors.
4. Safe humanitarian corridors, under UN supervision, must be established to ensure the safe passage of civilians from El Fasher and its surrounding areas and provide them with adequate protection.
5. Urgent psychosocial support must be provided to victims and survivors of sexual, physical, psychological, and other forms of violence.
6. The necessity of imposing targeted sanctions on the leaders involved in these crimes and holding local accomplices accountable.

Silence and complicity in these grave crimes are tantamount to complicity in the crime itself. Moral and legal responsibility demands urgent action to stop the bloodshed and restore justice.

Sudan Rights Watch Network

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