



**Under siege:**  
**the situation of human rights in El Fasher, North Darfur**  
**since May 2024**

## I. Introduction

1. On 15 April 2023, hostilities broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum state and Merowe, and, soon after, in the Darfur region. By the end of November 2023, the RSF had taken control of four out of five Darfur states, leaving only parts of North Darfur, including the capital El Fasher, under the control of the SAF and aligned armed movements (signatories of the Juba Peace Agreement, commonly called the “Joint Forces”).<sup>1</sup>

2. El Fasher has a population of over one million people and hosts hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) who are survivors of prior ethnic conflict in Darfur. Since July 2023, the number of IDPs in El Fasher has increased, with thousands of people, mostly belonging to African tribes, fleeing fighting in South and Central Darfur states.

3. Since May 2024, the RSF, supported by allied Arab militia, have encircled El Fasher, preventing the movement of the SAF and the Joint Forces and cutting them off from support and supply channels, effectively besieging the city. From May to November 2024, the RSF launched attacks from the east, west and south, seeking to gain control of the city, using heavy artillery shelling and “suicide drones” designed to be deliberately crashed into targets. The SAF carried out airstrikes and artillery shelling to repel RSF attempts to advance. The intense hostilities have resulted in civilian deaths, injuries, destruction of civilian infrastructure and a worsening humanitarian situation.<sup>2</sup>

4. On 13 June 2024, the UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 2736 \(2024\)](#), demanding that the RSF halt the siege of El Fasher and calling for an immediate halt to the fighting and de-escalation in and around the city. The Council further demanded that all parties to the conflict ensure the protection of civilians, including by allowing civilians to move within and out of El Fasher to safer areas, and recalled that all civilians must be protected in accordance with international law.

5. Seven months of siege and hostilities have transformed the city of El Fasher into a battleground, and despite commitments made by the parties to the conflict on the protection of civilians,<sup>3</sup> the human rights situation continues to deteriorate. This report highlights patterns and trends of violations documented from May to November 2024, providing emblematic cases.

## II. Methodology

6. On 26 September 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Government of the Republic of Sudan signed an Agreement to establish an OHCHR Country Office in Sudan. Pursuant to this Agreement, and in accordance with the High Commissioner’s global mandate under UN General Assembly resolution 48/141, the OHCHR Sudan Country Office monitors and reports on the human rights situation in Sudan.

7. The findings in this report are based on human rights monitoring undertaken by OHCHR and interviews conducted in October and November 2024 with 52 victims and witnesses (23 male, 29 female) who had fled El Fasher since May 2024. Through first-hand testimonies and corroboration with primary and secondary sources, OHCHR documented emblematic cases and patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law occurring in El Fasher since May 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> Primarily composed of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minawi and the Justice and Equality Movement, along with elements of smaller groups.

<sup>2</sup> See statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 26 September 2024: [Sudan: Türk sounds alarm over hostilities in El Fasher, warns of serious human rights violations | OHCHR](#).

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan, signed by the SAF and RSF on 11 May 2023; Security Council Resolution 2736 (2024) calls for its full implementation.

8. In gathering, assessing and analyzing information collected, OHCHR’s standard methodology on human rights monitoring, including the principle of “do no harm”, was applied. Information gathered was corroborated using multiple independent sources, to establish facts and analyze violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law in the context of the ongoing hostilities. The standard of proof of “reasonable grounds to believe” was applied.

### III. Legal framework

9. A non-international armed conflict is ongoing in the Sudan between the SAF and the RSF, supported by their respective allied armed movements and militia. In this situation, international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) continue to apply concurrently.<sup>4</sup>

10. IHL limits the means and methods used in the conduct of hostilities, and protects persons who do not, or no longer, participate in such hostilities. Medical and religious personnel and objects, as well as humanitarian relief personnel and objects, in addition to children, are granted special protection. The parties to a conflict are obliged to respect IHL, including the principles and rules of precaution, distinction and proportionality. They must at all times distinguish between civilians and persons taking a direct part in hostilities, as well as between civilian objects and military objectives. Parties to the conflict are also under a duty to avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas.<sup>5</sup>

11. Under IHL, sieges are not prohibited when directed exclusively against the opposing party to the conflict. However, civilians who remain in a besieged area continue to be protected and must be allowed to leave the area. The imposition of sieges that endanger the lives of civilians by depriving them of goods essential for their survival is prohibited.<sup>6</sup> IHL also prohibits attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Further, parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief to civilians in need.<sup>7</sup>

