

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: AL OTH 47/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

1 May 2025

Mr. Dagalo,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 50/7, 50/6, 51/15, 52/7 and 50/18.

We are independent human rights experts appointed and mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council to report and advise on human rights issues from a thematic or country-specific perspective. We are part of the special procedures system of the United Nations, which has 60 thematic and country mandates on a broad range of human rights issues. We are sending this letter under the communications procedure of the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council to seek clarification on information we have received. Special Procedures mechanisms can intervene directly with Governments and other stakeholders (including companies) on allegations of abuses of human rights that come within their mandates by means of letters, which include urgent appeals, allegation letters, and other communications. The intervention may relate to a human rights violation that has already occurred, is ongoing, or which has a high risk of occurring. The process involves sending a letter to the concerned actors identifying the facts of the allegation, applicable international human rights norms and standards, the concerns and questions of the mandateholder(s), and a request for follow-up action. Communications may deal with individual cases, general patterns and trends of human rights violations, cases affecting a particular group or community, or the content of draft or existing legislation, policy or practice considered not to be fully compatible with international human rights standards.

Rapid Support Forces

In this connection, we would like to follow up on the joint allegation letter dated 15 August 2023 (AL OTH 101/2023) and your subsequent response dated 19 January 2024, in addition to the joint urgent appeal sent on 6 August 2024 (OTH 115/2024) and joint allegation letter sent on 15 August 2024 (OTH 116/2024) regarding the alleged serious human rights and humanitarian law violations in Sudan. In particular, we would like to bring to your attention new and deeply concerning information regarding the continued commission of serious human rights violations against women and children in Sudan from September 2024 to the present. Many violations are reportedly being committed by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), despite public commitments to address such abuses, including through directives under the command intended to guide the behavior of RSF personnel. The allegations brought to our attention include a broad pattern of sexual and gender-based violence, such as rape, sexual slavery, and forced marriage, as well as the denial of access to sexual and reproductive health services, the failure to protect and support survivors, the trafficking and abduction of women and children, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and extrajudicial killings.

According to the information received:

The conflict in Sudan, now entering its third year, continues to cause widespread suffering and displacement, with credible reports of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), including forced marriage, femicide, and other grave human rights violations. As of February 2025, over 12.5 million individuals have been forcibly displaced due to the conflict. This includes approximately 8.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and more than 3.6 million refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries.¹ An estimated 6.7 million women and girls are at heightened risk of gender-based violence.² Despite some steps taken to address these issues, including recent commitments to regulate conduct within the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate sharply.

We continue to be seriously alarmed at the reports of continued and large scale sexual violence committed by forces that belong to the RSF or that are affiliated with the RSF, despite the RSF having issued directives aimed at all the troops under its command on combating all forms of violence against civilians, including sexual offenses.³ This concern is echoed by the Human Rights Council in resolution 57/2, adopted on 9 October 2024, which expressed grave concern over reported acts of sexual and gender-based violence, including against children, principally by the Rapid Support Forces.⁴ It is unclear how the directives explicitly prohibit acts of sexual and gender-based violence; how they are disseminated, enforced and ultimately lead to improved accountability for acts of violence committed. The absence of clear prohibitions and accountability measures raises questions about the extent to which such directives can contribute to the protection of civilians, particularly women and girls, in areas

¹ UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/114539>

² UNFPA, <https://www.unfpa.org/news/sexual-violence-and-severe-hunger-surge-sudan-war-passes-one-year>

³ See, for example, among others, [Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan](#) from 23 October 2024 (A/HRC/57/CRP.6 para 164)

⁴ [A/HRC/RES/57/2](#), para. 7

affected by the conflict. We have also not noticed the impact of the said directives on the behavior of forces affiliated with the RSF or a lessening of gender-based crimes.

Systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war

Sexual violence reportedly continues to be used systematically by the RSF as a weapon of war, subjugation and control across Sudan, particularly in Al-Gezira, Sinnar, Darfur, and South Kordofan. These violations are not isolated incidents but seems to form part of a widespread and systematic pattern involving gang rape, abduction, forced marriage, and sexual slavery. The deliberate targeting of women and girls has created a climate of terror fueled by impunity. While ethnic targeting has been evident in many attacks, particularly affecting non-Arab communities in Darfur and Al-Gezira, women and girls across different backgrounds have been significantly impacted.

Sexual violence has reportedly been used both in retaliation following military gains by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and as a means of punishing civilians perceived to be affiliated with the opposing side. Numerous survivors reported being raped by RSF soldiers on suspicion of SAF affiliation, for their perceived support of the former regime (kizan), or due to the alleged activities of their relatives or their own involvement in documenting human rights violations. In many cases, women and girls were attacked and raped in their homes during such retaliatory assaults.⁵

In this context, cases of conflict-related sexual violence in Al-Gezira reportedly intensified following the surrender of the RSF Commander to the SAF on 20 October 2024. The RSF reportedly launched a deadly retributive campaign marked by mass killings of civilians, widespread looting, and the destruction of surrounding villages. Between 21 October and 4 November 2024, more than 100 villages and small towns were reportedly attacked, displacing at least half a million people. During this period, at least 44 documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence were reported across East Al-Gezira, Helalia, and Tomboul.

