



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Snapshot

Sudan

May 2025



Sudan Defenders

Sudan Human Rights Defenders Coalition

Context

The political and human rights situation in Sudan has significantly deteriorated since the [coup of 25 October 2021](#), executed jointly by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and their allies from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed Hamdan (Hemedti), which overthrew the revolutionary government established after the [December 2018 popular revolution](#). The coup suspended the [Constitutional Charter](#) for the Transitional Period of 2019 and forced the [resignation](#) of the civilian Prime Minister Dr. Abdalla Hamdok. The subsequent power struggle between the SAF and RSF culminated in the outbreak of war on 15 April 2023, spreading from the capital, Khartoum to the rest of Sudan, further undermining civic space and human rights. The humanitarian disaster in Sudan is currently the largest in the world, with more than [11.6 million](#) internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over [3 million](#) refugees.

This war has been characterised by gross [violations against civilians](#), women and children, as well as high rates of conflict-related sexual violence. The conflict has seen the return of [ethnically motivated](#) killings, forced displacement, and sexual violence by both sides. These tactics bear alarming similarities to the Darfur crisis [of 2003-2005](#), raising fears of systematic ethnic cleansing and war crimes. This war was also characterised by the [direct targeting of human rights defenders](#), activists, front-line responders, and even [humanitarian workers](#), with killing, targeting, and arrest.

In this context, civil society entities in Sudan [face significant constraints](#) on their ability to organise and operate due to laws restricting freedoms since the 2021 military coup. The situation has worsened following the outbreak of war, with the proliferation of intelligence agencies and security groups [targeting activists](#) by restricting their operational spaces. This has also had a significant impact on the safety and security of human rights defenders and activists, [forcing them to flee](#) due to the deteriorating security, living conditions, and humanitarian situation in Sudan.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

All parties to the conflict, namely the SAF, the RSF and their allies, have committed violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law as the war is [characterized](#) by its urban and widespread nature, “with civilians placed at the centre of extreme violence.” Blatant disregard for international human rights and humanitarian norms by both the SAF and the RSF and allies has led to both targeted and indiscriminate [attacks](#), including airstrikes, on civilians and on hospitals and schools. Medical personnel, humanitarian workers, teachers, lawyers, journalists and human rights defenders have been [targeted](#). For example, prominent lawyer and activist Khaled Omar Al-Sadig Ali (Khaled Abu Al-Rous) was [forcibly disappeared](#) by the RSF in December 2024. More than three months later, his fate remains unknown. Similarly, lawyer Montaser Abdullah was arbitrarily arrested in Port Sudan after legally challenging the prosecution of former Prime Minister Dr Abdalla Hamdok and others. Such cases highlight the increasing criminalisation of legitimate human rights and legal work.

Since 2023, Sudan’s civic space has been severely [repressed](#): freedoms of expression, association and assembly have deteriorated as dozens of civil society groups [shut down](#) and activists are driven underground or displaced. Public protests are banned, while journalists and activists face arrests, threats and violent assaults—including the April 2023 [storming and looting](#) of UNICEF offices in Khartoum and Darfur, which crippled humanitarian operations. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate has recorded [438 violations](#) against media

professionals since the war began, and on 14 May 2025 photojournalist Ibrahim Nugdallah was [brutally attacked](#) in Cairo by Sudanese thugs.

Between 27 August and 18 September 2024, South Kordofan's General Intelligence Service rounded up [22 political activists](#) in Rashad and Abu Jubeiha—accusing them of backing Freedom and Change, sabotage, instigation and acting as an RSF political incubator ahead of planned protests. Alaa El-Din Hassan and Ahmed Al-Tijani were among those [arrested](#).

Journalists and media personnel have been [severely affected](#) by the war: [shelling](#) in a displacement camp killed Samaher Abdel Shafi; Ramadan Mahjab was [arrested](#); TV cameraman Ali Shatta was [shot](#); Osama Sayed Ahmed and Ahmed Al-Basili [were targeted](#) in RSF-held areas; two Sudan state TV reporters died in a [drone strike](#); and RSF forces attacked the youth-led Hadreen initiative, [killing](#) one supervisor in custody.

2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The absence of a recognised constitutional framework, an executive authority, and a parliament has severely hampered efforts to strengthen the civic space through legislation. Human rights defenders have faced [persecution](#) across Sudan, especially in conflict-affected areas. The current legal framework in Sudan does not adequately protect civil society and is sometimes used as a tool of repression. No new laws have been passed over the past year due to the dysfunction of legislative institutions, but de facto restrictions have been imposed through military decrees and security crackdowns on civil society organisations.

On 9 May 2024, the Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, signed the constitutional decree, which included [amendments](#) to the General Intelligence Service Law of 2010. Some considered this a step backward, and one that poses a significant threat to the scope and effectiveness of Sudanese activists and civil society. These amendments add powers of search, arrest, detention, and seizure of assets to members of the National Intelligence and Security Service without complying with legal procedures through the Public Prosecutor. This increases the targeting of activists and the unconfirmed accusations made under these powers.

