



Human rights defenders without protection

A report from the heart of war in Sudan



Cover artwork by Ali Al Amin

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Cover artwork by the artist Ali Al Amin

List of abbreviations used

ACLED	The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
CIB	Coordinated inauthentic behavior
CSCSO	Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organizations
CSCs	Change and Services Committees
GIS	General Intelligence Service
FIDH	International Federation for Human Rights
HAC	Humanitarian Aid Commission
HRDs	Human rights defenders
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IHL	International humanitarian law
IHRL	International human rights law
LSHTM	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
MI	Military Intelligence
NISS	National Intelligence and Security service
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SHRM	Sudanese Human Rights Monitor
SPLM-N	Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North

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About the Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM)

The Sudanese Human Rights Monitor is an independent organization founded in 2005 and registered with the Humanitarian Aid Commission in Sudan. SHRM works to promote the protection, respect, and fulfillment of human rights in Sudan. It aspires to a Sudan where human rights and the rule of law are protected, and where all persons enjoy their fundamental rights within the framework of justice and equality, in accordance with international law. SHRM's mission is to protect and defend human rights in Sudan without discrimination, in accordance with international human rights law. We are committed to supporting human rights defenders (men and women) in building a just society where rights are respected and the rule of law prevails.

SHRM includes among its members HRDs from diverse backgrounds and generations, some of whom have contributed to the field of human rights in Sudan since the mid-1980s. It is a member of several national, regional and international human rights networks, such as the Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organizations (CSCSO), the Arab Organization for Human Rights, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and the Coalition for an Effective African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

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Executive summary

Since the outbreak of Sudan's war in April 2023, human rights defenders (HRDs) have faced unprecedented threats in an environment of violence, lawlessness, and institutional collapse. Both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have systematically targeted HRDs through arbitrary detention, torture, disappearances, harassment, and assassinations. Women HRDs have faced gender violence, including abduction and sexual assault. Documentation of violations has become very complicated due to mass displacement, communication blackouts, pervasive threats and constant danger, and severe restrictions on movement. The report draws on 25 interviews and case studies from across Sudan and exile communities, highlighting patterns of violations against HRDs, their criminalization, coping strategies, and the overall collapse of civic space. Despite the threats, HRDs continue their work through relocation to safer places, underground networks, digital adaptations, and exile-based activism, demonstrating resilience and creativity.

The report stresses that the war has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with famine, mass killings, and over 12 million displaced. As one of the most heavily targeted civilian groups, HRDs require urgent, multi-layered protection backed by local, regional, and international solidarity.

SHRM has developed a set of recommendations addressed to the UN and AU human rights systems and to national, regional, and international civil society organizations. It demands an immediate halt to attacks on HRDs by all warring parties and urges the UN and African Union to strengthen protection through urgent interventions, relocation and psychosocial support, digital and physical security measures, and mechanisms for safe documentation. Civil society actors must intensify coordination to sustain HRD networks and ensure that defenders can continue to carry out their vital work. Only by safeguarding HRDs will pathways to accountability, justice, and peace remain intact.

SHRM concludes that the protection of HRDs is inseparable from addressing Sudan's broader human rights and humanitarian catastrophe. International and regional actors must act urgently to safeguard defenders and ensure accountability, without which the space for rights and justice in Sudan risks total collapse.

Background

More than two years have passed since the outbreak of military confrontations between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum on 15 April 2023. The fighting and attacks on civilians have spread to multiple regions in Sudan, including Darfur and the states of South Kordofan, North Kordofan, West Kordofan, Sinnar, White Nile, Blue Nile, Gedaref, River Nile, Gezira, and Khartoum.

As the war continued, the SAF re-captured Khartoum and Omdurman and largely consolidated control in the eastern and northern parts of the country, while slowly expanding in Kordofan. The RSF is controlling most of Darfur and significant parts of Kordofan and recently declared a parallel government to be based in Nyala, South Darfur. The warring sides are actively fighting over territory in the greater Kordofan region, while drone attacks by RSF have caused infrastructure damage in relatively calm areas of Red Sea, Kassala, Gedaref, Northern and Rive Nile states.

Both sides have shown disregard for basic principles of human rights and international humanitarian law, the rules that should govern armed conflicts. They have attacked civilians and civilian infrastructure such as government institutions and major public sector enterprises, banks, markets, warehouses, and private vehicles. The RSF, in particular, has engaged in widespread looting and destruction of property, not only in Khartoum during the early months of the war, but notably in West Darfur, Gezira, and all territories they have occupied. The warring sides have also cut off communications, sometimes for months, further complicating independent humanitarian assistance efforts, SAF aerial bombardments have been indiscriminate, targeting RSF positions but also causing significant civilian casualties including markets, water points and residential areas.

The violence has killed an unknown number of thousands of civilians. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reported more than 28,700 deaths in Sudan from 15 April 2023, to the end of November 2024. These figures likely underestimate the actual death toll of the war, which could be as high as 150,000.¹ In November 2024, researchers at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) estimated that over 61,000 people died in Khartoum State alone between April 2023 and June 2024 due to the war in Sudan, including approximately 26,000 violent deaths, based on a capture-recapture analysis.²

The war has created the world's largest humanitarian crisis. In March 2025, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 30.4 million people are in need of assistance, and that 20.9 million will be targeted for assistance through the 2025 Humanitarian Needs Response Plan. International agencies also estimate that 12.66 million people have been displaced since April 2023, with more than 3.79 million of them crossing into neighboring countries.³

The combined effects of the war have deprived communities of food with large segments of the population now facing severe food shortages, hunger and starvation. In July 2024, an international famine monitoring group announced it had detected famine in five locations notably in Zamzam camp near El Fasher, and likely extending to Abu Shouk and Al Salam camps, as well as the Western Nuba Mountains. Moreover, they projected that by December 2024 to May 2025, similar famine conditions

¹ The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 'Conflict Watchlist 2025: Sudan', 21 February 2025, available at: <https://shorturl.at/ywJfe>.

² Dahab, Maysoon et al. 'War-Time Mortality in Sudan: A Capture-Recapture Analysis,' London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, November 2024, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5016438>.

³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Key facts and figures for the Sudan crisis,' 26 March 2025, available at: <https://shorturl.at/II9Qr>.

would spread to an additional five areas, including Um Kedadah, Melit, El Fasher locality, At-Tawisha, and Al Lait in North Darfur.⁴

Sudan's history is marked by shifting political and social dynamics, including persistent conflict and power struggles. Since gaining independence, Sudan has experienced multiple episodes of political upheaval, including military coups and civil wars. Throughout these periods, human rights defenders (HRDs) have faced severe repression, particularly under military regimes that ruled for extended durations. During the rule of former president Gaafar Nimeiri (1969–1985), the security organs detained and tortured peaceful activists and dissenters. Then, the long-running president, Omar Al Bashir (1989 – 2019), further empowered the National Intelligence and Security service (NISS) to repress opponents.