Reports from conflict-affected areas have also described consistent patterns of sexual violence involving the separation of men and women upon the RSF's entry into a community, followed by mass rape. In some families, every female member was reportedly raped and in many instances in front of each other. In addition to raping and gang-raping women and girls, RSF soldiers have reportedly subjected them to other forms of torture and ill-treatment, including severe beatings and the deliberate infliction of serious bodily harm, such as cutting parts of their bodies with sharp blades. In some instances, women were forced into sexual slavery, held for extended periods in unknown locations, and later found dead. Forced marriage has also been used as a tactic of war, with at least 14 reported cases involving girls forced to marry RSF members in Darfur.

⁵ A/HRC/57/CRP.6, para. 172

As of early 2025, at least 330 cases of conflict-related sexual violence had been reported, including children, though the true scale could be far greater due to widespread underreporting. What follows are select reports received since the beginning of 2025, which are likely to represent only a fraction of the full scale of violations. On 1 January 2025, the death of a 20-year-old woman was reported in East Al-Gezira following appalling torture, gang rape, and violence inflicted by RSF soldiers. She reportedly died from excessive bleeding caused by her injuries. Following the SAF's recapture of Khartoum City from the RSF on 26 March 2025, 19 new cases of CRSV were reported in the capital, including 15 cases of rape and gang rape, one case of physical and sexual assault, and three cases of sexual harassment, which were attributed to RSF forces. As of April 2025, an additional 13 CRSV cases had been documented in East Soba, Khartoum State. In April 2025, during the attack on Zamzam Displacement Camp in North Darfur, there were reports of sexual violence committed by RSF fighters. Eight women who reached El Fasher were allegedly raped by RSF soldiers on April 13 inside the camp. Meanwhile, new reports continue to emerge from Al-Qatina City in White Nile State, which was under RSF control until its recapture by the SAF in February 2025. As of April 2025, 18 cases had been reported from Al-Qatina, including acts of torture and gang rape. One of these attacks reportedly resulted in the death of the survivor. Among the victims were two girls, aged 14 and 16, and several elderly women between the ages of 60 and 68. Survivors in these areas continue to face immense stigma and shame within their communities, further compounding the impact of these violations.

Victims have also reported unwanted pregnancies and long-term psychological trauma. In addition to psychological harm, survivors have reported a range of physical health issues, including kidney pain, irregular menstrual cycles, walking difficulties, and, in some cases, occasional memory loss. Some women reportedly developed fistula as a result of rape, while others were infected with HIV or Hepatitis B. Children who witnessed their relatives being raped are also reportedly suffering from serious psychological consequences, including persistent nightmares. There is virtually no access to medical or psychological care for survivors of sexual violence, due to the destruction of health infrastructure and the collapse of support systems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 80 percent of hospitals in the most conflict-affected areas of Sudan are not functional, further compounding the already dire lack of essential services for survivors.⁶ Health personnel have also been targeted and attacked. In some cases, it was reported that survivors have taken their own lives, unable to access the assistance they needed.

Suicide among survivors has been increasingly reported, with cases emerging from villages such as Al Seriha, Azrag, Ruffa, and Abu Gelfa. In one instance, a woman reportedly took her own life shortly after being raped by RSF soldiers in front of her father and brother. In another case, two sisters died by suicide after being gang raped while the male members of their family were tied up and severely beaten in a separate room. In Al-Gezira, multiple reports indicate that

⁶ WHO, "Sudan Conflict: Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA) (01 September 2024)", 4 September 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-conflict-public-health-situation-analysis-phsa-01-september-2024>.

13 women reportedly threw themselves into the Nile River following the gang-rape by the RSF soldiers. Women are increasingly and openly contemplating suicide as a means of escaping the ongoing horrors associated with RSF violence. These accounts point to a deepening mental health crisis among survivors, particularly in areas where support systems have completely collapsed. The ongoing violence, the absence of justice or accountability, and the lack of survivor support have left women and girls exposed to further harm.

Among the documented survivors are reportedly many children.⁷ On 22 September 2024, eight girls aged between 6 and 15 were reportedly abducted by the RSF from the areas of Riffa and Al-Hashasa. They were taken to Madani, where they were held for several months. During this period, one of the girls was reportedly raped and killed. In February 2025, the remaining seven girls were transferred to police custody and subsequently released without any support, rehabilitation, or psychosocial care. Despite the severity of the violations they experienced, no follow-up or protection was provided upon their release. One other recent case of a gang rape of a 13-year-old girl was reported in Eastern Gezira, which allegedly resulted in a death of the victim.

