

Trócaire Speaking Points
Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence
October 8th, 2024

Women, Peace and Security

This is a man-made crisis and, as is so often the case, it is women and girls who are uniquely and disproportionately affected. In fact, Sudan represents a most extreme crisis of protection of women and girls.

Sexual violence has been weaponised by the warring parties and the bodies of women and girls used as battlefields.

The ages of victims range between 8 and 75 years.

Survivors of these horrific crimes report being beaten, lashed, and threatened with death or harm to their relatives or children, before being raped.

Furthermore, women human rights defenders, journalists, and medical personnel are also victims of sexual violence, in what appears to be ‘punishment’ for their activities.

Such violence is intended to break individuals and communities. Suicide rates among survivors of sexual violence is increasing. The number of children born out of rape is surging – they, like their mothers will be stigmatised. Most will never

Many of these women are so young, and so malnourished, that their bodies, and their children will struggle to survive pregnancy to full term.

Support to these women and girls is lacking due to the destruction of health facilities, lack of access to them by mobile health services, and shortages of funding.

The women of Sudan however are not passive victims. Many are on the front line of humanitarian response providing humanitarian reach and access to those where many international actors cannot.

They have long been integral to the success of grassroots movements in the country including just 5 years ago when protests by civil society led to the overthrow of the country’s long-time military dictator Omar al-Bashir.

Despite this, their voices are being continually denied.

- denied equitable participation in the now divided Transitional Government of Sudan intended to form a pathway to democracy;
- denied in their concern at the decision to withdraw UN peace operations from the western states of Darfur in 2020 which today leaves a security vacuum in which so much violence occurs;
- denied now assistance and protection as victims and survivors of violence let us be clear, assistance delayed is assistance denied
- denied access to humanitarian funding (only 1.63% of the Sudan Humanitarian Fund – a country based Pooled Fund - in 2023 went to local women’s organisations)
- denied justice for the crimes committed against them

- and denied once again as participants in negotiations to bring about an end to violence

It is time to deny them no more.

Over the past 24 years, the UN Security Council has passed a series of resolutions known as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This agenda recognises the unique and disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls – including sexual violence. Amongst its many provisions, it calls for action to protect them, access to services essential to their well-being, and their meaningful participation and voice in efforts to resolve conflict and build peace.

Importantly, Ireland is a respected champion of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

In this context, we ask that you:

- **Advocate for and support inclusive efforts to end conflict and build peace. Consistent with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, this includes promoting the meaningful participation, voice and leadership of the women of Sudan.** As Parliamentarians who understand and enjoy the privileges of an inclusive parliamentary democracy, we ask you to be visible and audible in this regard. Amplify their voices. Express your solidarity. Champion their cause, their right to protection, right to assistance, right to a voice in decisions that affect them now and as part of Sudan's future. As experience has shown on this island, peace and justice are hard won but all the better, and all the more sustainable, when it is inclusive.
- **Advocate for Sudan to be included as a key partner country under Ireland's international development programme and Ireland's next National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security due in 2025.** As exemplified by Ireland's voice and solidarity with those impacted by conflict and violence in other parts of the world including during Ireland's presence on the UN Security Council, Ireland has strategic opportunity to continue to again differentiate itself and provide leadership amongst member states and leading donors. The people of Sudan need allies like Ireland with a reputation for promoting respect for international norms.
- **Ask whether Ireland's ODA funding is accessible to local actors, including women centred organisations directly supporting survivors of GBV,** with unique reach and access to those furthest behind and inaccessible to international actors. This means direct funding or funding through intermediaries *with sustained equitable partnerships* with local actors.

Challenging the Trend of Failing Multilateralism

Conflict in Sudan is characterised by an almost complete absence of respect for international norms.

These norms include international humanitarian law, also known as the law of war, and which for humanitarian reasons seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict. This law places obligations on warring parties to conduct hostilities in a manner that avoids harm to the civilian population.

It also includes human rights law, universal and inalienable rights inherent to all human beings without distinction – this includes the right to life, liberty and security of person, right to freedom

from torture and degrading treatment, the right to democracy. It also includes the right to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms can be fully realised.