Sudan has also seen gross human rights violations during long-running wars in the South (1955-1972 and 1983-2005), the brutal counterinsurgency in Darfur in 2003, in the “Two Areas” of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile in 2011-2019, and during the current war that started in 2023. These violations included crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes including forced displacement, with HRDs, like all civilians caught up in the conflict, subjected to targeted threats, arrests, and assassinations.

During the Sudanese revolution (2018–2019), which led to the fall of Omar Al Bashir's regime, HRDs as leading activists played a critical role in defending peaceful protesters and activists, and documenting abuses against them, and demanding justice and accountability. Their work exposed them to severe risks from security forces, including violent repression and arbitrary detention. Many abuses occurred in the context of security forces' crackdowns on peaceful protesters, which killed hundreds in 2019 alone.

Methodology

While Sudan has experienced armed conflicts and repression for decades, the current war plunged the country into unprecedented crisis. In this context, Sudanese HRDs, defined for the purposes of this report as any individual who documents the human rights situation and/or takes peaceful action to protect civilians from violence and human rights abuses, are facing challenges because of their work.

This report seeks to describe in more detail the types of abuse, risks and challenges HRDs face as well as the coping strategies they have adopted. It also provides practical recommendations to improve their working environment and enhance their protection.

The report is based on interviews and a survey that SHRM administered between March and May 2025 with 25 HRDs from various professions including human rights monitors, trade unionists and members of professional associations, teachers, students, lawyers, journalists, and activists. Later, a couple of interviews were carried out for this updated version. The research included HRDs across different geographic areas including the Red Sea, Kassala, Kordofan, Khartoum, Northern, Blue Nile, and Darfur states, South Kordofan, as well as those who have sought refuge outside Sudan. The SHRM team also reviewed relevant literature and open-source digital material which includes relevant reports and documents issued by the UN and Sudanese and international NGOs, the SAF, the RSF, the Sudanese authorities, and the media, among other sources.

⁴ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 'Famine Review Committee: Sudan, December 2024: Conclusions And Recommendations', available at: https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Famine_Review_Committee_Report_Sudan_Dec2024.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

The names of most individuals mentioned in this report have been changed to protect their identities. In most cases, only the minimum necessary information is provided to avoid revealing who they are.

For the purposes of this report, we adopt the definition of a human rights defender (HRD) provided by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). As outlined above, according to OHCHR, an HRD is any person who, individually or in association with others, acts to promote or protect human rights peacefully. This definition is broad and inclusive, covering the promotion of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as women's rights and gender equality. Accordingly, HRDs may include teachers, journalists, peace workers, trade unionists, lawyers, NGO staff, politicians, government officials, or private sector employees. The definition is derived from the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (commonly known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998.

Legal Framework

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders elaborates how international law should protect HRDs: Article 1 affirms the fundamental right of every individual, alone or in association with others, to seek the protection and realization of human rights. Article 6 affirms freedom to access, exchange, and disseminate information, and to hold opinions concerning the implementation of human rights. Article 12 guarantees legal protection for those engaged in peaceful activities against rights violations. Importantly, the Declaration obliges States to take effective measures to protect HRDs from all forms of threats, retaliation, or arbitrary measures, thereby fostering a safe and legitimate environment for their work.

The UN has frequently reiterated the importance of protecting HRDs. The UN Secretary-General's 2023 Note on the Situation of HRDs specifically addresses the protection of women HRDs in conflict settings: "The protection of women HRDs is crucial in conflict and post-conflict settings, where they face specific challenges owing to their gender and the volatile nature of these environments. International law provides a framework for safeguarding the rights and safety of women HRDs, the aim of which is to ensure that they are active participants in and contribute to promoting peace, human rights, and gender equality."⁵

Under IHL, the current armed conflict in Sudan between the SAF and RSF is classified as an internal conflict, therefore the SAF, the RSF, and any other forces associated with them must abide by IHL, as expressed in Article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, Additional Protocol II of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions applicable in non-international armed conflicts as well as customary IHL.⁶

Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions stipulates that all persons in the hands of the enemy shall be treated humanely, without discrimination or harm. It specifically prohibits murder, mutilation, torture, cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, the taking of hostages, and unfair trials. It also requires the collection and care of the wounded, sick, and shipwrecked. The

⁵ United Nation, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders: A/78/131". 7 July 2023, see: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/78/131>.

⁶ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "'The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols,' 29 October 2010, see: <https://shorturl.at/s89jg>.

International Committee of the Red Cross is granted the right to provide its services to parties to the conflict.⁷

IHL, specifically Additional Protocol II, prohibits attacks on, the destruction, or removal of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, including food, agricultural areas, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works.

Under human rights law, Sudan is obligated to respect and protect the right to life of all persons within its territory, a non-derogable right under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which is also enshrined in Article 4 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Sudan is a state party to both treaties.

International human rights law also prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and unfair trials. It also stipulates the rights of individuals to the protection of their homes and families, and special protection measures for children and women in times of armed conflict. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights also affirms these measures.

Sudan ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2021, with Article 2(2) stating: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."⁸

Understanding the Threats Facing HRDs: Cases and Testimonies

With the outbreak of the current war in April 2023, Sudanese HRDs faced new and unprecedented threats amid complex and fast-changing security and humanitarian challenges. Depending where in Sudan they live, HRDs face everyday violence from the warring sides, SAF and RSF, and from other loosely organized armed groups that have emerged. They also have to operate in an environment of lawlessness, in which civilians have taken up arms for self-protection and organized crime like smuggling has surged.⁹

In the absence of functioning institutions, there is no protection or legal recourse for victims, and what remains of the judiciary often functions as a tool of retaliation, fostering a culture of impunity that undermines efforts to protect rights or deliver justice. As documented in this report, HRDs may be subjected to unfair prosecutions based on little or no evidence, which appear designed to repress activists who oppose the war.

The war has also changed the social fabric, bringing new threats to HRDs based on their identities and profiles. There has been a dramatic increase in hate speech, discrimination, and deep ethnic and political divisions. As activists, sometimes known in their communities as such, HRDs may experience more threats and discrimination than before the war. There are documented examples in which HRDs

⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 'Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,' available at: <https://shorturl.at/1Vnyz>.

⁸ OHCHR, 'Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,' December 1984, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading>.