According to UNICEF, armed men, including RSF fighters, have raped and sexually assaulted children, including infants as young as one year old.⁸ In its 2025 report on Sudan's child rape and sexual violence crisis,⁹ UNICEF recorded 221 cases of rape of children since the beginning of 2024. Of these, 147 survivors were girls. The report notes that these figures likely represent only a small fraction of the total number of violations, given the stigma faced by survivors, fear of retaliation, and challenges in accessing services or reporting incidents.

In addition to the systematic use of sexual violence, there have also been reports of femicide, when women were deliberately targeted and killed, which was supposedly primarily done by RSF forces. These killings appear to be acts of brutal punishment aimed not only at silencing individuals but also at terrorizing entire communities. One such case includes a female school principal in North Khartoum, Al-Sagai, who was reportedly hanged in her home on 18 January 2025 in front of her family by RSF soldiers who accused her of collaborating with SAF.

Enforced disappearances, abduction, sexual slavery and trafficking of women and girls

Reports indicate that enforced disappearances of women and girls have sharply increased in areas under RSF control, with many believed to have been abducted for the purpose of sexual slavery or exploitation. Additional accounts describe abductions followed by detention in conditions amounting to enslavement, highlighting the heightened risk of enforced disappearance and trafficking,

⁷ A/HRC/57/CRP.6, para. 218

⁸ UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/children-young-one-reported-among-survivors-rape-during-sudans-violent-conflict>

⁹ [Sudan's child rape and sexual violence crisis UNICEF report](#), 2025

particularly for women, children, internally displaced persons, and refugees.¹⁰ Over 230 cases of enforced disappearance have been documented since late 2023, and the real number is believed to be significantly higher. Victims have reportedly been taken from their homes, markets, displacement sites, and during attempts to flee violence.

In El Fasher, women and girls who were reportedly abducted earlier in 2024 by RSF forces have only recently been found. Some were discovered deceased, with signs indicating they had been raped before being killed, while others remain missing. These recent findings point to ongoing violations, including prolonged sexual violence during captivity and the continued risk of disappearance or death for abducted women. The targeting of displaced women and girls for abduction and trafficking appears to be widespread, with patterns suggesting that such acts are neither isolated nor incidental.

In addition to the abduction of the eight girls from Riffa and Al-Hashasa in September 2024, further reports suggest that displaced women, including those who are pregnant, are being taken from shelters and camps without a trace. Survivors have described being held for prolonged periods ranging from days to several months in conditions amounting to sexual slavery.¹¹ In West Darfur and Khartoum States, two women were reportedly abducted from the street by armed men in RSF uniform, transported to other locations within the same state, and subjected to consecutive rapes, including gang rape. One woman was allegedly held incommunicado in a locked room with no access to the outside world and was dependent on her captors for food, water, and toilet access. She was allegedly raped repeatedly by different RSF members and threatened with death. The other woman reportedly was forced to stay in her captor's house under guard, told she was now his wife, and beaten whenever she resisted sexual intercourse. She became pregnant as a result and was denied medical care throughout the pregnancy.

Additional accounts describe survivors being detained in warehouses previously used for storing medical supplies. In one such case, two sisters were reportedly abducted by RSF while collecting firewood in El Fasher and held for 21 days, during which they were tortured and forced to cook and clean for soldiers. On 2 January 2025, 18 women were reportedly abducted by 15 RSF members while collecting fruit in Hagaraldleb. Although they were released the next day in Dilling and not physically harmed, three women recounted attempted rapes and threats to burn them alive. More recently, in April 2025, at least 25 women and girls were reportedly abducted from the Zamzam Displacement Camp by RSF fighters using military vehicles. The lack of access to protection mechanisms, combined with the breakdown of law enforcement and judicial structures, has left families without any recourse to locate missing relatives or seek justice.

Sexual exploitation and deteriorating conditions in displacement settings

Since September 2024, conditions in displacement camps under RSF control have deteriorated dramatically. Women and girls face heightened risks of sexual

¹⁰ A/HRC/57/CRP.6, para. 101

¹¹ A/HRC/57/CRP.6, para. 193

exploitation, violence, and abuse as food insecurity deepens, essential services collapse, and humanitarian access is increasingly obstructed. Nationwide, an estimated 24.6 million people are expected to face high levels of food insecurity between December 2024 and May 2025. Famine has already been confirmed in five areas, with five more projected by May. An additional 17 locations, including Darfur, Kordofan, Khartoum, and Al Gazira, have been classified as being at high risk of famine.¹²

In El Fasher, markets have come under sustained shelling by RSF, severely limiting civilians' ability to obtain food and other basic goods. The siege imposed by the RSF around El Fasher during this period has further exacerbated hunger and deprivation. Humanitarian aid has been systematically blocked, forcing women and girls to adopt desperate survival strategies. In parallel, RSF forces have reportedly targeted critical infrastructure across Sudan. Many areas under their control now suffer from acute shortages of water and electricity, further undermining the population's ability to cope. According to reports received, towns and camps, including El Fasher, Abshok Camp, Zamzam Camp, Golo, Shagra, Lawabda, Al-Koma, Mellit, Kabyabika, Kafuti, Halat Dalal, and Abu Zariqa, have been subjected to widespread and systematic drone strikes carried out by RSF forces.

The human toll of these attacks continues to mount. As of 13 April 2025, reports suggest that as a result of the RSF attack, at least 330 civilians have been killed, including 56 women and girls, in Zamzam Displacement Camp, North Darfur. Due to the attack, at least 200 women have been reportedly injured, many of whom required urgent medical attention in El Fasher. Additionally, eight children were reportedly wounded in Zamzam Camp, sustaining life-threatening injuries, while 20 children have reportedly died following attacks by the RSF on both Zamzam and Abshok camps.

Amid these worsening conditions, particularly in RSF-controlled areas, reports have begun to emerge of women and girls resorting to survival strategies that place them at further risk of exploitation and abuse. Reports since October 2024 describe women being forced to sell sexual acts in exchange for food, water, or temporary shelter. In some cases, families have arranged marriages for their daughters in exchange for basic goods or money, attempting to cope with starvation and the total collapse of livelihoods. The dire conditions and denial of access to basic humanitarian assistance and protection, particularly in RSF-controlled areas, reflect a continued failure to uphold fundamental human rights principles, including those raised in previous communications, such as JUA OTH 115/2024 and JAL OTH 116/2024.

Collapse of access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health services

In El Fasher, the continued RSF attacks on health facilities and its siege have impacted access to healthcare as a whole for the population, including displaced persons.¹³ Women reportedly have been forced to give birth in unsafe,

¹² <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-famine-and-2025-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-hnrrp-dg-echo-dg-echo-partners-un-ocha-ipc-echo-daily-flash-6-january-2025>

¹³ [Report of OHCHR Sudan Country Office on the siege of El Fasher, North Darfur since May 2024](#), paras. 52-53

unhygienic conditions, and pregnant women and newborns have reportedly died due to the unavailability of skilled care. In Sennar State, as of December 2024, only one public emergency unit reportedly remained functional. Across many parts of Al Gezira, South Kordofan, and Darfur, healthcare services are non-existent or dangerously overburdened.

Survivors of sexual violence reportedly face nearly insurmountable barriers to accessing medical or psychosocial support. Emergency contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV are largely unavailable. Psychosocial support services have collapsed entirely. The destruction of facilities, stigma, fear of reprisals, and widespread insecurity all contribute to keeping survivors silent. Many survivors reported being unable to access health facilities or report incidents to the police due to the ongoing fighting and fear of stigma. The presence of RSF members in some medical centres, particularly in Khartoum, reportedly further restricted access to time-sensitive treatment. In addition, both parties to the conflict, and particularly the RSF, have been accused of attacking health facilities and looting medical supplies, further crippling the already fragile healthcare system.

Maternal mortality has also sharply increased. Women are giving birth without skilled personnel, clean water, or sterile supplies. Complications go untreated, and survivors of rape-related pregnancies face additional stigma and health risks without any follow-up care. The lack of medical treatment has led to preventable deaths, long-term disability, and deepening trauma.

Targeting of women human rights defenders and first responders

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs), volunteers, and frontline responders have reportedly continued to be targeted by the RSF, and in some cases by other armed actors, for their roles in supporting survivors of sexual violence, delivering essential services, and documenting human rights violations.¹⁴

In October 2024, two women volunteers in Khartoum who had been providing psychosocial support to survivors were reportedly raped by RSF members. Around the same time, another volunteer was murdered in her home. There are increasing indications that some women were deliberately targeted with sexual violence due to their roles as human rights defenders, journalists, medical professionals, or legal advocates. In many cases, they were perceived as documenting abuses or siding with the opposing party. Although most survivors did not personally know the perpetrators, several reported that the attackers appeared to be aware of their professional identities and, in some instances, seemed to have been searching for them.¹⁵ In December 2024, two Emergency Room volunteers in Omdurman were also raped by armed assailants, allegedly belonging to RSF, while providing medical assistance. There have also been instances when female medical personnel were reportedly raped by RSF fighters after failing to save wounded soldiers. One nurse was allegedly abducted by 13 soldiers in Khartoum North, compelled to provide emergency care to injured fighters, and then gang-raped until she lost consciousness.

¹⁴ A/HRC/57/CRP.6, para. 184

¹⁵ A/HRC/57/CRP.6, para. 196

WHRDs affiliated with both local and international organizations have reported being monitored, harassed, or intimidated in connection with their fieldwork in displacement sites, healthcare centres, and documentation efforts. In addition to physical threats, WHRDs and female journalists have reportedly increasingly been subjected to technology-facilitated violence, including doxxing, online harassment, and smear campaigns. Disinformation has been used to accuse organizations of fabricating evidence of sexual violence. Internet shutdowns and digital surveillance have severely restricted the ability of civil society actors to report violations or coordinate emergency support.

Barriers to justice and the absence of accountability

Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence face overwhelming obstacles to justice. In most conflict-affected areas, courts are non-functional, and law enforcement institutions are either absent or aligned with armed actors. The justice system offers no meaningful redress.