12. The Sudan has signed but not yet ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, thus it is not a party. However, the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction over crimes listed in the Rome Statute committed in Darfur by virtue of Security Council [Resolution 1593 of 31 March 2005](#), referring the situation prevailing in Darfur since 1 July 2002 to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. On 13 July 2024, the Prosecutor stated that this mandate is ongoing with regard to crimes committed in Darfur since 15 April 2023.<sup>8</sup>

### IV. Key findings

13. Since the siege of El Fasher began in May 2024, OHCHR has documented the killing of at least 782 civilians and the injury of over 1,143 others in the context of hostilities in the besieged city. These figures, based on OHCHR monitoring, do not purport to be comprehensive.

14. OHCHR’s findings indicate a persistent disregard by the parties to the conflict for fundamental principles and rules of IHL, as evidenced by the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated urban areas, and direct attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including attacks on health facilities. The conduct of hostilities has had

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<sup>4</sup> The applicable legal framework is set out in reports of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council: see [A/HRC/55/29](#) and [A/HRC/50/22](#).

<sup>5</sup> ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I, Rule 23.

<sup>6</sup> ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I, Rules 53 – 56.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. See also <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/protection-civilian-population-during-sieges-what-law-says>.

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-khan-kc-uk-2024-07-13>.

a devastating impact on the enjoyment of human rights, in particular the rights to life and physical integrity, food, health and an adequate standard of living.

(a) *Attacks affecting civilians and civilian objects*

*Indiscriminate attacks and lack of precautions*

15. OHCHR monitored several incidents raising concerns about compliance with the prohibition under international humanitarian law of indiscriminate attacks and the obligations under the principle of precaution to take constant care, in the conduct of military operations, to spare the civilian population, and to take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population under their control against the effects of attacks.<sup>9</sup> Survivors who fled El Fasher gave consistent testimonies about **regular and intense artillery shelling by the RSF on densely-populated residential areas** in the southern, eastern and south-eastern parts of the city since the beginning of the siege in May 2024, up until the time of reporting. In addition to intense artillery shelling by the RSF, the hostilities also involved **recurrent airstrikes by the SAF and artillery shelling by both the SAF and the Joint Forces**. In most cases, attacks were conducted without warning despite the presence of thousands of civilians, raising concerns regarding respect for the principle of precaution, and may amount to indiscriminate attacks.

16. According to testimonies gathered, the city witnessed a sharp escalation of hostilities during the month of June, including in the north and north-west, leaving no safe area in El Fasher. Residents who fled El Fasher recounted that they believed the regular and intense RSF shelling was deliberately aimed at forcing people out of their houses, leaving their belongings behind. Indeed, witnesses reported extensive looting of houses and shops by the RSF. *“The RSF and their allies are now established in our houses,”* one witness told OHCHR.

17. Civilians found themselves caught in the middle of shelling and exchange of fire between parties to the conflict. There were no safe spaces for residents of El Fasher, even within their own homes. In cases documented by OHCHR, victims died inside their houses, in markets, in the vicinity of hospitals and in the streets. In the southern neighbourhood of Al-Thawra Janoub, where hostilities escalated in early June 2024, residents were not able to collect bodies of those who died in the streets for days, due to the continuous shelling and heavy exchange of fire.

18. A female resident of Al-Thawra Janoub recounted to OHCHR that two days before *Eid al-Adha* (around 15 June 2024), the RSF fired artillery shells into the neighbourhood, one of which exploded in the neighbouring house, killing three members of their neighbours’ family and injuring four others.

19. *“When the shells started falling, we would hide behind a building. Sometimes, the shelling would go on from 6 a.m. until midnight. The shells would come suddenly, destroying everything in their path, even the trees,”* stated a female resident of Al-Quba neighbourhood.

20. A 40-year-old woman told OHCHR that both her father and her husband were killed in August 2024, as result of RSF shelling and a SAF airstrike: *“My father was killed by an RSF shell in the Jebel neighbourhood near the main market, and my husband was killed by a SAF missile at home in Tumbasi neighbourhood near the livestock market.”*

21. Victims and witnesses gave consistent testimonies that members of the RSF, SAF and Joint Forces were stationed within residential neighbourhoods **using civilian objects, mainly residential buildings, for military purposes**. *“Our entire neighbourhood was filled with army [SAF] checkpoints,”* said a 50-year-old woman from Al-Tekarir neighbourhood. In the southern and south-eastern neighbourhoods of El Fasher, members of all parties to the conflict are reported to have used residential houses, contributing to widespread looting of civilian property.<sup>10</sup> The use of residential areas and civilian objects by the parties to the

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<sup>9</sup> ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I, Rules 15, 22.

