

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the right to food; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

21 May 2026

Mr. Dagalo,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 53/4, 60/8, 58/10, 60/10, 52/7, 51/19 and 59/14.

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 59 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 mandate-holder(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.

In this connection, we would like to bring to your attention information we have received concerning **serious allegations of death in custody and detention conditions amounting to torture and ill-treatment in Shala Prison, in El Fasher, North Darfur, where approximately 9,000 persons, including women, are being arbitrarily detained by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), with many detainees allegedly facing life-threatening conditions due to lack of food, water, medical care and inhumane detention conditions.**

Rapid Support Forces

Special Procedures mandate holders have raised, at multiple occasions, serious concerns about the human rights situation in the context of the non-international armed conflict on North and West Darfur, including serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by the RSF. Notably, they sent communication [OTH 115/2024](#) on 6 August 2024. We regret that no reply has been received. In addition, the experts publicly shared their concern on 7 November 2025 in a [press release](#) regarding mass atrocities, including unlawful killings and widespread violence in El Fasher, on 27 November 2025 in a [press release](#) concerning the trafficking of women and children by armed groups in El Fasher, and on 8 May 2025 in a [press release](#) regarding the escalation of human rights violations in displacement camps, particularly in North Darfur.

According to the information received:

The number of persons detained by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Shala Prison, El Fasher, has reportedly escalated at an alarming rate, reaching critical and deeply concerning levels. Between 1 and 15 January 2026, the number of persons detained in Shala Prison reportedly increased from approximately 2,000 to 3,500, including around 500 women, many of whom were allegedly charged with supporting the Sudanese Armed Forces. As of February 2026, more than 9,000 persons are reportedly detained in Shala Prison, the majority of whom are wounded civilians suffering from serious injuries resulting from indiscriminate shelling the siege of El Fasher.

Detainees in Shala Prison are reportedly being held in conditions that pose an immediate and life-threatening risk to their survival. In detention facilities operated by the RSF, reports indicate patterns of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and infliction of severely inadequate conditions of detention, including lack of food, water and denial of medical care, often leading to outbreak of diseases and rising cases of death in custody. In Shala Prison, reports indicate severe shortages of food and medical care, with over 300 detainees who reportedly died during the past two months as a result of infected wounds, lack of treatment, starvation and disease, including an outbreak of cholera causing between 5 to 10 deaths per week. These conditions mirror the broader pattern of conflict-induced starvation and deprivation across Sudan, particularly in Darfur, where the destruction of markets, obstruction of humanitarian assistance, looting of food supplies, and attacks on civilian infrastructure have deepened acute food insecurity and exposed civilian population to famine-like conditions. Reports from affected areas indicate that many civilians have been forced to survive on animal feed and other unsafe substitutes amid the near-total collapse of access to food and essential services. The RSF allegedly prevented volunteer medical personnel from accessing the prison to provide medical assistance. Following the cholera outbreak, detainees were reportedly evacuated from the Prison and relocated to the Shala Remand House for Juveniles, located near the prison.

The reported treatment of deceased detainees constitutes a particularly disturbing pattern of degrading and inhuman conduct. Bodies are reportedly left beside detainees for prolonged periods without burial, and detainees are allegedly forced to bury deceased persons within the prison vicinity. RSF

soldiers are alleged to have compelled inmates to dispose of the bodies in the prison's mass grave.

Context

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported that “[o]n 15 April 2023, armed hostilities broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the non-state Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum state and Merowe, and swiftly engulfed the Darfur region. After the RSF largely consolidated control over four of the five Darfur states in late November 2023, the focus of the conflict turned to North Darfur and its capital, El Fasher”.¹ According to OHCHR reporting, “[f]rom May 2024, the RSF, supported by allied Arab militia, imposed and maintained a siege of El Fasher and engaged in sustained attacks on the city and surrounding areas.² [...] On the night of 24 October 2025, the RSF launched a final offensive on the besieged city of El Fasher”.³ More than 6,000 civilians in and around El Fasher were reportedly killed during the first three days of this attack.⁴ The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Joint Fact-Finding Mission on the Human Rights Situation in the Sudan stated that “[s]ince the outbreak of hostilities in mid-April 2023, tens of thousands of civilians and persons hors de combat are believed to have been killed across Sudan”.⁵

During and immediately following the October 2025 offensive, the RSF reportedly used ten separate detention facilities in El Fasher, including to detain children. These facilities included Shala prison (South-West of the city), a facility operated by the RSF in an area they controlled prior to the offensive. The RSF also reportedly established unofficial and unregulated detention facilities, referred to as “secret prisons”, in civilian houses in neighbourhoods such as Darja Ola.

Before the RSF takeover of El Fasher, Shala Prison was used for the detention of civilians accused of collaboration with the SAF and Joint Forces as well as a disciplinary facility for RSF fighters. During and following the takeover of the city in late October 2025, the prison has been used for mass detention of both SAF and Joint Forces combatants – including wounded combatants – as well as civilians perceived to be mobilized to fight with the SAF and Joint Forces. At the end of October 2025, hundreds of civilians were reportedly arrested and detained in the detention centers established in El Fasher, including Shala Prison. The RSF allegedly contacted relatives of some detainees and demanded payments in exchange for their release. During the same period, Shala prison served particularly as a primary detention facility for hundreds of combatants and civilians before they were transferred to Tagris prison in Nyala, South Darfur, in November 2025. Shala prison has reportedly continued to serve as

¹ OHCHR [Report on the RSF final offensive and capture of besieged El Fasher \(24-30 October 2025\)](#), 13 February 2026, para. 1.

² *Ibid* para. 3.

³ *Ibid*, para. 4.