Fear of retaliation and a lack of confidence in the willingness of RSF command to investigate and prosecute its own members deter survivors from reporting acts of sexual violence. This has contributed to widespread underreporting, leaving the vast majority of cases uninvestigated and unpunished. Survivors also face severe barriers in accessing healthcare services, and the absence of both legal and medical support deprives them of protection, redress, and the possibility of recovery.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we express grave concern regarding the continued reports of widespread and systematic human rights violations committed by the RSF against women and girls in Sudan since September 2024 until present. These include conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearances, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and trafficking, as well as killings and acts of reprisal against women human rights defenders, volunteers, and other civil actors. Internally displaced persons, refugees, and women from non-Arab communities appear to be disproportionately affected. These violations not only result in physical and psychological harm to individuals and their families but also contribute to the broader destabilization of already vulnerable communities.

We are particularly alarmed by the reported denial of access to sexual and reproductive health services, high maternal mortality, and the psychological trauma experienced by survivors who lack access to medical and psychosocial care. These compounded effects of conflict and discrimination amount to a serious public health and protection crisis, in direct violation of Sudan's international human rights obligations.

We are alarmed at the continued and widespread sexual violence committed against women and girls in territories under their control, as well as the attacks on health workers and human rights defenders attributed to the RSF, demonstrating. We deeply regret that the RSF appears to have introduced cosmetic instructions that have, however, maintained the sense of impunity and have failed to prevent the occurrence of further

violations and violence. We are concerned about the continued lack of a meaningful change in behaviour and the continued lack of respect for the dignity, safety and rights of women and girls, human rights defenders and health personnel.

We urge the RSF to immediately cease all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, ensure unimpeded humanitarian access, and take all necessary measures to protect women and girls, including through the provision of safe spaces, healthcare, and psychosocial support. We remind the RSF of its obligation to conduct prompt, independent, impartial, and credible investigations into all allegations of sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearance, killings, and other violations, and to bring those responsible to justice. Survivors must be provided with full reparations and rehabilitation in accordance with international standards.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on the measures undertaken to guarantee immediate and complete cessation of all violence against civilians, including sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls and deprivation of basic services, such as sexual and reproductive health care.
3. Please provide information on the actions taken by the internal investigative committee to investigate acts of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls that were reportedly committed by the RSF and the outcomes of these investigations. Please inform how such investigations are being carried out in line with international standards including the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) and the United Nations Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture (Istanbul Protocol (2002 ed)).
4. Please provide information on the issuance, content, and dissemination of the RSF's announced and adopted directives. In particular, clarify whether the directives include explicit prohibitions against sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment, and the mechanisms in place to monitor their enforcement across the chain of command.
5. Please provide information on the measures taken to prevent the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, as well as efforts made to identify,

rescue and refer child victims of these crimes in line with their best interests for reintegration.

6. Please provide information on the measures undertaken for the provision of remedy, assistance, protection, rehabilitation, recovery and redress for victims of sexual- and gender-based violence.
7. Please clarify what measures were taken to identify feasible alternatives to the displacement of the affected communities, why such displacement was considered unavoidable, and what measures were taken to ensure displacement was carried out in a manner that upheld the rights to life, dignity, liberty, security, and family life of those affected and in satisfactory conditions of safety, nutrition, health, and hygiene.
8. Please clarify what measures were taken or are envisaged to provide protection and assistance to those displaced, including alternative adequate housing, water, essential food and medical services, and other forms of humanitarian and/or legal assistance.
9. Please clarify what measures have been taken or are envisaged to ensure durable solutions for those affected, including access to effective remedies and justice for rights violations experienced during displacement.
10. Please provide information on actions taken to investigate intimidation and arbitrary arrests of women activists and human rights defenders, and measures taken to prevent any further incidents.
11. Please provide information on the measures undertaken or envisaged to prevent further arbitrary displacement, provide protection and assistance to refugees, as well as to investigate violations of their rights and ensure remedy and accountability.
12. Please provide information on the measures undertaken or envisaged to guarantee safe and regular access to humanitarian assistance, ensure that international and national humanitarian actors can safely access affected victims and communities in need of assistance, investigate attacks against humanitarian personnel and hold perpetrators accountable.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter will be sent to the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sudan.

Finally, we stress that this letter does not in any way imply the expression of opinion concerning the legal status of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Please accept, Mr. Dagalo, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Reem Alsalem
Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Paula Gaviria
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

Tomoya Obokata
Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences

Alice Jill Edwards
Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Laura Nyirinkindi
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw your attention to the relevant international norms and standards that are applicable to the issues brought forth by the situation described above.

We wish to recall that both international and humanitarian law and international human rights law continue to apply in a situation of armed conflict, and there are obligations to respect fundamental human rights recognized in customary international law, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Customary Rules of International Law identified in the study of the International Committee of the Red Cross (“Customary Rules”). Rules of customary international law are binding at all times. In light of these grave allegations, we recall that the right to life constitutes an international customary and *jus cogens* norm, universally binding at all times (A/HRC/35/23, paras. 25-26).