<sup>10</sup> The most affected areas are Burinjia, El Kifah, Al Amal, El Mawashi, Dadinga and Al Azama.

conflict put civilians living in these neighbourhoods at greater risk, running counter to the IHL obligation to take all feasible precautions to avoid or minimize incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects.<sup>11</sup>

22. As an example, the Joint Forces established defensive positions in Al Mawashi livestock market and in the Al Salam and Al Wihda neighbourhoods. In three separate incidents in July 2024, the RSF fired artillery shells on the Al Mawashi livestock market and surrounding neighbourhoods, killing at least 43 civilians, including three children from the same family, and injuring at least 97 others. Similar RSF attacks on the same areas on 26 September and 10 November 2024 killed 37 civilians. In Al-Salam neighbourhood, a densely populated residential area that was trapped between two key positions of the SAF/Joint Forces and the RSF since May 2024, a 43-year-old man recounted: “*We were under continuous artillery shelling by both sides and several artillery shells exploded in our house. During the crossfire, the only thing we could do was take shelter and sleep on the floor.*”

#### Attacks on hospitals and health facilities

23. Under IHL, medical establishments and units, including hospitals, are specifically protected from attack; this protection extends to medical personnel and the wounded and sick.<sup>12</sup> Between 9 May and 28 November 2024, OHCHR documented 13 attacks on health facilities in the city of El Fasher. Some facilities were attacked multiple times. Most of these attacks, attributed to the RSF, involved artillery shelling, launched without warning. Facts gathered by OHCHR and corroborated, *inter alia*, by eyewitnesses’ testimonies, satellite imagery and video footage, indicate the **deliberate targeting by the RSF of healthcare infrastructure** in El Fasher. For example, the Al-Saudi Maternity Hospital, in western El Fasher, has been repeatedly shelled since the start of the hostilities. As at the time of writing, this is the last remaining public hospital in the city with the capacity to perform surgery and provide sexual and reproductive health services, including necessary medical care for survivors of sexual violence. On 18 May 2024, the RSF fired several artillery shells into the western and northern parts of El Fasher, one of which hit the hospital, injuring nine civilians and causing damage to the facility. On 22 June 2024, a shell launched by the RSF hit the pharmacy inside the hospital, killing four civilians and a female pharmacist. The hospital also sustained significant damage in further attacks on 11 August and 28 November 2024. RSF members have alleged that the SAF was using the Al-Saudi Maternity Hospital for military purposes, in order to justify shelling. In this regard, OHCHR confirmed information about the presence of SAF Military Intelligence officers in the hospital from early July 2024, as well as the treatment of some injured SAF and Joint Forces members at the hospital, as the military hospital in El Fasher was overwhelmed. However, no findings were made on alleged harmful military use.

24. Between 25 May and 3 June 2024, the Al Janoubi Hospital, in southern El Fasher was subjected to three mortar and gunfire attacks, attributed to the RSF, resulting in the death of two people and the injury of 14 patients and caregivers. On 8 June 2024, RSF fighters raided the same hospital, shooting into the air, physically assaulting medical personnel, damaging medical equipment, stealing money and medication, and seizing one of the hospital’s ambulances. As result, medical staff were relocated to a safer place in the city, and patients were transferred to Al-Saudi Maternity Hospital.

25. The Tumbasi Medical Centre, in southern El Fasher, was also struck by RSF shelling on 3 August 2024, resulting in the death of at least 23 people and injury of 60 others. The attack also caused severe damage to the medical centre, putting it out of service and forcing patients to evacuate the hospital.

26. According to multiple testimonies, when hostilities suddenly erupted in the southern part of El Fasher from mid-April to mid-May 2024, the Al-Janoubi hospital was turned into

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<sup>11</sup> ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I, Rules 15, 22.

<sup>12</sup> ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Volume I, Rules 25, 28 and 35. Note: Security Council [Resolution 2286 \(2016\)](#) demands that all parties to armed conflicts fully comply with their obligations under international law to ensure the respect and protection of all medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities.

shelter used by civilians as a safe place. A 30-year-old woman from Al-Taimanat neighbourhood took her niece, who had been struck by a stray bullet on 21 May 2024 and died a week later, to Al-Janoubi Hospital for treatment. She recounted to OHCHR: “*We sheltered in the hospital for almost one month, as the shelling was so intense in our neighbourhood. But the last week we were in the hospital, shells were falling every day on the hospital and the surrounding areas. We then left the hospital.*”

#### Direct attacks on IDP camps

27. The Abu Shouk IDP camp, north-west of El Fasher, has been subjected to recurrent artillery shelling by the RSF, amounting to direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects. From May to the end of November 2024, OHCHR documented 15 attacks on the camp. For example, on 27 June, artillery shells launched by the RSF killed four IDPs and injured 12 others, and also damaged a malnutrition treatment facility. On 26 August 2024, artillery shells targeting the livestock market inside the camp killed 15 civilians, including 5 women, injured at least 17 others, and destroyed and damaged several houses and shelters. Most recently, on 23 November 2024, five IDPs were killed and eight were injured in further shelling. Previously, Abu Shouk IDP camp hosted approximately 105,000 IDPs from African tribes, predominantly Fur as well as Zaghawa, Tunjur and Berti; however, the recurrent shelling has forced more than 50% of the inhabitants to flee the camp to safer places.

28. On 1 and 2 December 2024, Zamzam IDP camp to the south of El Fasher, where famine conditions were confirmed in August 2024 as a result of conflict and limited humanitarian access,<sup>13</sup> came under artillery shelling attributed to the RSF. Eight IDPs were reportedly killed (three men, two women and three children), at least 20 others were injured, and the hospital and market, as well as residences, sustained serious damage.

29. On 25 September 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted concerns for residents of Abu Shouk IDP camp and also of Zamzam IDP camp in the context of escalating hostilities in El Fasher, noting the risk of retaliatory attacks based on their tribal identity and perceived support for the Joint Forces and SAF.<sup>14</sup>

#### **(b) Protection of civilians in the context of the siege**

30. Victims and witnesses interviewed by OHCHR in October and November 2024 gave consistent accounts that, apart from a few exceptions, **civilians were not afforded any opportunity to evacuate the city** before the hostilities erupted in April 2024 and have since been trapped by intense fighting in residential neighbourhoods, around their houses and other places of refuge. Residents of the city suffered **repeated displacement** as they sought safety, moving within El Fasher, to other locations in North Darfur, as well as to other states in Sudan. A 40-year-old woman who lived in military garrison houses in El Fasher, which were targeted by RSF shelling in May 2024, recounted to OHCHR how she and her family relocated four times within the city, but each time the “safer” area was hit by shelling. “*We kept moving from one place to another to avoid the shelling. But in vain. I took my five daughters and left El Fasher in the first week of July,*” she said. Those interviewed by OHCHR who had fled El Fasher mostly belonged to African tribes, including Zaghawa, Fur, Tunjur, Berti and Masalit, as well as Al Ja'alin, an Arab tribe of northern Sudan. They said they had fled out of the fear that the RSF would perceive those who did not leave El Fasher as collaborators or supporters of the Joint Forces and the SAF.

31. Victims and witnesses informed OHCHR that in neighbourhoods under its control, the RSF would profile, detain, disappear and assault people perceived as affiliated with the Joint Forces or supporters of the SAF, including based on their tribal identity. Such discriminatory and **inhuman treatment** targeted young men and women in areas under RSF control in El Fasher. A 25-year-old woman from an Arab tribe, living in Al-Salam neighbourhood, was abducted with her mother from the Al-Taaminet area in May 2024 by two men in civilian uniforms. They were taken by car to a house in Al Massani

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<sup>13</sup> [IPC Famine Review Committee Report Sudan July2024.pdf](#).

<sup>14</sup> [Sudan: Türk sounds alarm over hostilities in El Fasher, warns of serious human rights violations | OHCHR](#).

neighbourhood, an area under RSF control, where they were held and ill-treated for two hours in separate rooms. *“Six different men came to the room and interrogated me. They removed my hijab and checked my body to see whether I was hiding any devices. Each one beat me and left. They accused me of being a SAF spy,”* the victim reported to OHCHR, demonstrating symptoms of psychological trauma. On 14 June 2024, she left El Fasher.