⁹ General Malik Agar, Vice Chairman of the Sovereignty Council, said that there are 36 million weapons in the country. See: Beam Reports, 'There are currently 36 million weapons in Sudan and 36 million weapons in D,' 26 January 2025, available at: <https://shorturl.at/ONPuB>.

were subjected to psychological pressure through smear campaigns that falsely associated them with the agendas of conflict parties.

In sum, HRDs risk a wide range of abuses in the context of Sudan's war. These have included extrajudicial killings, detentions, torture and abusive treatment, flawed judicial proceedings, harassment, including direct threats and surveillance. The realities of working in hostile environments are an everyday fact of their lives. To survive, they must avoid unwanted attention and adopt creative, often low-profile methods of work. At the same time, they desperately need more local and international support and solidarity.

HRDs in Sudan face a wide range of threats, including direct physical violence, arbitrary arrests, defamation, and unfair prosecutions. The following cases illustrate the range of rights violations – which we are calling “threats” in this report – faced by HRDs. The cases show how defending rights has become an inherently dangerous act that jeopardizes not only HRDs themselves but also their families and social networks.

Arbitrary Detentions, Torture, Due Process Violations

The following cases are examples of unlawful detention of activists by RSF. They were carried out during the waves of arrests that started from the first day of the war. They demonstrate patterns of violations of international human rights law attributable to the RSF.

Abubakr Ibrahim, 42, is married and a father of four. Before the conflict, he worked as an administrator at a private school in Al-Hasahisa, Gezira State, and lived in Al Omda neighborhood. Since 2019, following Sudan's December 2018 revolution, he had been active in the town's Change and Services Committees (CSCs), contributing to civic and community initiatives. His involvement in these committees, which played a key role in grassroots mobilization and local governance, made him a visible civic actor and, consequently, a target for harassment.

Speaking about the circumstances of his arrest, Abubakr Ibrahim says:

"I was arrested by an RSF unit led by an officer on February 23, at around 1 AM, from my home. They blindfolded me, whipped me, and hurled degrading insults at me. The accusation was that I was a friend of a SAF officer who lives in the neighborhood and that I was cooperating with Military Intelligence (MI), a slander spread by someone I knew. I was taken along with two others to a detention site, basically a residential house in the neighborhood, where they kept beating us severely until around 4 AM. After that, we were moved blindfolded to another place, which I later learned were offices belonging to the Sur Textile Factory, used by the RSF as a detention center. There, I found dozens of detainees. We were placed in a 'container,' a kind of ventilation room annexed to the factory and divided into two small rooms. The one we crammed into was no more than 2 square meters, packed with about 20 to 30 people. My family had no idea where I was being held. However, a Non-Commissioned Officer from my neighborhood recognized me and informed my family. Later, the same officer was able to get me released. I was forced under threats to sign a pledge that I had no ties with MI and committed to cooperating with the RSF. I was released in the second day around 4 PM."¹⁰

This case illustrates multiple and overlapping human rights violations committed by the RSF. Abubakr was subjected to arbitrary arrest, reflecting a wider pattern of raids used to intimidate communities

¹⁰ SHRM interview, Cairo, 14 February 2024.

in Gezira at that time¹¹. During detention he was blindfolded, whipped, beaten, and insulted, amounting to torture and ill-treatment prohibited. He, and his fellow prisoners, were also held in degrading conditions, crammed with 20–30 others in a 2 m² cell. His detention in a private house and later in the Sur Textile Factory, both unofficial facilities, further breached his right to liberty and security of person and demonstrates the RSF's systematic use of non-designated sites for unlawful detention. His family did not know his whereabouts, amounting to a temporary enforced disappearance. He was forced, under threat, to sign a coerced pledge abandoning any ties with MI and promising cooperation with the RSF, in violation of fair trial rights and the prohibition of self-incrimination. His profile as a civic actor illustrates the criminalization of HRDs and the shrinking civic space under RSF control. The impact extended to his family, who were left in fear and insecurity, ultimately forcing him into displacement and exile, thereby violating his right to family life. In detention, Abubakr witnessed dozens of other detainees held in severely overcrowded and inhumane conditions, subjected to beatings and ill-treatment.

In another case, RSF personnel arrested on 18 January 2024 Ugail Ahmed Na'em, a member of the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate Council, from his home in Al Jaili, north of Bahri (Khartoum North), and took him to an undisclosed location, according to a statement by the Syndicate.¹² Ugail had been arrested also in January 2019 when he called on his fellow citizens in Al Jaili town to demonstrate peacefully. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate revealed that around 12 journalists, including women journalists were victims of detention and forced disappearance since the outbreak of war in April 2023 by both SAF and RSF¹³. These incidents amount to enforced disappearances, prohibited under international human rights law, and represent direct infringements on the right to freedom of expression and association (Articles 19 and 22 ICCPR).

On 15 February 2024, the RSF Intelligence Unit in Zalingei, Central Darfur State, arrested Sheikh Abdel Raziq Sulaiman, a prominent IDP leader in Dankoj camp in Saraf Omra. He was part of a delegation of IDP *sheikhs* en route to the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) to coordinate humanitarian aid delivery to their community. The arrest took place in the People's Square in Zalingei, and the group was taken to the RSF headquarters. According to information received by the SHRM, the arrest was ordered following an interview Abdel Raziq gave to *Radio Dabanga*, in which he described the worsening humanitarian situation and increasing threats to the movement of IDPs following RSF's control of the city. He criticized the deteriorating security and rising civilian targeting, especially IDPs.¹⁴ This arrest of Sheikh Abdel Raziq is an apparent retaliation for statements made in a media interview, illustrates reprisals against HRDs and obstruction of humanitarian engagement, in contravention of the rights to freedom of expression, participation in public affairs, and protection of HRDs as recognized by the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Collectively, these cases reflect a deliberate strategy by the RSF to silence dissent, intimidate civil society, and restrict humanitarian access, raising concerns of systematic and widespread violations that may amount to crimes under international law.

¹¹ SHRM has documented the situation in Gezira at that time in SHRM, 'Human Rights Violations in Gezira State: Terror, Humiliation and Constant Degradation,' July 2024, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/55ssyfja>.

¹² Medameek, 'The Rapid Support Forces militia arrested a member of the Journalists Syndicate Council, Mr. Aqil Ahmed Na'em,' 19 January 2024 available at: <https://www.medameek.com/?p=138566>.

¹³ See Freedoms Secretariat at the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, 'Freedoms During the Two Years of the War,' ND, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ueyu434e>.