We further recall that according to common article 3 to the four Geneva Conventions, persons taking no active part in hostilities shall be treated humanely, be protected from torture and other cruel treatment and should not be subject to violence to life and person and that murder is prohibited. Additionally, the intentional killing of civilians, and the torture and ill-treatment of civilians and prisoners of war, constitute war crimes and may represent crimes against humanity when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack. We note that the obligation to investigate allegations of international crimes is particularly important within the human rights framework. Armed non-State actors should, as a priority, investigate killings (or acts of torture or sexual violence) committed by their members (A/HRC/38/44, para. 74). Such investigations should also satisfy international standards of independence, impartiality, promptness, transparency and effectiveness. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls has underscored the responsibility of all parties to a conflict to investigate incidents of gender-based violence committed by their forces and to ensure accountability and reparations for survivors, especially in contexts where State institutions are absent or non-functional (A/HRC/47/26, paras. 82–85; see also A/HRC/38/44, para. 74). Attached to the prohibition of torture – including those of a sexual nature – are obligations to criminalize and investigate all acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to prosecute or extradite suspects, to punish those responsible and to provide remedies to victims and protect victims and witnesses from reprisals or retribution (A/HRC/52/30 and A/79/181). Investigations must be in line with applicable standards, including the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016) and the United Nations Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture (Istanbul Protocol (2022 ed)). Investigations should be prompt, effective and thorough, with independence, impartiality and transparency. Furthermore, and according to international human rights law, all parties to a conflict, including internal conflicts are bound by the principle of non-refoulement, which covers any return or transfer of a person in any manner whatsoever, from the position that the absolute prohibition of torture, cruel treatment or outrages on personal dignity are enshrined in common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. The Geneva Conventions further prohibit forcible

transfers and deportations of protected persons from occupied territory, regardless of the motive for such removal or transfer. These acts are explicitly forbidden under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and are considered grave breaches of international humanitarian law. The prohibition applies both to individual and mass transfers, whether within the occupied territory or beyond its borders, and is intended to protect persons from being displaced against their will in violation of their fundamental rights and protections under international law. All parties to non-international conflicts, whether State or non-State must abide by international humanitarian law rules.

We also recall the absolute and non-derogable right to life and the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment which constitute international customary and jus cogens norms, universally binding at all times (Human Rights Council resolution 25/13; United Nations General Assembly resolution 68/156; A/HRC/35/23, paras. 25-26; ILC Articles on Peremptory Norms of International Law, [A/CN.4/L.967](#); ICJ *Questions relating to the Obligation to Prosecute or Extradite (Belgium v. Senegal)*, Judgment of 20 July 2012, ICJ Reports 2012). The prohibition of enforced disappearances and the corresponding obligation to investigate them equally attained the status of jus cogens and is also considered a form of torture both for the abducted individual and their family members. We would like to remind the RSF that the killing and serious injury of civilians, including the sexual abuse and rape of women, contravenes the absolute and non-derogable prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, according to international human rights and humanitarian law and jus cogens norms (see further A/79/181).

Regarding the acts of rape and sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in conflict affected areas, we would like to stress that these acts of gender-based violence and sexual torture are strictly prohibited by international humanitarian law and constitute a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions. When committed in the context of internal armed conflict, such acts are prohibited through common article 3 of four Geneva Conventions ratified by Sudan, which prohibits violence to life and person, cruel treatment and torture, and outrages upon personal dignity; and other provisions, such as article 4(2) of additional protocol II, which explicitly prohibit attacks against women, including rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault, which is a part of customary law. We recall that a range of sexual violence offenses were included in the ICC Statute and of ad hoc tribunals, ICTY and ICTR, that convicted perpetrators for rape and forced pregnancy and enslavement of rebels “wives”, as well as in other sex and gender based violence cases. UN Security Resolution 1820 requires that “all parties to armed conflict immediately take appropriate measures to protect civilians, including women and girls, from all forms of sexual violence,” noting that civilians account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict; that women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate.”

In the report on the criminalisation and prosecution of rape (A/HRC/47/26), the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls noted that under international humanitarian law and international criminal law, rape can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide when other

elements of the crimes are present. The Special Rapporteur stressed that rape is a violation of a range of human rights, including the right to bodily integrity, the rights to autonomy and to sexual autonomy, the right to privacy, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the right to equality before the law and the rights to be free from violence, discrimination, torture and other cruel or inhuman treatment. The Special Rapporteur recommended that there should be no statute of limitation for initiating legal proceedings on rape, whether committed during conflict or in peacetime. Finally, the Special Rapporteur recommended that legislation on the criminalisation and prosecution of rape should be reviewed in order to allow for accountability of the perpetrators, in line with international human rights standards.

The Special Rapporteur on Torture considers that there is an overwhelming consensus which crystallizes rape and other forms of sexual aggression of comparable gravity into prohibited forms of torture as *jus cogens* (A/79/181), supported by extensive international jurisprudence.

The Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda found “Like torture, rape is used for such purposes as intimidation, degradation, humiliation, discrimination, punishment, control or destruction of the person. Like torture, rape is a violation of personal dignity”.¹⁹ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia held that forcing male prisoners to commit sexual acts against each other²⁰, and forcing people to watch other people being raped²¹, constitute torture or cruel and inhuman treatment. The International Criminal Court has found that rape and sexual violence against abducted women constitutes torture as a crime against humanity and a war crime.

Every international and regional human rights body (courts and committees) has recognized rape and other sexual assaults of comparable gravity as torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and has placed a priority on victims of war violence. The Human Rights Committee held that gang rape by soldiers violated article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Committee against Torture has regularly, through its individual communications procedure, prevented the expulsion of individuals at risk of threats of sexual torture. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has acknowledged that various forms of gender-based violence may constitute torture (CEDAW/C/GC/35, paras. 16-18). The Committee on the Rights of the Child recognized that children are extremely vulnerable during armed conflicts and that torture includes sexual abuse (CRC/C/GC/13, paras. 3(i), 4, 25, 26 and 72(g)).

In Africa, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights has held *inter alia* that acts of rape and failure to prevent acts of rape constitute violations of article 5 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.¹⁶

Furthermore, regarding addressing the acts of violence against women and girls in Sudan, we recall that the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, which defines violence against women in article 2 as encompassing, but not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence. The Declaration states that women are

¹⁶ ACmHPR, Sudan Human Rights Organization and Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions v. Sudan, Comm Nos. 279/03-296/05, May 2009, para. 157. See also A/79/181, para 35.

entitled to equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other fields. These rights include, inter alia, (a) the right to life; (b) the right to equality; (c) the right to liberty and security; and (d) the right to equal protection under the law (article 3). In article 4(g), the Declaration notes the importance of ensuring that women subjected to violence receive specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in childcare, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation. The Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children has highlighted in the report that during humanitarian crises, children seeking to survive are often compelled to exchange sexual services, and due to pre-existing vulnerabilities as well as discrimination, girls are even forced to marry for food, shelter, protection or safe passage (A/72/164). Moreover, children on the move or those who live in conflict and humanitarian crisis areas, may be sold or trafficked to serve as combatants in armed conflict children, some of whom fall into the hands of criminals to continue their journey to reach relatives or acquaintances in another country. The Report underscores the recommendations to ensure justice and accountability in all cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation by implementing zero tolerance for such crimes, setting up prompt and effective investigations and prosecutions, implementing commensurate penalties for those guilty of such crimes, and providing reparation for victims. The Special Rapporteur outlined in the report that care, recovery and reintegration measures should be provided to child victims as part of their right to a meaningful remedy. Prevention measures must be taken against sexual exploitation by the military, extremist groups or family members, as well as child or forced marriages, whether in refugee, internally displaced persons camps or other situations in the country. Identification measures should be implemented to safeguard those children at risk of sexual and labor exploitation, including the establishment of accessible, safe and regular channels of migration. Moreover, collaboration must be strengthened on data sharing and the exchange of good practices among governments, humanitarian agencies and civil society on the identification, referral and assessment of children at risk of sale, trafficking and exploitation.

The Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children has emphasized in another report (A/HRC/52/31), that in line with the evidence based on various cases, reparation can allow for the narrowing of the gaps within communities formed by conflict and holds the potential to be an effective policy tool to promote recovery and development. There is an urgent need to step up efforts to support child-friendly remedies and reparations for victims and survivors, with a view to ensuring their access to justice and aiding their holistic recovery. Such efforts should include awareness raising for victims and their families and how to gain access to them, facilitating the expansion of free legal aid for children and building national cadres of specialized lawyers and paralegal services. Some positive steps in terms of meaningful reparation to child victims and survivors should also include; integrating legislative framework concerning survivor-centered reparation into the domestic jurisdiction, introducing co-creation model with the participation of child victims and survivors in the process of determining harms suffered, implementing interim relief measures, and ensuring child-friendly, multidisciplinary and inter-agency responses in line with age-appropriate and gender- and local-context-sensitive approaches.

We would like to recall that enforced disappearance is prohibited under customary international law (rule 98) and all parties to a conflict must take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and must provide their family members with any information they have on their fate (rule 117). Accordingly, we would like to recall the Guiding Principles for the Search for Disappeared Persons, and in particular principle 4, which requires the adoption of a differential approach when searching for disappeared children, girls and women. With regard to the latter, principle 4.3 establishes that “in cases involving adolescent girls and women who have disappeared or are involved in the search, all stages of the search should be conducted with a gender perspective and staff, including female staff, who have received proper training”. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls has stressed that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by enforced disappearances, particularly in conflict settings, and has called for the integration of a gender perspective in all aspects of search, identification, accountability, and psychosocial support for relatives (A/HRC/50/26, paras. 32-35). Relevant indications on how to perform the search for disappeared girls and women and adopt adequate and effective measures of psychosocial support are also enshrined in the general comment on women affected by enforced disappearances issued by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (A/HRC/WGEID/98/2).