32. OHCHR monitoring also indicates that, between June and July 2024, the Joint Forces detained dozens of persons in the city in an informal detention facility, on grounds of alleged collaboration with the RSF. In most cases, detainees were not allowed to inform their family about their detention or receive legal assistance. A man who was detained by the Joint Forces in June 2024 for ten days told OHCHR, *“I was released and went home after ten days of detention and torture. No one informed me that I had been charged.”*

33. According to the testimonies of victims and witnesses who were able to leave besieged El Fasher, all main routes into and out of El Fasher were under RSF control. **Safe passage for civilians** out of the city was dependent upon the RSF, armed movements controlling other North Darfur localities and tribal leaders. Most of those interviewed by OHCHR reported that the routes they took to flee El Fasher were unsafe, the travel costs were high, and the journey was an uphill struggle to reach places of refuge. They indicated that all parties to the conflict contributed to this situation, in different ways.

34. OHCHR received consistent testimonies that civilians who fled El Fasher were obliged to make **cash payments at checkpoints** controlled by each of the parties to the conflict. Amounts fluctuated between checkpoints, based on the profile of the victim and on money and valuables that he or she might have. A woman in her sixties told OHCHR that she and her family fled Al-Tekarir neighbourhood to Zamzam IDP camp on 11 June 2024, and then onwards to Dar Es Salam locality, when they were stopped by men in SAF uniform who demanded 3,000 Sudanese Pounds per person to let them pass. *“I fled with my two daughters, my granddaughters, and left one of my daughters behind in El Fasher because we didn’t have enough money to bring everyone with us,”* she said. Another woman in her seventies recounted: *“Along the way, we were stopped by security forces on several occasions. SAF, RSF and the Joint Forces, all of them took money from cars at checkpoints to let us pass through. The RSF demanded 10,000 Sudanese Pounds to let us pass”.*

35. All parties to the conflict conducted **“screening” of displaced persons** leaving El Fasher, and in this context, there were consistent reports of torture and ill-treatment, detention, sexual and gender-based violence, and disappearances. The RSF conducted its screening at checkpoints commonly called *“Bawabat”* [gates] erected at the entry and exit points of main towns and villages along the routes leading to Chad and South Sudan. The aim was to ascertain whether members of the SAF or Joint Forces were leaving the city. The Joint Forces maintained checkpoints on the route between El Fasher and Zamzam IDP camp, which was the only route available to exit El Fasher from the south. OHCHR was informed that the Joint Forces screened displaced persons leaving El Fasher, purportedly for security reasons. In particular, reports indicated that young men belonging to the Zaghawa and Fur tribes were interrogated about their reasons for leaving El Fasher and were dissuaded from leaving and encouraged to join the Joint Forces.

36. OHCHR also received testimonies in relation to the **mobilization of civilians** in El Fasher by the Joint Forces and the SAF to join the fighting. Information gathered indicates that the Joint Forces have mobilized fighters along tribal lines, mainly from the Zaghawa, Berti and Fur tribes, increasing the protection risks for members of these tribes based on their perceived affiliations. For example, since mid-November 2024, there have been growing protection concerns over the increased deployment of Joint Forces troops to Zamzam IDP camp, as well as the alleged proliferation of weapons among IDP men mobilized with the Joint Forces.

**(c) Attacks on and ill-treatment of civilians during their flight from El Fasher**

37. OHCHR documented cases of reports of torture and ill-treatment, detention, sexual and gender-based violence, and disappearances perpetrated against civilians fleeing El Fasher, in the context of screening at RSF checkpoints or of ambushes by armed Arab men

in plainclothes affiliated with the RSF. Violations and abuses were often ethnically motivated, based on real or perceived tribal identity. OHCHR was also informed about cases of separation of family members in these contexts.

38. Victims and witnesses recounted that the road to Ed Daein, the capital of East Darfur, which is under full RSF control, was particularly difficult and insecure. During screening, the RSF reportedly humiliated men coming from El Fasher, interrogating them about their tribal affiliation, beating them and accusing them of being SAF soldiers or supporters. Many were detained or disappeared. A 24-year-old pregnant woman who left El Fasher on 13 June 2024 recounted her journey with around 20 people, in one vehicle, to Khazan Jadeed, south-east of El Fasher, and then to Ed Daein. When they arrived at an RSF checkpoint in Ed Daein, the RSF inspected their telephones. They interrogated all the men about their relationship with the SAF, severely beat some of them with whips and took two men to an unknown location, before allowing the rest of the group to continue to Al-Rigaibat.