In Port Sudan (the current administrative capital of the country), the Humanitarian Aid Commission has made registration and renewal procedures [difficult](#) and complicated, [especially for civil society organizations](#). This is being done without official notification of the ban on civil society organisations from work or support in humanitarian aid, using this as a pressure tactic to compel independent organisations to align with the government's views. All approvals and permits, whether for registration or activities, face very complex and stringent security procedures, which aim to restrict the work of civil society (if they are approved at all). Obtaining a permit for any activity requires the approval of the Procedures Office of the Humanitarian Aid Commission, the approval of the General Intelligence Service, and the approval of military intelligence. This has subjected civil society to a long and complex process that often involves procrastination and/or rejection of registrations or approval requests by authorities.

On 16 January 2024, the acting Federal Governance Minister [banned](#) civil society groups created during the revolution and later in the war. The Humanitarian Aid Commission also put [restrictions](#) in place for national non-government organisations' operations. In areas controlled by the RSF, the so-called Humanitarian Relief Agency has been established as a regulatory body under RSF command. This agency restricts civil society work, seeking to control humanitarian aid and potentially overlook RSF practices.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Access to financing has become more difficult, as insecurity and the deterioration of banking infrastructure have disrupted funding and [fund transfer operations](#). Controls have been introduced in the sector that restrict - and impose significant oversight on - the bank accounts of organisations. Some international donors have also reassessed their interventions due to security risks. However, alternative opportunities have emerged [through partnerships and alliances](#) with regional and international humanitarian organisations.

In October 2023, Adeela Organization, which is a youth-led civil society organisation working in peace building, issued a [memo](#) clarifying the freezing of their bank account by the [decision](#) issued by the Public Prosecutor - Investigation and Inquiry Committee, and the [list](#) of names of frozen bank accounts.

In addition, the US administration's decision to reduce and suspend funding on 20 January 2025, had a restricting impact on the work and activities of Sudanese civil society. A [joint report](#) prepared by the Framework Mechanism, Adeela Organization, and Al-Ayyam Center examines some of the impact of the funding cessation on Sudanese civil society organisations, which has a negative impact on the following: disruption of humanitarian aid services for displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, suspension of protection projects, impact on Human Rights Monitoring and Transitional Justice, deterioration of Civil Society Capacity Building, severely hindering the reconstruction of government institutions and hindering peaceful transition efforts.

The UN Secretary-General [announced](#) that the UN, alongside national and international partner organisations, would launch the 2025 Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and the 2025 Sudan Refugee Response Plan. This has created hope for improved access to funding and support by local civil society.

4. State openness and responsiveness

Since the war began, most humanitarian aid delivered by local groups (known as ERRs) has required coordination with the authorities of the controlling armies, whether the SAF or the RSF. However, this coordination lacks the mechanisms, policies, or a clear charter governing the delivery of humanitarian aid. It depends largely on personal relationships. Due to safety and security concerns and risks, most of the communications and political liaison offices for the ERRs maintain a high level of discretion in order to protect the volunteers and ensure safe delivery of the aid. The situation changes according to the situation or the form of control of the controlling army. Both sides in the conflict view civil society with suspicion, and there are no established ways for them to talk to each other. Volunteers delivering basic humanitarian aid in Sudan have been [repeatedly targeted](#) by either the SAF or RSF during their work.

There is no transparent consultative process on the laws, and civil society is excluded from them. For instance, on 23 February 2025, Sudan's Ministry of Justice published an amended [Constitutional Declaration](#) that extends the transitional period by 39 months, eliminating the committee investigating the 2019 sit-in dispersal, and increasing military representation on the Sovereign Council without public consultations or the participation of civil society.

In February 2025, the Coordination of Civil Democratic Forces (Taqaddom) announced its decision to sever ties between its political and civil components, due to differing positions on the formation of a parallel government in exile. On 18 March 2025, the Sudan Founding Alliance launched its work in Nairobi, with the participation of the RSF, the Sudan People's

Liberation Movement (SPLM), political forces, armed movements, and national figures. Participating in the opening session were Abdel Rahim Dagalo, Second Commander of the RSF; Abdel Aziz Al-Hilu, Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM); Major General Fadlallah Barma Nasser, Chairman of the National Umma Party; and leaders of the armed movements within the Revolutionary Front led by Al-Hadi Idris. Other figures, including former Sovereignty Council member Mohamed Hassan Al-Taayshi, representatives for coordination of unions and professionals, as well as representatives of civil society organisations, also participated.

5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Civil society is often viewed by parties to the conflict as part of the "other side" or "foreign tools." The state has not issued an official statement accusing civil society organisations of being agents and mercenaries, but the regime uses its media platforms to attack individuals and organisations. An example of this is the [attack on activist Kholoud Khair](#), accusing her of being an agent of the West, against the backdrop of US sanctions against the Sudanese army in the [chemical weapons](#) case.