Additionally, the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, in its report on sexual and reproductive rights in crisis (A/HRC/47/38), stressed that sexual and reproductive health matters are intrinsic to every woman and girl and tied to their ability to live with dignity and exercise their agency. It expressed deep concern about the widespread impunity for violations of the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls. The experts emphasized that women and girls are entitled to receive adequate reparations, including restitution, compensation, satisfaction, rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition, for violations of their sexual and reproductive health rights. The Working Group recommended expanding the availability of sexual and reproductive health services, such as through telemedicine and mobile clinics, as well as ensuring access to a full range of contraceptive information and services for women and girls, including emergency contraceptives. It also recommended expanding access to safe abortion services, including medical abortion and post-abortion care.

Furthermore, as stressed by the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls in one of its reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/23/50), stigmatization, harassment and outright attacks are used to silence and discredit women who are outspoken as leaders, community workers, human rights defenders and politicians. Women defenders are often the target of gender-specific violence, such as verbal abuse based on their sex, sexual abuse or rape; they may experience intimidation, attacks, death threats and even murder. The Working Group recommended to accelerate efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including through a comprehensive legal framework to combat impunity, in order to fulfil women’s human rights and to improve the enabling conditions for women’s participation in political and public life. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls has also highlighted the particular risks faced by women human rights defenders in conflict and post-conflict settings and emphasized the urgent need for States and non-State actors to adopt gender-sensitive protection mechanisms and accountability systems to address such violence (A/HRC/44/52, paras. 41-44).

Here, we would also like to refer to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We would like to refer to the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement which establish that all authorities shall respect their obligations under international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, to prevent and avoid conditions that might lead to the displacement of persons. The Principles shall be observed by all authorities, groups and persons irrespective of their legal status and applied without any adverse distinction (principle 2). Every human being shall have the right to be protected from being arbitrarily displaced, including in situations of armed conflict or due to gross human rights violations, discrimination and fear of persecution (principle 6). Displacement shall not be carried out in a manner that violates the rights to life, dignity, liberty and security of those affected (principle 8).

Internally displaced persons should not be arbitrarily deprived of their lives, including through murder, summary or arbitrary executions, and enforced disappearances (principle 10(1)). Internally displaced persons shall also be protected in particular against direct or indiscriminate attacks or other acts of violence, starvation as a method of combat, and attacks against their camps or settlements (principle 10(2)). Authorities have the obligation to protect internally displaced persons in particular from rape, mutilation, torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and other outrages upon personal dignity, such as acts of gender-specific violence, forced prostitution and any form of indecent assault (principle 10(2a)) and from slavery or any contemporary form of slavery, such as sale into marriage, sexual exploitation, or forced labor of children (principle 10 (2b)). Internally displaced persons should also be protected from arbitrary arrest or detention and discriminatory arrest and detention (principle 12). All internally displaced persons have the right to know the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives, and the authorities should endeavor to establish the fate and whereabouts of internally displaced persons reported missing and cooperate with relevant international organizations engaged in this task. (principle 16(1-2)). The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls has reiterated the urgent need for displaced women and girls to have guaranteed access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, psychosocial care, and protection mechanisms tailored to their specific vulnerabilities, including through mobile clinics and remote services when traditional access is disrupted (A/76/144, paras. 50-52).

We would also like to highlight principle 18, which sets out that internally displaced persons shall have an adequate standard of living, including safe access to essential food and portable water, basic shelter and housing, appropriate clothing, and essential medical services and sanitation. (principle 18). Internally displaced persons should receive to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay the medical care and attention they require, without distinction, and that special attention should be paid to the health needs of women, including access to female health care

providers and services, such as reproductive health care as well as appropriate counselling for victims of sexual and other abuses (principle 19). National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, and all authorities concerned shall grant and facilitate the free passage of humanitarian assistance and grant persons engaged in the provision of such assistance rapid and unimpeded access to the internally displaced (principle 25). Persons engaged in humanitarian assistance, their transports and supplies shall be respected and protected and shall not be the object of attack or other acts of violence (principle 26). We would like to remind you of the primary duty and responsibility to support durable solutions for internally displaced persons (principles 28-30).

Finally, we would like to refer to the Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protection of migrants in vulnerable situations, that requests authorities to establish accessible and confidential services for migrants who are survivors of violence and exploitation. These should include healthcare, counselling, reporting and complaints mechanisms, and effective referral arrangements. Migrants should have access to medical care, sexual and reproductive health services, and essential medicines, as well as psycho-social and other forms of support to assist their recovery and rehabilitation. Service providers should be trained to understand the human rights of migrants and migrant families who have been affected by violence, to respond to their needs, and to overcome anti-migrant bias. Migrants' experiences of violence, including domestic violence and sexual and gender-based violence, should be addressed without causing further victimization, trauma or harm. Ensure that relevant information on protection, services and rights is made available to migrants in a format and language they understand and in an age-appropriate manner.