39. A 32-year-old man fled the fighting between the RSF and Joint Forces in his village west of El Fasher at the end of June 2024, together with a friend. On their way from Dar Es Salam to Khazan Jadeed, at Um Katkot village, the two men were stopped by RSF fighters. They were detained for two days with two other men, during which time they were interrogated, had their telephones inspected and were beaten several times and accused of being members of the Joint Forces or the SAF. *“We were released after we asserted under oath that we were not members of the SAF or Joint Forces,”* he told OHCHR.

**(d) Sexual violence**

40. OHCHR documented numerous reports of sexual violence against women and girls during the siege and as they fled El Fasher after May 2024. According to a reliable source coordinating service provision, the number of victims of sexual violence reaching service providers in El Fasher surged significantly from May 2024, reaching between 20 to 40 cases per month. This is considered to be significantly under-reported due to stigma, and also as artillery shelling restricted the movement of people in general and survivors of sexual violence in particular, preventing them from accessing medical care.

41. In a case documented by OHCHR, Reyi, while trying to flee from Al-Wihda neighbourhood to Zamzam IDP camp on 5 June 2024. They were able to receive medical treatment within 72 hours; one of the victims needed to be transferred to another facility to undergo surgery. In another case, a woman was raped by RSF fighters as she was fleeing from El Fasher to Chad after May 2024; she had been separated from her fellow travellers at the main checkpoint into Nyala, South Darfur, from the north, which is known as *“Bawabet Jahannem”* [or “the gate of hell”]. The woman was able to receive medical treatment at Nyala Hospital, where she spent four days.

42. While information on the extent and prevalence of sexual violence in the context of the siege of El Fasher is not easily accessible due to the ongoing hostilities, OHCHR monitoring suggests that members from different parties to the conflict are involved in sexual violence against women and girls, which is corroborated by local medical and legal aid service providers. IDP women and girls from rural areas surrounding El Fasher, whose livelihoods are centred in the city, are at particularly high risk of sexual violence. Despite the insecurity and risks, they continue to enter and exit El Fasher city to sell goods in the main market daily or weekly, in order to sustain their and their families’ livelihoods. However, testimonies gathered by OHCHR indicate that the El Fasher main market is “not safe” for these women and girls, including the northern vicinity of the market, which is under the control of the Joint Forces at the time of writing. Incidents of sexual violence have occurred around this area, and IDP women and girl survivors have limited access to medical care and legal recourse, according to testimonies collected.

43. More generally, given the collapse of the healthcare system and other public services as a result of the hostilities, survivors have faced serious challenges in reaching timely medical, psychosocial and legal support, in particular post-exposure prophylaxis or emergency contraception, but also surgical care like fistula repair. Attacks on the Al-Saudi



Maternity Hospital since May 2024, the only hospital receiving survivors of sexual violence in the area, further affected access to medical care.

**(e) Recruitment and use of children**

44. In El Fasher, OHCHR received reports about the alleged recruitment and use of children by the RSF, either on a “voluntary” basis, driven by ethnical or tribal motives, or using abduction and coercion. It is reported that children from neighbourhoods of El Fasher or surrounding areas controlled by the RSF, either “agreed” to join the RSF or were abducted, and then taken in RSF vehicles to recruitment camps in East Darfur state, following a trip that would take four to five days.

45. OHCHR spoke to a teenage minor from an African tribe (in the presence of a parent) who was taken by the RSF from an area west of El Fasher during the siege, and then brought to an RSF recruitment camp in another state of Darfur. According to the victim, who managed to return to home, one camp located in the Rizeigat village, on the outskirts of Ed Daein (East Darfur), housed 50 new recruits, including adults and some boys aged as young as 10 years, coming from various tribes, including Fur, Berti and Zaghawa. Most of the recruited children were Zaghawa, and many had been abducted from El Geneina, Nyala or were separated from their families during displacement. According to information received by OHCHR, they were all accommodated in huts, without separation of men and boys. The boys were trained to shoot and use different types of guns on a daily basis, in an open area adjacent to the village. The camp was constantly monitored, and each *rakuba* [hut] was guarded by an RSF fighter. *‘The treatment wasn’t harsh, the food was good, we had access to bathrooms, and we were permitted prayer times. But they were strict about preventing escapes,’* reported the teenager abducted from El Fasher. *‘They told us that we would be deployed to Khartoum,’* he added.