¹⁴ Report by Yalla Narsud (Let us Monitor) Group, 18 February 2024, see: [عبدالرازق يوسف سليمان - حالة اعتقال - pdf - Google Drive](#)

On the other hand, cases of detention of HRDs by SAF illustrate various violations. In one example, Abdalla Tabir Ali Khamis, a 35-year-old lawyer from Al Faw, Gedaref State, was arrested by MI in Sinnar on 14 January 2024 and released on 16 February 2024. He stated that:

*"I was not allowed to contact my family or lawyer. The treatment was harsh. I had my first meal after three days of detention. We received only one meal a day. I developed malaria and gastroenteritis due to starvation. They poured cold water on thirst detainees as a method of torture. I was detained with approximately 120 people, including 8 children under 18. All detainees were accused of RSF affiliation, yet only two were actual RSF defectors. Those two were tortured daily. Four detainees died during my detention, one of them was buried behind the toilets in the Intelligence facility; we do not know where the others were buried. Women detainees were arrested and raped at night."*¹⁵

Abdalla Tabir Ali Khamis told SHRM how he faced harsh conditions including torture and lack of sufficient food. He witnessed abuses of children and sexual violence. His testimony illustrates multiple serious violations of international law. Detainees, including children, were held arbitrarily and incommunicado, denied contact with family or lawyers. They suffered torture and cruel treatment, including starvation, physical abuse, and sexual violence against women. Four detainees died in custody, with most burial sites unknown, raising concerns of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearance. All were accused of RSF affiliation, despite most having no connection, demonstrating collective punishment and violations of both international human rights and humanitarian law.

In another example, on 27 January 2024, Saif Al Dawla Ahmed Khalil, a 61-year-old self-employed businessman from Bara, North Kordofan State, was arrested by MI in Bara. He was transferred to El Obeid, where he was handed over to the General Intelligence Service (GIS). He described crowded and harsh conditions and lack of due process:

*"We were first detained at the General Intelligence Service (GIS) building in Bara, five of us: myself, Ustaz Rifaat Abdel Aziz, Ustaz Ezz Al Din Shatta (from the Teachers' Committee), Mujtaba Gasim Ahmed Marouf (from the Resistance Committees), and Sheikh Hussein. Mujtaba was released after three days. Later, we were moved to El Obeid Prison, where we found 70 detainees in two wards. We were placed in a ward with 35 detainees. The conditions were harsh but tolerable, meals were provided, and we were allowed to bring our medication. However, I was not charged [with any crime] and had no access to a lawyer. Only one family representative was allowed to meet me."*¹⁶

This case reflects clear violations of international human rights standards. Saif Al Dawla Ahmed Khalil was arbitrarily detained without charges, denied access to legal counsel, and restricted in family contact, violating the right to liberty and fair trial guarantees under the ICCPR. The overcrowded detention conditions, although described as "tolerable," nonetheless point to treatment that may amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading. The targeting of civic figures such as teachers and resistance committee members alongside him highlights the broader pattern of using detention to suppress civil society actors in conflict-affected areas.

Mohamed Al Mugaddam is a HRD from South Kordofan. He was arrested by the Military Intelligence in November 2024 and detained at a military base. He was released after five months in detention. No charges were investigated or filed against him, and his family and lawyer were not allowed to visit him. Al Mugaddam believes that the reason for his arrest was his previous civil society activism during

¹⁵ SHRM interview via WhatsApp, 21 February 2024.

¹⁶ A report from SHRM field monitors., 3 March 2025.

the transitional period, which was monitored by members of the former ruling National Congress Party. Speaking about the conditions in detention, Al Mugaddam says:

*"There were at least 40 detainees on average, sometimes up to 80. The cell for all these people measured 6 by 4 meters. We were given two meals a day, lentil with porridge for breakfast and lunch. There was no medical care, and if you got sick, you had to pay for your treatment and medicines. Sometimes limited treatment was available when a senior officer visited. We were allowed to go to the toilet twice a day: in the morning and at sunset. We could shower only once a week. Among the detainees were habitual criminals involved in smuggling, drugs, armed robbery, road ambushes, theft, and arms trade, and some were detained for allegedly collaborating with the RSF or the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N). Upon my release, I was clearly told that I must remain in areas under SAF control under their conditions, or leave the country, and that if I were arrested again, the situation would be worse."*¹⁷

About other detainees, Al Mugaddam adds:

"Individuals from certain tribes were specifically targeted, and arrests arbitrarily, based solely on their belonging to Arab tribes accused of cooperating with the RSF. Among the detainees were elderly people in their seventies and eighties. Detainees were used for cleaning and carrying water. Some detainees being tortured: beaten, forced to stand in the sun for long periods, made to crawl on the ground for distances, or forced to confess. Those who refused to confess were subjected to further beatings.

*Intelligence officers threatened detainees. One MI personnel, who admitted he was part of the Shadow Brigades¹⁸, threatened a detainee with rape when he protested against being tortured. A lawyer was arrested on suspicion of cooperating with the RSF and was tortured for denying the accusation. A week after his arrest, his father, uncle, and cousins, belonging to an Arab tribe from which at least 20 people were arrested over two months, were also detained and beaten. Many detainees suffered urinary problems after torture, sometimes for over a week, sometimes urinating blood, and occasionally ear bleeding and hearing loss. Some detainees who were released paid money through networks connected to MI officers. One detainee told me that his 15-year-old cousin was arrested to force her father to surrender himself."*¹⁹

The case of Mohamed Al Mugaddam illustrates multiple human rights violations by MI in South Kordofan. He was arbitrarily arrested without charge, denied family and legal access, and detained in overcrowded cells with 40–80 detainees in inhumane conditions, including limited food, medical care, and hygiene. He witnessed widespread torture, forced confessions, and ill-treatment of other detainees, including beatings, forced standing in the sun, crawling on the ground, and coercion of minors to pressure family members. Certain tribes were targeted, showing discriminatory and arbitrary arrests, while some detainees suffered long-term physical harm such as urinary problems, bleeding, and hearing loss. The case highlights a systematic pattern of abuse, ill-treatment, and intimidation of HRDs and other detainees, reflect both direct violations of their rights and the broader environment of repression and fear.

¹⁷ Exchanges with Mohammed Al Mugaddam through WhatsApp, August 2025.

¹⁸ Military organizations operating under the command of the Sudanese Islamic Movement. Ali Osman, Deputy to former President Al Bashir, threatened the protesters in the 2018 revolution that they would deploy these forces to suppress them.

¹⁹ Ibid.

SHRM has documented two deeply troubling incidents of serious violations against women HRDs, revealed in an urgent appeal published on 29 November 2024²⁰. The first case involved lawyer and former state parliamentarian Izdehar Gomaa, who was violently abducted on 24 October 2024, moments after leaving Karima court. Armed assailants dragged her from her car, brutally beat her breaking her arms and targeting her face and left eye. They immobilized her with plastic to suppress her cries before abandoning her unconscious in an isolated mountainous area. Despite clear evidence of intent to “dispose of her,” no suspects have been detained, even though Gomaa had previously filed complaints exposing corruption among local security personnel, raising serious concerns about institutional impunity.

