

## **Three years on, Sudan's civilians continue to bear the cost of grave violations of international humanitarian law**

Three years into the armed conflict in Sudan, the IHL Centre reiterates its deep alarm at the harrowing toll of the conflict on civilians, and the persistent failure of parties to the conflict to respect international law. Credible reports from across the UN system, as well as civil society, humanitarian and medical actors point to a pattern of serious and widespread violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law by the Sudanese Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces, and their allies.<sup>i</sup>

The IHL Centre notes over the past year the conflict in Sudan has been characterized by a disregard for IHL, as evidenced by, but not limited to, the following documented patterns of violations:

- Sexual violence continues to be perpetrated primarily towards women and girls in Darfur. Many survivors are civilians occupying the displacement camps in this region or attempting to flee hostile routes and are attacked while en route. Indiscriminate attacks continue to occur during the conduct of hostilities between the paramilitary group RSF and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). This has included indiscriminate shelling of civilian neighbourhoods or camps in their attempt to capture or recapture towns.
- Systematic looting and destruction of essential civilian infrastructure, specifically hospitals, water treatment plants, and humanitarian warehouses.
- Deliberate interference with life-saving aid delivery and the targeted killing, detention, and harassment of humanitarian personnel. All of which has led to starvation of the civilian population. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) has classified the food insecurity situation in El Fasher (North Darfur) and Kadugli town in South Darfur to be at a level 5 which is the highest level of food insecurity akin to famine and starvation.<sup>ii</sup>

The impact of the conflict on civilians over the last three years is simply catastrophic: Sudan is now considered to be the world's largest humanitarian crisis<sup>iii</sup>, with nearly 34 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 21 million lacking healthcare services, 8.6 million displaced inside the country and over 4 million having fled the country as refugees.<sup>iv</sup>

More than 40,000 injuries have been reported in Sudan since April 2023, while civilians continue to be killed, injured and displaced in ongoing attacks, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan.<sup>v</sup> The true death toll<sup>vi</sup> is unconfirmed but is likely far higher than available figures suggest: the UN has warned that documented civilian killings increased by more than two and a half times in 2025 compared with the previous year, with many thousands still missing or unidentified.

The IHL Centre therefore renews its urgent call for sustained and principled engagement with arms bearers to protect civilians, secure humanitarian access, and guarantee full compliance with IHL. Specifically, the IHL Centre reminds all parties to the conflict in Sudan of their obligations under IHL:

- Civilians and civilian objects must never be targeted.
- Parties must at all times distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives as attacks can only be directed towards combatants, members of non-state armed groups and their objects that contribute to military action.
- Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited, and parties must take all feasible precautions to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure from the effects of hostilities.
- All forms of sexual violence are strictly prohibited under both treaty and customary IHL. Such acts constitute grave breaches of the law, and commanders bear a clear legal responsibility to prevent, suppress, and punish these violations by officers within their ranks. Medical personnel, hospitals and humanitarian workers enjoy special protection under IHL and must be respected and protected.
- Humanitarian relief for civilians in need must be allowed and facilitated rapidly and without arbitrary impediment.
- The use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare is expressly forbidden, as is the destruction or removal of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, crops, livestock, and drinking water installations.

These obligations are not optional and do not diminish with the intensity or duration of the conflict. We also call on third states, the wider humanitarian ecosystem and the international community to exercise their influence to prevent and bring to an end all violations of international law in Sudan.

For any questions please contact [info@ihlcentre.org](mailto:info@ihlcentre.org). To access our [free and confidential advisory service](#) please see [here](#).

---

<sup>i</sup> See for example <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/sudan-third-anniversary-conflict-un-and-achpr-au-fact-finding-missions> and

<https://www.unicef.org/media/177086/file/2026-HAC-Sudan.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/countries-in-focus-archive/issue-137/en/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/14-04-2026-after-three-years-of-conflict--sudan-faces-a-deeper-health-crisis>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/sudan-third-anniversary-conflict-un-and-achpr-au-fact-finding-missions>

<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/public-health-situation-analysis---sudan-conflict-and-complex-emergency>

<sup>vi</sup> Please note that death toll numbers for Sudan are difficult to collect accurately and should therefore always be considered as an estimate.