**(f) Right to food**

46. Sudan is facing critical levels of food insecurity, with over half of the population (25.6 million) in acute hunger, and the highest number of malnutrition cases in Eastern Africa.<sup>15</sup> The siege, conduct of hostilities and restricted humanitarian access are drivers of food insecurity, malnutrition and denial of the right to food in El Fasher and surrounding IDP camps. On 1 August 2024, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) confirmed famine conditions in Zamzam IDP camp, and said possible famine was ongoing in Abu Shouk and Al Salam IDP camps, with a risk of famine across El Fasher.<sup>16</sup> Most of the victims and witnesses interviewed by OHCHR expressed the view that the prolonged siege had left the city on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe and severe food deprivation crisis, undermining accessibility and availability of adequate food and essential goods. In addition to recurrent attacks by all parties to the conflict on markets which are critical for livelihoods, RSF restrictions on the entry of humanitarian assistance and commercial goods have further restricted access to adequate and affordable food and goods essential for civilian survival.

47. In Zamzam IDP camp, supply roads are largely controlled by the RSF, who have imposed direct and indirect restrictions on humanitarian access. In July 2024, the RSF held humanitarian supply trucks transporting food, medicines and essential supplies destined for Zamzam camp. The trucks were stopped in Kabkabiya locality in North Darfur (179 km south of El Fasher), shortly after they entered Sudan from Chad, and denied onwards access for months.<sup>17</sup>

48. In the strategic locality of Mellit (60km north of El Fasher), which is positioned at the junction of trade routes linking El Fasher to south-eastern Libya and to Northern state, it is reported that since taking control of the town in April 2024, the RSF has established

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<sup>15</sup> Source: World Food Programme.

<sup>16</sup> [Report of the Famine Review Committee of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\)](#). See also: [Famine Early Warning Systems Network](#).

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.msf.org/sudan-msf-outraged-and-alarmed-over-repeated-attacks-hospitals-el-fasher-and-blockade-urgently>.

checkpoints to control the flow of goods into Darfur and to derive profits.<sup>18</sup> RSF control of these supply routes, which also provide strategic military advantages, has led to increased imposition of fees and impediments along commercial trade routes. *“They have taken advantage of the ongoing siege,”* stated several interviewees who had fled El Fasher. This has contributed to the rise in prices of food and essential commodities, including staples like sugar and rice, exacerbating economic barriers and food insecurity.

49. OHCHR also received consistent testimonies about the RSF preventing commercial trucks transporting food supplies from South Darfur from entering El Fasher in May 2024. Although the trucks were released after long negotiations with tribal leaders, facilitated by armed movements who are not party to the conflict, such actions illustrate the deliberate interference with civilians' right to food in besieged areas, contrary to obligations under IHL.<sup>19</sup>

**(g) Right to water**

50. On 27 May 2024, the RSF briefly took control of the Golo water reservoir, located seven kilometres west of El Fasher, which is the main source of drinking water for the city. Witnesses told OHCHR that on 27 May, RSF commander Ali Rizkallah, *aka* “Al-Savana”, arrived with his troops at Golo reservoir, shut down water purification stations and cut off the water supply to El Fasher. *“At the water source, the RSF took photos and videos showing that they had shut off the water source of El Fasher,”* reported an eyewitness. Before leaving the area that night, the commander warned the people of Golo against collaboration with the Joint Forces.<sup>20</sup> The following day, the Joint Forces regained control of Golo reservoir.

51. According to OHCHR monitoring, the RSF temporary takeover of the reservoir follows a pattern of retaliatory attacks on villages to the west of El Fasher by the RSF and allied Arab militias since early April 2024. These retaliatory attacks often targeted the Zaghawa tribe, which is the tribe of most of the Joint Forces leaders who have allied with the SAF. Witnesses told OHCHR that, on their way back from Golo reservoir at the end of May 2024, the RSF attacked villages along the route, setting houses on fire and displacing villagers. *“When they left Golo in the evening of 27 May, on their way back they burned Hilat Dalala village because the villagers provided water and food to the Joint Forces in the morning of that day,”* a witness told OHCHR. Witnesses also recounted that the Golo area was also encircled by villages under RSF control since May 2024, and the RSF had prevented people from bringing vegetables and other food items into the area.