The second case concerned journalist Rasha Hassan, who was arbitrarily arrested by men identifying themselves as members of the Special Forces while at an internet café in Ad Duweim. She was subjected to a degrading street-side search and psychological intimidation, then held overnight at military intelligence without legal basis. Her phone was seized and searched, including deleted content, without consent, in violation of professional confidentiality and privacy rights.

Both incidents highlight grave breaches of constitutional protections and international norms, directly linked to efforts to uncover local corruption. They also underscore the gendered nature of repression, with women activists and journalists targeted, reflecting a wider pattern of systemic violence against female HRDs in Sudan’s conflict-affected context.

HRDs’ Voices: Challenges and Resilience

The following testimonies shed light on the lived realities of HRDs during Sudan’s ongoing conflict. Beyond the direct violations described in earlier sections—such as arrests, enforced disappearances, and harassment, these accounts reveal how HRDs endure a wider spectrum of pressures that undermine their activism. They highlight the interplay between deteriorating humanitarian conditions, political and ethnic polarization, shrinking civic space, and the collapse of state institutions.

Taken together, the voices of HRDs illustrate not only the gravity of the threats they face but also the strategies of adaptation they have developed, ranging from underground or remote work to using technology to exile and reorganization abroad. Their narratives underscore the human dimension of abstract patterns of repression: the dismantling of networks, the silencing of civic actors, and the personal toll of fear, displacement, and loss. Yet they also testify to remarkable resilience and creativity in the face of overwhelming odds, reminding us that Sudan’s human rights movement, while deeply weakened, continues to survive.

Shoroug (a pseudonym), an activist from North Kordofan currently residing in Uganda, described how insecurity forced activists into exile:

*“We faced significant challenges defending human rights amid the ongoing war, especially threats to security and safety, and widespread job losses. The security pressures forced many HRDs into exile, creating a considerable vacuum in human rights activism. The conflict also disrupted funding, as accounts of some organizations were seized, making it difficult to pay rent and administrative expenses.”*²¹

²⁰ SHRM, ‘Wartime conditions are not permission to authorities to violate civilians’ rights: The assault on lawyer Ezdihar and the arrest of journalist Rasha are a violation of the constitution and international standards,’ 26 November 2024, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/v696h7fu>.

²¹ Interview with Shoroug through WhatsApp, 9 MARCH 2025.

She explained that GIS closely monitored all civil society and suspended independent public activities. As a result, groups that focused on documenting violations and helping at-risk people were compelled to relocate abroad or operate clandestinely.

The following testimonies illustrate not only the personal risks HRDs face but also the broader collapse of the enabling environment for human rights activism. Activists describe how the war has eroded the basic conditions necessary for their action: insecurity that makes fieldwork dangerous, communication blackouts that interrupt links with victims and partners, and the destruction of essential services that compounds community suffering. However, some of the testimonies also show that despite the serious violations and risks they face, Sudanese HRDs continue to resist, adapt, and find ways to survive or carry on their activism.

Sami (a pseudonym), an activist working in Darfur, explained how violence and restrictions have forced defenders to reinvent their methods:

“The war has escalated violence and violations, and deteriorated security hampering fieldwork. Disrupted communications and essential services have complicated documentation and victim support. HRDs have faced both direct and indirect threats due to their stance on the war, including personal threats, harassment, and restricted movement caused by numerous checkpoints. We minimized field movements, adopted remote work, and confidentially documented violations. The conflict has devastated local communities, causing mass displacement, increased violations against women and children, and the collapse of basic services, creating a severe humanitarian crisis.”²²

The impact of war on human rights protection has not been confined to active conflict zones like Darfur; even in relatively safe areas under SAF control, HRDs have faced severe repression. In Red Sea State, Raghd (a pseudonym) described how direct targeting and pervasive surveillance made ordinary activism almost impossible. She noted that defenders were subjected to arrests, constant threats, and movement restrictions, while communication blackouts further complicated both documentation and contact with international partners:

“HRDs face direct targeting, arrests, constant threats, and surveillance, alongside movement restrictions and disrupted communications. Documentation and communication with international organizations have been complicated, and forced displacement has added pressure on human rights efforts. Some HRDs have ceased activities or been forced underground. The situation has worsened fundamental rights such as health, food, and personal security in conflict-affected areas, while other regions experience severe security restrictions and repression of activists.”²³

Raghd explained that she and her colleagues adapted by changing documentation methods and relying on secure communication platforms. Her account highlights how even where active fighting is limited, state repression and the collapse of basic protections have driven HRDs into underground work, further fragmenting networks and weakening human rights advocacy.

Marwan (pseudonym), a nonviolent and peacebuilding activist from Kassala State, reported severe challenges faced by him and his colleagues. The deteriorating security situation, harassment including arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, and the persistent lack of internet and communication access severely hindered their work and coordination with other HRDs. The conflict disrupted Marwan’s team communication, causing loss of contact with some members and weakening their organizational structure. The escalation of violence and polarization, especially among youth,

²² SHRM interview with Sami, March 2025.

²³ SHRM Interview with Raghd, Port Sudan, 22 March 2025.

undermined support for nonviolent action and made advocacy efforts more difficult. Marwan himself survived two attempted arrests in Kassala, which ultimately forced him to flee both the city and Sudan.²⁴

Case Studies

Case 1: Weaponizing Law — The Case of Montaser Abdullah Suliman Khairallah

The case of the lawyer Montaser Abdullah Suliman Khairallah exemplifies the systematic obstruction faced by legal professionals defending human rights in Sudan. Montaser, 39 years old, married with two children and residing in Port Sudan, was arrested by MI on 5 September 2024. His detention was allegedly linked to a request he submitted to the Public Prosecution on 3 April 2024, seeking a review of a complaint against politicians from the Taqaddum Alliance. According to testimony from Montaser's family shared with the SHRM, he was subjected to ill-treatment during his detention. Montaser now faces multiple serious charges that, according to his lawyer, carry the death penalty. These include two articles of the Sudanese Penal Code, five articles of the Cybercrime Law, and two articles of the Counterterrorism Law. He remains imprisoned in Port Sudan under harsh and inhumane conditions, denied adequate healthcare.²⁵

Case 2: Torture and Death in Custody — The Case of Salah Al Din Al Tayeb Musa

There are numerous documented cases of detainees dying under torture, among them Salah Al Din Al Tayeb Musa, 33, a lawyer, political activist, and head of the Sudanese Congress Party in his town. Salah Al Din, a married father of one infant, was arrested from his home by a MI-affiliated force. He was blindfolded, handcuffed, and gagged before being thrown onto the back of a pickup truck in front of his family, a humiliating and traumatic experience. Arrested on 17 April 2024 at Al Azzazi School in Al Jazeera State, his family learned in early May that he had died due to torture.²⁶