It has been noted that civil society has strayed from its impartial stance following the outbreak of war. Some organisations and activists have adopted biased narratives supporting one of the warring parties, which has deepened divisions within civil society itself. This shift has also led to human rights documentation that lacks professionalism and impartiality, focusing primarily on violations committed by only one side of the conflict.

Within the period of 27 August until 18 September 2024, [22 political activists](#) were arrested for their activism and were accused of being "supporters of Freedom and Change, saboteurs and instigators, and political incubator for the Rapid Support Forces" by the General Intelligence Service in Rashad and Abu Jubeiha localities in South Kordofan.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

Overall, [Internet Accessibility](#) is very low in Sudan. In all areas where Starlink services are present, they are often monitored by the military intelligence services that control the region (SAF or RSF). This negatively impacts access to information, documentation and monitoring, which in turn negatively impacts the enabling environment for civil society.

The internet has been subject to several partial and complete blackouts in conflict zones, and authorities have used censorship and blocking tools on social media. There have also been reports of hacking and cyber-extortion against activists. The digital environment is not sufficiently secure, and there are weaknesses in data protection and privacy.

The September 2024 extended telecommunication [blackout](#) in Sudan resulted in approximately 30 million individuals being without internet access for a period of eight months. This lack of connectivity significantly impeded the populace's ability to obtain critical information during the ongoing conflict.

The near-total communications blackout [in February 2024](#), crippled the ability of human rights defenders to document abuses and coordinate responses, restricted freedom of expression and the ability of humanitarian organisations to deliver aid, with Starlink providing only slow interventions. It also led to a collapse of the banking system in many areas, in addition to disrupting the arrival of [humanitarian aid and support](#), as financial transfers depended directly on electronic banking applications.

Since the beginning of the war, several cases of arrests of [individuals and/or activists](#) for posts or comments on social media platforms have been documented and various charges have been levelled against them. In July 2024, [Ethiopian authorities arrested](#) Sudanese activist Hisham Ali, known as "Wad Qalba," in Addis Ababa, due to his online activism against corruption. Pursuant to a defamation complaint filed by a person close to the Sudanese government following Hisham's publication of a series of episodes exposing corruption cases under the title "The Devil," Hisham Ali was arrested in circumstances more akin to a kidnapping than a legal arrest under proper and supervised procedures. He was arrested in an unprofessional manner at 8:00 PM in front of his home in Addis Ababa on a weekend. In such a complaint, the defendant could be summoned to appear before the investigating authority or wait until the beginning of the week to take appropriate action. However, the circumstances of the arrest suggest otherwise, as explained by legal advisor Ismail Al-Taj. Hisham was released on personal recognisance and will appear before the relevant authorities to follow up on the case.

Challenges and Opportunities

Civil society actors operating in Sudan will continue to face complex challenges that severely hinder their ability to continue their work and sustain a dignified life. Activists and relief workers are [constantly detained and arrested](#) and live in a constant state of fear. Civil society organisations face immense challenges despite their crucial role in providing humanitarian assistance and monitoring violations. The general insecurity and instability, combined with [hostility](#) from the warring parties in Sudan, places civil society actors at constant risk. Relief workers [expressed](#) that they had a constant fear of being attacked by the Sudanese army. The war is also being used as an avenue to [suppress](#) pro-democracy activists.

In the coming months, civil society will continue to face challenges from the ongoing conflict, such as mass displacement, limited access to funding, and a lack of personal and institutional security. Restrictions on digital and civil liberties will intensify, with threats from parties to the conflict and armed militias escalating.

Despite the complex situation, there are opportunities to strengthen coordination between Sudanese organisations and international humanitarian actors, launch community initiatives in displacement areas, and leverage the digital space to amplify the Sudanese voice internationally.

To address these challenges identified above, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) Provide HRDs with specialised training on protection, advocacy, digital and personal security, and technical skills for modern monitoring and documentation processes. This will ensure that civil society actors have the knowledge to protect themselves and continue to have an impact in a restricted environment.
- 2) Promote peacebuilding efforts and reinforce the importance of neutrality among civil space actors to counter political classifications and divisions. Sudanese share a desire for the end of the war, and [different peacebuilding](#) initiatives have been implemented.
- 3) Create an impartial network or body to connect civil space actors, foster a sense of community, promote international solidarity, and encourage continuous documentation, engagement and advocacy work. Sudanese culture is communal, and this is one of the reasons for the success of [Emergency Response Rooms](#). Such a structure would greatly benefit civil society.
- 4) Launch global, regional and local advocacy campaigns to amplify calls for an end to the war and the protection of civil space in Sudan. The [situation](#) in Sudan is still undermined

both [nationally](#) and [internationally](#). Advocacy would ensure that the world is informed of the situation in Sudan and [provide support in any way possible](#).

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