

The war on Sudan: the choice is ours

by Jean-Nicolas Armstrong Dangelser

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Mothers and children wait for a fortified peanut-based paste used to treat moderate acute malnutrition at Dabaniera Camp, Tawila, North Darfur, Sudan.

Photo Credit: MSF/Aurélie Lécivain

“The choice is ours.” This sentence has echoed in my mind throughout the time I spent in Sudan as part of the Médecins Sans Frontières operational support team responding to the growing humanitarian needs caused by more than 30 months of reckless war.

These needs are not confined within Sudan’s borders. They spill over into the vast gaps faced by Sudanese refugees fleeing for their lives to neighboring countries such as those in eastern Chad, where I also spent about a year responding to the humanitarian crisis.

Accountability for what is happening is, ultimately, a matter of collective failure.

I have met countless eyewitnesses. One memory that stands out is meeting refugees who fled the mass killings of June and November 2023 in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. I met them in May 2024, when the **Rapid Support Forces** (RSF) began the siege of El Fasher. They recounted their horrific experiences: thousands of their community members were slaughtered and they already feared that El Fasher would soon suffer the same fate.

Figure 1: Map of Sudan

Created with Datawrapper

I remember the shock and sadness on the faces of people **returning to Khartoum** after Ramadan in 2024. They were coming back to entire neighbourhoods completely destroyed after months of relentless street fighting and campaigns of indiscriminate heavy artillery shelling and airstrikes. The desolation was a stark indication of the tactics of the armed factions which aim to destroy the enemy and maintain power over people without any regard for the preservation of human lives and dignity.

I remember the mothers in the neonatology ward of El Geneina Teaching Hospital, counting how many newborns had died during the past week alone because of the unmet gaps in healthcare delivery across West Darfur.

The scale of devastation in Sudan is soul-crushing. The complexity of the conflict cannot be summarised in a few sentences, but what is clear is that the social fabric of the country is being ripped apart, and people are being forced to take sides by

the sheer survival pressure.

The forces at play are emerging from ethnic fault lines that warring parties exploit for their own gain — much like colonial powers did before them. These societal fractures are deeply rooted in the past, and the reverberations of the current events will be felt for generations to come.

I wouldn't describe what we are witnessing in Sudan as "inhuman", because that word itself is the first step of the "othering process" at the very root of the crisis. Rather, what we are seeing is the darkest side of humanity exposed through actions carried out against civilians in Sudan for the past 30 months.

Tragically, it reminds us of the genocide of the early 2000s. The violence unleashed during that period involved the exact same actors, even though many relations and alliances have shifted in the meantime. For too long, and still at the time of writing, the armed actors in Sudan are erasing the humanity of entire communities in their words on paper and in their speeches to justify the physical and cultural extermination of the people.

However, violence and darkness are not the only factors echoing from the past in today's situation. The generosity, courage and boldness of the Sudanese people are also extending old traditions of solidarity in various forms.

The community kitchens fed millions of people for months if not years and continue to do so. The networks of doctors and the [Emergency Response Rooms](#) treat hundreds of thousands of patients and saved countless lives. And these are only a couple of examples of the mutual aid ecosystem that exists in Sudan. Not only are they doing incredible work, they are also responsible for the bulk of the aid that the Sudanese people are receiving, particularly in areas that are off-limits for international organisations and state institutions for months at a time.

The international humanitarian community failed the Sudanese people when, at the start of the current war in April 2023, most international staff of all institutions abandoned them to their fate. It has continued to fail by not delivering aid where it is most needed, and at the scale required, due to a lack of leadership and coherence.

The same failure extends to international mechanisms: from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to the foreign powers deeply involved, directly or indirectly. Despite UNSC Resolution 2736, which demanded that the RSF end its siege of El Fasher, no concrete or meaningful actions were taken.

In the post-truth era we live in, every belligerent claims to defend civilians and uphold international humanitarian law, while decision-makers claim they have no

leverage to stop the violence. These are hollow declarations and empty gestures; the Sudanese people are still waiting to see genuine political will transformed into real changes in their lives.

Mutual aid flourished from tradition and conviction, but also out of necessity. As the conflict drags on, the needs continue to grow in more parts of the country, weapons continue to flow from foreign sources (despite a constantly violated embargo that should have been expanded from Darfur to cover the whole country), and international funding continues to decrease steadily.

Despite repeated warnings from history, from experts, from field workers and **from the Sudanese themselves**, those with the power to act across the international system have failed to prevent the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives.

This war has not been inadvertently forgotten; it is consciously ignored. The tragedy unfolding today was predictable, but not unavoidable.

The choice remains ours.

This blog was written as part of a partnership between the Development Policy Centre with Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders (MSF) Australia. MSF provides medical assistance to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from healthcare. Their actions are guided by medical ethics and the principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality. MSF Australia does not receive public institutional funding.

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