Khalid (pseudonym), a nonviolent peacebuilding activist operating in Darfur and Kampala, Uganda, echoed similar concerns. He highlighted that the war created an environment of political polarization and social divisions. This factor together with the deteriorated security impeded the implementation of human rights activities and weakened cooperation among HRDs. Further Khalid explains "my work was also disrupted by my own displacement and exile."²⁷

Amin (pseudonym), a lawyer and human rights activist based in Khartoum, detailed the dual pressures HRDs face from both parties to the conflict due to their documentation of violations. Arrests and forced disappearances have forced many HRDs, including Amin himself, into exile for safety reasons. The ongoing insecurity and lack of access to Sudan have severely hindered his ability to continue his work. The breakdown of state institutions and civil society has made monitoring violations by both sides nearly impossible, jeopardizing prospects for justice and accountability.²⁸

Laila (pseudonym), a member of the Emergency Response Room (ERR) in Sharg El Neil, Khartoum North, described the direct targeting of HRDs through arrests, prosecutions, and killings. Movement restrictions and disruptions to essential services such as electricity and internet have severely limited documentation efforts and communication with international partners. These challenges, coupled

²⁴ SHRM interview with Marwan, Kassala, 21 MRCH 2025.

²⁵ Based on information provided by a HRD entrusted by the SHRM.

²⁶ Radio Dabanga, 'Shocking facts about the killing of lawyer Salah Al Tayeb with Sharp Blow to his head', 12 May, 2024. Available at the link <https://shorturl.at/aGN48>.

²⁷ SHRM interview with Khalid, West Darfur, 20 March 2025.

²⁸ SHRM interview with Amin, 21 March 2025.

with forcing activists into exile, have led to the dismantling of human rights networks and weakened coordination. As a result, Laila shifted her focus toward humanitarian work, relegating human rights efforts to cautious, underground activities.²⁹

Nora (pseudonym), a civil and political rights activist from South Darfur, underscored the profound obstacles created by the absence of communication networks, which rendered engagement with victims and documentation nearly impossible. She further explains:

"The lack of communication networks made it nearly impossible to contact victims and document violations. Ethnic polarization made cooperation difficult, as the war intensified tribal labeling and divisions. This situation was affected me and my colleagues psychologically."

Nora faced dangerous situations, such as being stopped and searched at the eastern gate of Nyala by RSF forces, where she was questioned for carrying a laptop.³⁰

Dangerous Working Environment During War

The ongoing war has created a perilous working environment for HRDs in Sudan, triggering a significant exodus of professionals abroad. This brain drain has severely disrupted human rights protection and limited activist's access to affected communities. Additionally, the conflict has fostered increased self-censorship and fear among HRDs, curtailing their activism and freedom of expression.

It has become increasingly challenging to research and share reports of violations during the war due to frequent internet and communication outages, alongside security restrictions that have severely limited fieldwork.³¹

The psychological toll on HRDs has been profound, as they face daily risks and ongoing threats, impacting their mental health and capacity to sustain their work. The environment has grown more dangerous as HRDs have been directly targeted through arrests, threats, and assassinations. Access to conflict-affected areas has become progressively difficult due to security chaos, reducing opportunities for documentation and victim support.³²

HRDs are subjected to direct threats via text messages or phone calls, and many find themselves listed as wanted individuals, intensifying psychological pressure and restricting their freedom of movement and work. Digital threats, including hacking attempts targeting HRDs' communication platforms, are deployed to criminalize, disrupt, or endanger their activities. These attacks undermine communication and digital documentation.

HRDs in exile also face risks, such as potential arrest by authorities in some of the host countries or challenges to the legality of their presence in these countries. The constant threat of persecution generates significant psychological distress, often forcing HRDs to distance themselves from family and reduce social interactions. Such conditions complicate the practice of human rights work considerably.

The lack of funding, human and technical resources, also undermines the effectiveness of human rights efforts.

²⁹ SHRM interview with Laila, Sharg El Neil, Khartoum Bahri, 22, March 2025.

³⁰ SHRM interview with Nora, South Darfur 21 April 2025.

³¹ See: Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, 'The telecommunications and internet sector is turning into a tool of war in Sudan,' 6 April 2025, available at: <https://almashhadalsudani.com/sudan-news/sudan-today/95291/>.

³² SHRM interviews with several Sudanese HRDs on the risks they faced during the ongoing war, March-April 2025.

As hinted above, the war has also deepened social divisions within Sudan, including within the human rights community, due to political polarization and ethnic or regional affiliations.³³ These fractures undermine coordination in advocacy networks, while direct targeting has compelled some HRDs to withdraw or relocate from their usual areas of work.

These challenges underscore the urgent need for sustained support in multiple forms that address different situations to ensure the continuity and strengthening of human rights protection in Sudan.³⁴

The severity and impact of threats faced by HRDs vary according to the location, the actors targeting the HRDs, and their tactics. In some places, armed forces use violence, killings, arbitrary detention, and torture - to intimidate HRDs. In other contexts, HRDs focused on social media threats, disruption to their communication channels, and efforts to undermine their credibility.

The table below summarizes the primary risks faced by HRDs based on SHRM's research.³⁵

Risk scope	Source of risk	Analysis of risk	Impact of risk	Level of risk
Extrajudicial killing	SAF and RSF	Many HRDs have been deliberately targeted and killed by both sides of the conflict.	Direct targeting and loss of life among HRDs.	High
Arbitrary detention	SAF and RSF	Arrests are mostly carried out without legal basis, posing a constant threat, especially amid the absence of an independent judiciary. Warring parties exploit security powers to detain HRDs as a means of deterring documentation and protection.	Persistent risk of detention undermining HRDs' work.	High
Harassment and threats related to exposing corruption	RSF and SAF	Addressing corruption involving powerful state and security figures exposes HRDs to intimidation, legal harassment, arrests, or physical elimination. ³⁶	Threats and attempts to silence critics, curtailing anti-corruption efforts.	High

³³ The Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) "Call for action to stop atrocious crimes and grave human rights violations in Sudan", 22 January 2025, available at: <https://shorturl.at/S8p3A>.

³⁴ SHRM interviews with several Sudanese HRDs on the risks they faced during the ongoing war, op.cit.

³⁵ This section is based on analysis of a questionnaire distributed to some HRDs and organizations in March 2025.