These laws are being violated by the parties to the conflict.

But they are also being aided by a divided and failing multilateral system which is failing to ensure respect for these international norms. This is leading to an increase in protracted conflict in the world amongst which Sudan risks becoming another statistic.

Sudan represents but one of almost 60 (59 in 2023) violent conflicts in the world. This is the largest number since World War II. The number of people forcibly displaced in the world is now at a record 117 million people. Those displaced are displaced for longer in the absence of efforts to promote sustainable peace. For refugees, the average length of displacement is 20 years, it is 10 years for IDPs.

Members of the UN Security Council, with particular responsibility for the promotion of international peace and security, are themselves violating or providing diplomatic cover to others violating international humanitarian law e.g. Russia in Ukraine, the US in its support for Israel. The UAE, an ally of western powers (the US and the UK), is arming the RSF, one of the two main parties to the conflict.

Notably, there has been no new *major* deployments of UN Peace-Keeping Forces anywhere in the world since 2014 despite the fact that the world is facing the highest number of violent conflicts since World War II. (This is due to Russia and China in particular pushing back against any actions which undermine state sovereignty, there is a lack of funding, and many states are actually asking UN Peace-Keeping Missions to leave e.g. in DRC, in the Sahel)

Critical leadership is required within the international community to prevent further erosion of international norms. Ireland has demonstrated this leadership in condemning violations of international law and calling for accountability for war crimes committed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Ireland to date has been vocal in condemning the violations of international law in Sudan. Doing so further will not only defend and promote respect for the rule of law, it will reaffirm Ireland's credentials as a candidate for future membership of the UN Human Rights Council.

We therefore ask that this House promotes respect for international norms by utilising the levers of diplomacy at its disposal including by:

- **Continuing to condemn violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law through public and private diplomacy** including attacks on civilians, the imposition of bureaucratic and other impediments to humanitarian access, the use of starvation as a weapon of war, and the sale and/or transfer of weapons by third parties and their intermediaries to the parties to the conflict contrary to the Arms Trade Treaty.
- **Continuing to call for an immediate and sustainable ceasefire and supporting the establishment of an independent monitoring and verification mechanism to enforce it.**

- **Supporting and amplifying calls for the deployment of an independent and impartial force with a mandate to protect civilians in Sudan (e.g. a UN mandated or other Peace Keeping Force e.g. by the AU).** The protection of civilians is paramount, and the parties must comply with their obligations under international law. Such a force has the potential to fill the protection gap created by the premature winding down of UN Mission in Darfur in 2020). As a country with the longest continuous contribution to UN peacekeeping, Ireland has legitimacy and credibility in making this call.

- **Supporting and amplifying calls for the UN Security Council to expand the recently renewed sanctions regime for Darfur (this includes assets freezes and travel bans and an arms embargo) to cover *all parts* of the country.** The UN Security Council has failed the people of Sudan by not seeking to limit the flow of arms into all parts of Sudan from where they easily flow into the Darfur states in the country's west.

- **Advocating for an expansion of EU sanctions** on those involved in and enabling the conflict – this means broadening the list of those targeted by sanctions to accommodate wider political and military elites, their corporate networks, and their enablers including international proxies. This should be done in coordination with UK and US sanctioning authorities and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

- **Supporting the resourcing of the recently renewed mandate of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan** noting
 - the continued deterioration of respect for the rule of law in the country since the mandate was created in October 2023;
 - that delayed funding has undermined the work of the Mission to date;
 - it is the only international mechanism with the mandate, expertise and experience to independently investigate and report on violations committed in the entire territory of Sudan since April 15, 2023, including their root causes (the ICC investigation *currently* only includes Darfur while a Joint Fact-Finding Mission of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) the AU Peace and Security Council has not yet been operationalised.

- **Supporting calls for the expansion of the current mandate of the ICC in Darfur to cover all of Sudan** - the current mandate focusses on alleged genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur only as a result of a referral by the UN Security Council in 2005 (note Sudan is not a signatory to the ICC / Rome Statute so this would have to be by a UNSC resolution which would be difficult under present circumstances). This ask is a recommendation of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission.