

Statement on the Current Political and Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan
Issued Jointly by
The Undersigned Organizations
April 2023

The undersigned members of the [Religious Liberty Partnership](#) (RLP) and representatives of the [Refugee Highway Partnership](#) (RHP) who are currently convening in Kathmandu, Nepal, we express our grave concern at the escalating horrific violence taking place in Sudan, and we convey our deepest condolences to the families of perished civilians who have been unjustly victimized by the power struggle gripping the capital of Khartoum and the entire nation. In response to the outbreak of vicious brutality on 15 April 2023, a humanitarian crisis has unfolded in such severity that United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on 17 April urgently called for an immediate termination of hostilities: “The situation has already led to horrendous loss of life, including many civilians. Any further escalation could be devastating for the country and the region. I urge those with influence over the situation to use it in the cause of peace; to support efforts to end the violence, restore order, and return to the path of transition.”¹

On Saturday (15 April 2023) mere minutes after a ceasefire between the two forces, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), was to formally take effect, shots rang out after both parties accused each other of violating the peace agreement.² In the resulting struggle, civilians in the crossfire have borne the brunt of indiscriminate aerial shelling and artillery fire. To further exacerbate the situation, casualties are expected to rise as civilian infrastructure - including homes, hospitals, and power grids, have been partially damaged or wholly destroyed. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has reported that punctual and equitable provision of humanitarian services to affected areas is “nearly impossible” and that Sudan’s health system is “at risk of breakdown” due to hospital overcrowding and medical supplies being exhausted.³

The fighting between SAF and RSF has led to the ransacking and burning of churches, including the Anglican Cathedral. Cathedral families were evacuated, with 42 children. On Tuesday morning armed men broke the gate and entered the cathedral premises and destroyed parked cars in the church with guns. Archbishop Ezekiel Kondo reported that the RSF destroyed cars, the cafeteria, the store, and broke into one of the offices. He believes that they will also destroy the families’ houses within the compound. We call for an end to the targeting of civilians and the targeting of religious structures and institutions. We call for the restoration of peace.

The fighting threatens to undermine the already-fragile transition to peace and multifaceted improvements achieved over the past few years. We applaud a number of human rights and civil protections made in Sudan in recent years.

¹ UN News, [“Guterres calls for ‘immediate’ ceasefire in Sudan, as death toll mounts”](#), 17 April 2023. ; UN Web TV, [Antonio Guterres \(UN Secretary-General\) on Sudan at the opening of the Forum on Financing for Development](#), 17 April 2023.

² Al Jazeera, [“Fighting continues in Sudan hours after ceasefire was to begin”](#), 18 April 2023.

³ Al Jazeera, [“Fighting continues in Sudan hours after ceasefire was to begin”](#), 18 April 2023.

- With regards to gender-based discrimination and rights violations, following the April 2019 deposition of autocratic President Omar al-Bashir, in November the transitional government under Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok restored women’s freedoms to dress, work, study, and travel as they please. Months later in April 2020, a legal amendment was passed which criminalized the performance of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). Justice Minister of Sudan, Nasredeem Abdulbari, announced the move, stating “We are keen to demolish any discrimination that was enacted by the old regime and to move toward equality of citizenship and a democratic transformation.”⁴
- In February 2021, Sudan’s Sovereign Council and Council of Ministers approved two draft legislations to formally accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT); the ratification was officially completed by August.⁵ Pursuant to their obligations to these accords, the government prohibited the “infliction of torture” and coerced confessions, both of which have been recorded in Sudan, as well as other violations of the right to due process.⁶

We particularly applaud and affirm several remarkable improvements in Sudan specifically with regards to securing and advancing religious freedom. Many of these have taken place in the legal framework of the country and redefine the core basis of key institutions.

- The Interim Constitutional Declaration signed into force in August 2019 includes several provisions which outline citizens’ right to “profess or express their religion or belief through worship, education, practice, performance of rituals, or celebrations, in accordance with the requirements of the law and public order” and prohibits forced faith conversions and coercion to engage in activities of a religion to which citizens’ do not subscribe. [Article 56]. Article 66 pertaining to ethnic and cultural groups guarantees their right to manifest their beliefs and “observe their religious customs”, as well as raise their children according to such traditions.⁷
- In July 2020, the Sudanese government passed Law No. 12 of 2020⁸ which amended and/or repealed 15 problematic articles listed in its formal Criminal Act of 1991.⁹ Among the groundbreaking changes made were the abolition of the apostasy law and the inclusion of “a newfound provision “penalizing anyone who labels others as ‘infidels’. Additionally, Law No. 12 prohibits flogging as a penalty for blasphemy, or “insulting the religious beliefs of others”; however, it reprehensibly remains a legal punishment for the crimes of alcohol consumption, fornication, and adultery. Finally, in September 2020, Prime Minister Abdall Hamdok signed a declaration iterating that “For Sudan to become a democratic country where the rights of all

⁴ Jehanne Henry, “Sudan’s Law Reforms a Positive First Step”, *Human Rights Watch*, 16 July 2020.