**(h) Right to health**

52. Attacks on hospitals and health facilities, and the extended siege by the RSF, have severely impacted access to healthcare and constitute grave violations of the right to health. This situation has led to many preventable deaths among civilians in need of specific treatment. A 45-year-old woman from Al-Wihda neighbourhood told OHCHR that in June 2024, when the hostilities intensified, she fled from El Fasher to Dar Es Salam locality with her elderly uncle, who suffered from kidney problems. As there was no kidney dialysis centre in Dar Es Salam, he died two days after arrival. By the end of June, at least 94 patients suffering from kidney disease in El Fasher were left without treatment after the only dialysis centre in the city, located west of the main market, was severely damaged as a result of RSF shelling.

53. Attacks on health facilities, restrictions on humanitarian assistance and the lack of fuel and electricity have severely affected the functioning of remaining medical facilities and reduced the availability and accessibility of life-saving equipment, medical supplies and medicines in El Fasher, which undermine the right to health of the besieged population. In

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<sup>18</sup> Sudan Policy and Transparency Tracker: <https://sudantransparency.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/MellitEN.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, Article 14 and ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 55.

<sup>20</sup> In a video widely circulated at the end of May 2024, and which OHCHR verified, Rizkallah declared, *“From now on, they will have to get water from the Red Sea.”*

particular, attacks on the Al-Saudi Maternity Hospital have had a severe effect on the availability and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services to women and girls. Medical professionals have told OHCHR that their ability to provide healthcare services, notably for survivors of sexual violence, is strained, and that it will soon become impossible if necessary medical supplies are not received.

## **V. Conclusion & recommendations**

54. Despite commitments made by the parties to the conflict relating to the protection of civilians and respect for international law, the siege of El Fasher and intense hostilities have continued without respite after more than seven months. The parties to the conflict continue to disregard the fundamental principles of IHL, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, and are responsible for violations of IHL and violations and abuses of IHRL. Attacks against the civilian population and protected persons and objects, including medical facilities, may amount to war crimes. Further investigations are needed to establish whether serious crimes under international law have been committed, and individual criminal responsibility.

55. The prospect of a large-scale RSF offensive looms over El Fasher, which would likely have catastrophic impacts upon the civilian population trapped in the city and in surrounding IDP camps. There are serious concerns regarding consistent reports of the increased mobilization of fighters by the parties to the conflict along tribal lines in North Darfur and other Darfur states. Apart from indicating preparations for continued hostilities, this heightens the risk of ethnically motivated violence and inter-communal conflict in Darfur. At this critical juncture, urgent measures are necessary to de-escalate the situation, bring an end to the siege and associated hostilities in El Fasher, and uphold the protection of civilians as required by international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

56. **OHCHR calls upon the parties to the conflict to:**

- a. **Fully and immediately comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, and translate their stated commitments on the protection of civilians into concrete actions;**
- b. **Ensure that all persons acting under their instructions, direction or control abide by obligations and commitments under international law;**
- c. **Refrain from all forms of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, including through the use of explosive weapons in populated areas;**
- d. **Ensure the safe passage of civilians wishing to leave El Fasher and surrounding areas, and put an end to practices of extortion, detention and ill-treatment of civilians;**
- e. **Prevent, investigate and punish, including at command levels, perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law and gross violations and abuses of international human rights law;**
- f. **Engage in mediation efforts in good faith to reach agreement on an immediate cessation of hostilities.**

57. **OHCHR calls upon the RSF to:**

- a. **Immediately put an end to its siege of El Fasher, in line with Security Council resolution 2736 (2024);**
- b. **Facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access into El Fasher and surrounding areas, including sufficient food and medical supplies;**
- c. **Ensure the particular protection of health facilities, health workers and humanitarian personnel;**
- d. **Cease all other impediments to the effective enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to food, health and an adequate standard of living.**

58. **OHCHR calls upon the international community to:**

- e. **Take necessary action to comply and ensure compliance with the arms embargo measures in Darfur as stipulated in Security Council resolution 1556 (2004);**

**f. Intensify coordinated efforts to reach a cessation of hostilities, ensuring the centrality of protection of civilians, human rights and accountability for past and present violations and their prevention in the future, and guaranteeing unimpeded humanitarian access in full measure.**

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