³⁶ See the cases of tow women HRDs, Lawyer Izdihar Gumaa in the Northern State and journalist Rasha Hassan in the White Nile State in SHRM, 'Wartime conditions do not entitle authorities to violate civilians' rights: The assault on lawyer Izdihar and the arrest of journalist Rasha are a violation of the constitution and international standards,' 26 November 2024, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/4nusbhhy>.

Blackmailing and social pressures	RSF and SAF	Families of HRDs are targeted or pressured to coerce HRDs into changing their positions or ceasing activities.	Psychological and social pressure on HRDs through family targeting.	Medium
Restrictions on freedom of movement	SAF and RSF	Administrative barriers and legal loopholes restrict HRDs' travel between regions and abroad, severely limiting access to victims and international monitors. Some reported travel times, such as from El Fasher to Port Sudan, extended to 14 days.	Delayed and limited access to critical areas and victims, impacting monitoring and advocacy.	Medium

The Impacts of War on the Activities of HRDs

The war's effects on human rights and humanitarian work in Sudan differ depending on regional and operational contexts. In some areas, HRDs have shifted their focus to providing emergency humanitarian aid, while others have prioritized documentation despite severe restrictions.³⁷ This diversity highlights the need for flexible, context-specific, and multi-pronged strategies.

Key impacts include:

- **Restricted freedom of movement:** Security controls and heightened risks have effectively closed off some regions. Coupled with communication and internet outages, these restrictions impede monitoring, documentation, and reporting of grave violations of HRL and IHL. The ability to provide direct support to victims has drastically diminished.
- **Halt of civil society activities:** The absence of a safe environment has led to suspension of community events aimed at awareness-raising and rights promotion. This disruption has weakened communication channels between HRDs and vulnerable communities.
- **Communication challenges:** Displacement and migration have fractured teams and organizations, making coordination difficult. Telecommunications disruptions, including internet and electricity outages, and strict control over alternative services such as Starlink³⁸, have further isolated human rights teams from one another and from victims.
- **Loss of operational stability:** The destruction or closure of workplaces has deprived HRDs of stable environments needed for their work. Legal practitioners representing HRDs or victims face harassment and arrests, further undermining justice efforts.
- **Displacement of victims:** Multiple displacements have resulted in loss of contact with victims, impeding delivery of psychological and legal support.

³⁷ SHRM interviews with a number of HRDs from Port Sudan, Kassala, Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, March/April 2025.

³⁸ While SAF banned the use of Starlink in areas under their control, the Starlink devices in the RSF-controlled areas were controlled directly by RSF officers who used them as a secondary income-generating investment. See: Atheer News, 'Decision on Starlink Internet Devices in Sudan, February 3, 2024, available at: <https://www.atheernews.net/131334/>; also The Tahrir Institute, "Internet in Conflict: Sudan's Battle for Connection", 19 September 2024, available at: <https://timep.org/2024/09/19/internet-in-conflict-sudans-battle-for-connection/>.

- **Economic and funding constraints:** The economic crisis, widespread job losses, and lack of financial resources have severely limited the ability of HRDs to respond to the growing need for documentation and assistance.³⁹

Practical Strategies Adopted by HRDs

Faced with these severe risks, HRDs have prioritized avoiding direct and indirect threats posed by the ongoing conflict. They have implemented various safety and security measures, ranging from heightened personal vigilance to digital adaptations and reliance on solidarity networks. Common strategies include:

- **Risk assessment and planning:** Regular evaluation of the security environment to update safety plans accordingly.
- **Secured communication:** Utilizing encrypted messaging applications to protect sensitive communications.
- **Safe houses and workplaces:** Relocating to safer locations or buildings whenever feasible.
- **Evacuation planning and emergency access:** Preparing evacuation routes, securing emergency communication channels, and accessing emergency funding.

Despite these efforts, the war's conditions have severely limited the effectiveness of human rights protection. The diversity and severity of risks force HRDs to continuously adapt to evolving threats that impact their ability to operate freely⁴⁰.

For example, HRDs originating from RSF-controlled areas who seek to renew their passports from SAF authorities in Port Sudan and other cities under SAF control often face significant delays because they are perceived as RSF supporters. To mitigate this, some seek assistance from acquaintances to complete bureaucratic procedures or choose to relocate to safer regions.⁴¹

What is considered a "safe" region often depends on a person's identity, particularly their ethnic background. For example, Kassala is geographically distant from active conflict zones and might ordinarily be considered safe for IDPs. However, this does not apply to everyone, as IDPs of Darfuri or Kordofani ethnic origin may face accusations of being a fifth column or affiliated with groups considered the social base of the RSF. The same pattern applies across eastern and northern Sudan, i.e., areas under SAF control.

Similarly, HRDs displaced from Khartoum who lack social or tribal or family support in their host community face increased vulnerability to arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention. The absence of such community protection has led many to operate underground or flee the country altogether. However, even in exile, threats persist as elements aligned with war parties continue to endanger HRDs' personal safety in refugee communities, exacerbated by growing political and ethnic polarization.⁴²

To reduce risks, many HRDs have limited their social media presence, temporarily shutting down personal pages or restricting access to trusted contacts only. Over time, some have cautiously

³⁹ SHRM interviews with several HRDs from Port Sudan, Kassala, Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, op. cit.

⁴⁰ SHRM interviews with several HRDs from Port Sudan, Kassala, Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, op. cit.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² SHRM has received information about such cases occurring in refugee-hosting countries in Northern and Eastern Africa.

resumed online activity minimizing public discussion of human rights issues and focusing instead on social topics to maintain safety for themselves and their families.

Movement within Sudan has become highly complicated and risky due to direct threats from multiple actors, pervasive surveillance, numerous checkpoints, and financial hardship. HRDs traveling from conflict or safe zones report incidents of robbery and theft of money and phones. Threats of enforced disappearance or death have compelled many to develop personal protection strategies, such as relocating to safer areas. Family safety remains a critical concern; the presence of relatives in war-controlled zones adds pressure on HRDs, influencing both their personal choices and professional activities.