⁵ Redress, “[In Historic Move, Sudan Ratifies Key International Treaty on Torture, Joining 171 Other States](#)”, 12 August 2021. ; Redress, “[Sudanese Government Approves Ratification of Key Treaties on Torture and Enforced Disappearances](#)”, 23 February 2021.

⁶ Jehanne Henry, “Sudan’s Law Reforms a Positive First Step”, *Human Rights Watch*, 16 July 2020. ; Mat Nashed, “[Police escape accountability in Sudan after prisoner death](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 9 November 2022.

⁷ Constitute Project, *Sudan’s Constitution of 2019: Subsequently amended*, 27 April 2022.

⁸ Library of Congress, *Sudan: New Law Amending Penal Code Takes Effect*, 23 July 2020.

⁹ Redress, [The Criminal Act 1991 \[Sudan\]](#).

citizens are enshrined, the constitution should be based on the principle of ‘separation of religion and state’”.¹⁰

The repeal of the apostasy law and the separation of religion and state are noteworthy steps that implement the recommendations outlined by both the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief¹¹ and the United Nations Secretary-General.¹² The key challenges for Sudan, however, will be to ensure the implementation of these developments in all spheres of life and to fight against the impunity of the past 30 years of discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities. Prior to the present unsettling developments of April 2023, many Sudanese citizens were already concerned that the steps taken to codify religious freedom would be endangered amidst the military’s growing influence; these apprehensions are duly felt in light of the crisis that has transpired over the past days.

We hope for a swift resolution to the current aggression and a resumption of the transitional peace process. Both Colonel Khaled Al-Akida and Musa Khaddan, SAF spokesman and advisor to the commander of the RSF, respectively, have asserted their willingness to reinstate the truce, which they carried out on 19 April.¹³ One Khartoum-based political analyst, Hafez Kabir, expresses that increasing international pressure could prove to be beneficial to de-escalation and armistice.¹⁴ Officials from the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have collaborated to urge for negotiations and ceasefire in their discussions with RSF and SAF leaders.¹⁵ The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) - comprising the presidents of Kenya, South Sudan, and Djibouti - have expressed plans to visit both RSF and SAF officials to pressure for a cessation of combat.¹⁶ We remain hopeful that such global engagement will imbue RSF and SAF with humanity and a sense of responsibility to ensure the safety of Sudanese civilians, and we urge additional national leaders with historical, cultural, political, and economic ties to Sudan whatsoever to leverage their connections and join these international efforts.

We call for the progressive steps taken with regards to civil liberties effectuated over the course of the previous years to endure in spite of the contemporary upheaval, as they have officially been enshrined in the country’s legal framework and because they express the collective will of the Sudanese people who have courageously and tirelessly fought for democracy, human rights, and a leadership which serves citizens’ best interests. The survival of Sudan and the fulfillment and satisfaction of Sudanese people is therefore dependent upon a swift termination of unlawful and inhumane hostilities and a resumption of the peace efforts undertaken by the civilian transitional government. Furthermore, we call for accountability for the atrocities committed by present and former state actors, as justice is essential for lasting peace.

¹⁰ Mohammed Alamin, “[Sudan Ends 30 Years of Islamic Law by Separating Religion, State](#)”, *Bloomberg*, 4 September 2020.

¹¹ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*, [A/HRC/40/58](#), 5 March 2019, para. 58.

¹² UN Human Rights Council, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, *Capital punishment and the implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty*, [A/HRC/42/28](#), 28 August 2019, para. 46.

¹³ Al Jazeera, “[Fighting continues in Sudan hours after ceasefire was to begin](#)”, 18 April 2023.

¹⁴ Arwa Ibrahim & Hafsa Adil, “[Sudan live news: Fighting continues despite new ceasefire](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 19 April 2023 [regularly updated].

¹⁵ Maziar Motamedi, “[Can the international community stop the fighting in Sudan?](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 19 April 2023.

¹⁶ Mariama Diallo, “[IGAD to Send Three Presidents to Mediate Crisis in Sudan](#)”, *Voice of America*, 17 April 2023.

We also recognize the troubling implications of the current situation on internally displaced peoples (IDPs) residing in and asylum seekers being hosted by Sudan. Nearly 800,000 refugees in the nation, half of whom are women, reside in Khartoum and White Nile after escaping famine and flooding in South Sudan.¹⁷ An estimated 133,000 Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees in eastern Sudan entered the nation as a result of the death and destruction taking place in the region of Tigray, and Sudan is an essential corridor to transport humanitarian aid to the countries from which they flee and where thousands remain in need.¹⁸ 95,000 Yemeni refugees¹⁹ escaping civil war and Syrian refugees²⁰ fleeing conscripted military service currently reside in Khartoum, the hotbed of fighting, and refugees from Central African Republic (CAR) are further stretching the already-limited resources.²¹ Any further influx of asylum seekers is incredibly dangerous, and yet Sudan's geographic location among multiple other emergency-fraught African nations - Chad, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia - renders it a destination for resettlement despite its now-cripple health, water, and food infrastructure.²²

We express our deep concern for these communities. The present conflict posits a catastrophic risk to the stability of not only Sudan, but the entirety of the Sahara, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa. Along with our disquietude regarding the current state of affairs Sudan and adjacent regions, we express our solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are bravely fighting for justice and for their future, and we appeal for prayer across the world for a change in the hearts of those actors whose activities wreak havoc on freedom-aspiring citizens. We pray for God's wisdom and strength to surround our Sudanese brothers and sisters in battle, and for deliverance from harm. We pray that the international rouses to altruistically offer humanitarian and diplomatic assistance, and that such engagement brings about accountability and justice, sustainable peace and reconciliation, and healing.

We exalt the prayers and testimonies of faith leaders in Sudan who have witnessed the atrocities, and who have fearlessly spoken out against the rival forces and represented the collective voice of hundreds of thousands of Sudanese civilians. On 17 April, members of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference (SCBC) issued a public statement that "We call for an end to the fighting and rever[sion] to dialogue in order to preserve the unity of the country and not to further the suffering of the people. [...] My brothers, never grow tired of doing what is right (2 Thessalonians 3:13), and this applies to our call for prayers and for the calm in Sudan."²³

¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Emergency Appeal: South Sudan emergency](#), updated March 2023.

¹⁸ ACAPS, [Sudan](#).

¹⁹ Jonathan Fenton-Harvey, "[The Forgotten Yemeni Refugees](#)", *Inside Arabia*, 30 September 2020.

²⁰ Fatma Naib & Durra Gambo, "[At least we are treated as humans': Syrians in Sudan](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 7 December 2015.

²¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Sudan: Central African Republic Refugees in Sudan \(as of 28 February 2023\)](#) [data set].

²² Hamza Mohamed & Usaid Siddiqui, "[Could the Sudan unrest inflame the Horn of Africa](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 18 April 2023. ; Al Jazeera, "[What is happening in Sudan? A simple guide](#)", 18 April 2023.

²³ Patrick Juma Wani, "[End the fighting, revert to dialogue': Catholic Bishops to Rival Forces in Sudan](#)", *Aciafrica*, 18 April 2023.

Endorsements from Religious Liberty Partnership and Refugee Highway Partnership Members

Organization Signatories:

Advocates International

African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries

American Association of Evangelicals

Anglican Persecuted Church Network

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Jubilee Campaign USA

Katartismos Global

Law and Liberty Trust

Missão em Apoio à igreja Sofredora

Philo Global

Red Eagle Enterprises

Save the Persecuted Christians

Spirit of Martyrdom International

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

Voice for Justice

Voice of the Persecuted

Individual Signatories:

Ann Buwalda

Executive Director

Jubilee Campaign USA

Bishop John Candelin

Myanmar Lutheran Church

Dede Laugesen

Executive Director

Save the Persecuted Christians

Ed Brown
Secretary General
Stefanus Alliance International

Faith McDonnell
Director of Advocacy
Katartismos Global

Floyd Brobbel
Chief Executive Officer
The Voice of the Martyrs Canada

Lauren Homer

Joseph Jansen
Chairperson
Voice for Justice

Patricia Streeter
Co-Leader
Anglican Persecuted Church Network

Reverend Susan Taylor
National Public Affairs Director
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Scott Morgan
President
Red Eagle Enterprises