Strengthening Practical Protection Frameworks for HRDs

Despite the escalating threats facing HRDs in Sudan, the current context underscores the urgent need to enhance protection efforts and bolster local, regional, and international support. The following proposed actions aim to deliver tangible outcomes that sustain HRDs' activities and amplify calls to end the war in Sudan:

Tactic	Means of Implementation
A multi-layer protection for HRDs	Establish emergency response mechanisms; develop and provide training on protection protocols; offer pro bono legal aid; provide safe houses and relocation support.
Advocacy and exposure of violations	Document and report violations against HRDs to international human rights bodies and special rapporteurs; advocate for inclusion of HRD protection clauses in ceasefire agreements and humanitarian frameworks.
Expand peaceful civic space	Support the adoption of new, less risky economic opportunities and tools; focus on protecting HRDs and local groups; international and diaspora support, with strong attention to women's leadership and safety.
Capitalize on local awareness	Leverage growing human rights awareness among youth and affected communities to build a rights-advocate society and promote a sustainable human rights culture.
Build networks and alliances	Promote coordinated action through local, regional, and international human rights networks and alliances, ensuring exchange of support and resources.
Build documentation and archiving platforms	Develop secure digital platforms for documenting violations and collecting evidence to facilitate local and international accountability efforts.
Ensure access to affected communities	Collaborate with local civil society networks; facilitate secure transportation and communication equipment; coordinate at field level; engage with local authorities, community leaders, and (when safe) engage non-state armed groups to guarantee humanitarian corridors and monitoring access; employ encrypted communication tools and satellite connectivity cautiously.
Advocate for accountability	Promote accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of serious violations against civilians via international or local judicial bodies to ensure justice and deter future violations.

Effective protection of HRDs in Sudan requires multifaceted capacity-building efforts, including:⁴³

- **Training** on personal protection, risk reduction in unstable environments, and operational effectiveness in wartime conditions.
- **Mobilizing solidarity** locally, regionally, and internationally through advocacy campaigns.
- **Implementing protection programs** against harassment, arbitrary detention, and torture, including legal aid and psychosocial support.
- **Community education** on rights and self-advocacy mechanisms to bolster local protection.
- **Tailored protection plans** based on regional threat assessments to mitigate risks.
- Emphasizing adherence to **IHRL** and **IHL** during conflict to open avenues for protection and reduce violations.
- Securing sufficient **financial and technical resources** is essential to maintain HRDs' activities, enabling development of documentation and monitoring tools and improving economic resilience through employment opportunities. Strengthening **local, regional, and international protection networks** enhances cooperation, coordination, and provision of emergency support, including relocation grants.

Investing in **training and capacity building** not only strengthens HRDs' competence but also ensures the sustainability of human rights efforts amid the challenges of war. Integrating a human rights perspective into ceasefire and mediation discussions elevates the profile of HRDs and fosters a more supportive environment for their work.

The Need for Accountability

The persistence of violations due to a lack of accountability highlights the necessity of robust mechanisms to end impunity. Strengthening justice systems, both local and international, is vital to reducing violations and enhancing IHL implementation to protect civilians and infrastructure.

As the conflict intensifies, Sudanese HRDs bear a historic responsibility to truthfully document and interpret the realities of war from a human rights perspective rooted in the country. This role extends beyond documentation to crafting a credible narrative that reflects victims' experiences and conveys their voices to the global human rights community.

Addressing this responsibility demands strengthening local HRD networks, improving coordination, and developing a unified human rights narrative grounded in professional principles. Structured cooperation among human rights actors in Sudan is crucial for engaging effectively with the international human rights movement through a collective, principled voice aligned with local priorities.

Holding perpetrators accountable, establishing effective protection mechanisms, and expanding local and international solidarity are essential steps to ending impunity in Sudan. Building strong regional

⁴³ This list is based on SHRM interviews with a number of HRDs from Port Sudan, Kassala, Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, op. cit.

and international human rights alliances further empowers Sudanese human rights defenders (HRDs), providing crucial support to enable them to fulfill their mission of defending rights, dignity, and justice—both within Sudan and on the global stage.

The persistent weakness of law enforcement and judicial institutions perpetuates crimes and impunity. Enhancing the efficiency and accountability of these institutions—by placing them under civilian oversight and reforming them in line with human rights standards—is vital to creating an environment that respects rights and prevents violations. Equipping HRDs with the necessary tools and skills to design and implement effective advocacy strategies for such reforms is equally important. This effort should be reinforced by building solidarity and cooperation networks that support HRDs locally, regionally, and internationally.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the past 26 months, Sudan has witnessed widespread and severe violations of international human rights law (HRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL), including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, the displacement of millions, and numerous documented cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence. HRDs have been the most targeted civilian group by all parties to the conflict. This report has highlighted the most significant threats and challenges faced by HRDs based on field testimonies, as well as their coping and advocacy strategies.

The following recommendations aim to improve the operational environment for HRDs and enhance their protection through coordinated efforts with relevant national, regional, and international actors.

Recommendations to the Warring Parties

- Allow HRDs and civil society organizations to operate without obstruction or intimidation.
- Immediately cease violations of IHL and HRL in all areas under their control.
- Investigate all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, or deaths in custody and ensure suspected perpetrators face prompt, fair, and public trials.
- Facilitate the access and cooperation of the UN Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) for an impartial and comprehensive investigation into violations since the war's outbreak on 15 April 2023.
- Prevent the targeting of civilians and combatants who have laid down their arms or are hors de combat on ethnic or regional grounds, and uphold the rights of prisoners of war and civilian detainees.

Recommendations to the UN Human Rights Systems

- Strengthen interventions to protect HRDs amid the ongoing conflict and collapse of national protection mechanisms through urgent and strategic measures.
- Activate UN special procedures and rapporteurs to publicly condemn targeting of HRDs and intensify documentation of violations against them.
- Ensure inclusion of HRDs' cases in Human Rights Council reports and resolutions on Sudan, underscoring their central role in human rights protection and justice-building.
- Provide structured technical and financial support for digital protection, documentation, monitoring, and training on personal and legal protection.

- Support Sudanese HRDs in developing secure platforms for documenting violations, guaranteeing data reliability, protection, and confidentiality.

Recommendations to the African Union Human Rights Systems

- Facilitate the role of the ACHPR Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and Focal Point on Reprisals in Africa through field visits and hearings on Sudan, and enable access to regional complaint mechanisms with legal support.
- Activate African special mechanisms to publicly condemn targeting of HRDs and intensify documentation of violations against them
- Protect displaced or exiled HRDs, particularly in neighboring countries, through cross-border cooperation involving host nations' institutions.
- Foster partnerships between Sudanese and African human rights organizations to build stronger protection and solidarity networks, enabling a unified and professional regional and international advocacy voice.

Recommendations to National, Regional, and International Civil Society Organizations

- Train HRDs on digital protection and personal security to reduce risks.
- Provide material and psychological support to enable HRDs to relocate to safer areas and continue their work, especially documentation and digitization efforts.
- Organize legal support for HRDs facing arrest or legal threats, while enhancing legal protection frameworks at all levels, including asylum and safe residency for those at imminent risk.
- Intensify international advocacy campaigns pressuring warring parties to respect IHL.
- Analyze obstacles to effective networking among diverse human rights groups within and outside Sudan, drawing lessons to foster stronger alliances and increase collective impact.
- Develop secure digital platforms for documenting violations and collecting evidence to facilitate future accountability efforts locally and internationally.



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