⁴ *Ibid*, para. 15.

⁵ OHCHR, [Sudan: On third anniversary of conflict, UN and ACHPR-AU Fact-Finding Missions jointly warn of escalating violence and heightened risk of further atrocity crimes](#), 13 April 2026.

disciplinary facility for the RSF, and it is reported that returning internally displaced persons have also been detained there.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we express serious concern the alleged unlawful killings, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and inhumane and life-threatening conditions of detention of thousands of individuals in Shala Prison, including civilians, internally displaced persons, and persons hors de combat. If confirmed, these would constitute serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law by the RSF, and may amount to war crimes.

Arbitrary deprivation of life

We are extremely concerned at the alleged death of three hundred detainees in Shala prison over the past two months, as a result of untreated infected wounds, starvation, disease, and a cholera outbreak. We recall that the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life is a *jus cogens* obligation and should be respected and protected at all times, without possible derogation or exception, including during armed conflict. Under common article 3 to the four Geneva Conventions, applicable in non-international armed conflicts, persons taking no active part in hostilities, including persons placed hors de combat by detention, wounds, sickness or any other cause, shall be treated humanely and should not be subject to violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds (the [Customary Rules of International Humanitarian Law](#) identified in the study of the International Committee of the Red Cross, rule 89 (“Customary Rules”)).

We recall that the right to life encompasses not only the obligation to refrain from unlawful killing, but also the obligation to investigate all suspected unlawful deaths, including every death occurring in custody or detention. Where individuals die while deprived of their liberty and under the effective control of a detaining authority, such deaths give rise to a strong presumption of responsibility on the part of that authority, particularly where deaths appear to be frequent, preventable, or linked to conditions of detention. This presumption may only be rebutted through a prompt, effective, independent, impartial and transparent investigation capable of clarifying the cause and circumstances of death and identifying those responsible. Investigations into potentially unlawful deaths, including deaths in custody, should be conducted in accordance with the [Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death](#) (2016), which reflects internationally recognized standards applicable to all actors exercising control over detainees, including non-State armed groups.

Arbitrary deprivation of liberty

We are also deeply concerned by reports that thousands of civilians are being held in Shala prison, many of whom were allegedly abducted for ransom or accused of supporting opposing forces. Under customary international humanitarian law applicable in non-international armed conflict, deprivation of liberty must not be arbitrary (rule 99 of the Customary Rules), must be based on imperative security reasons, and must be accompanied by minimum procedural safeguards. These include being informed of the reasons for arrest, being brought promptly before a judicial authority or other competent body, and having the possibility to challenge the lawfulness of detention. We wish to recall that, in accordance with article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), no one shall be subjected to arbitrary

arrest, detention, or exile. The prohibition of arbitrary detention has attained the status of *jus cogens* under international law.

Prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and humane conditions of detention

We are gravely concerned by consistent reports indicating patterns of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in RSF-operated detention facilities, including Shala prison. These include severe overcrowding, prolonged deprivation of food and water, denial of medical care, exposure to disease, and the psychological suffering caused by prolonged exposure to unburied corpses. The prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is absolute and non-derogable, under international human rights law. Furthermore, it is a customary norm (rule 90 of the Customary Rules) that has attained the status of *jus cogens*. This applies to civilians as well as persons *hors de combat* (rule 87 of the Customary Rules). Under Common article 3, cruel treatment and outrages upon personal dignity are strictly prohibited at all times. The [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners](#) (the Mandela Rules), provide authoritative guidance on detention standards. They require that all persons deprived of liberty be treated with respect for their inherent dignity and value as human beings (rule 1) and shall not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (rule 43).

In addition, we are deeply alarmed by allegations that detainees, including wounded civilians and injured combatants, are denied essential medical care, leading to the deterioration of wounds, outbreaks of cholera, and preventable deaths. Civilians and persons *hors de combat* must be treated humanely (rule 87 of the Customary Rules). Under customary international humanitarian law, the wounded and sick shall be respected and protected, and shall receive the medical care required by their condition (rule 110 and 118 of the Customary Rules). All prisons must ensure prompt access to medical attention in urgent cases (rule 27 of the Mandela Rules) and accommodation, sanitation, and hygiene must meet basic standards of health, including adequate space, ventilation and cleanliness (rules 13 and 15 of the Mandela Rules). We recall that the specific protection, health and assistance needs of women affected by armed conflict must be respected (rule 134 of the Customary Rules). Moreover, under principle 19 of the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, “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.”

We express serious concern at reports that detainees in Shala prison and other RSF-operated facilities are subjected to severe shortages of food and potable water, leading to starvation, disease and death. Customary international humanitarian law requires that all persons deprived of their liberty must be provided with adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and medical attention (rule 118 of the Customary Rules and rules 22 and 42 of the Mandela Rules). Furthermore, such actions would constitute a violation of article 11 enshrining the right to an adequate standard of living of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Sudan acceded in 1986.

Treatment of dead bodies and remains

We are alarmed by information indicating that bodies of deceased detainees are left beside living detainees for prolonged periods, and that detainees are forced to bury the deceased in mass graves within or near the prison. As highlighted by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, violations of the right to life implicate the dignity and protection of the dead and the right of families to the remains of their loved ones ([A/HRC/56/56](#), para. 35). International humanitarian law requires States to take all possible measures to advance the search for, and the recovery, documentation and protection of, the dead ([A/HRC/56/56](#), para. 41). Parties to a conflict must take all possible measures to search for the dead in a timely manner (rule 112 of the Customary Rules), prevent the mutilation or mistreatment of dead bodies (rule 113), and ensure that the dead are disposed of in a respectful manner and their graves are respected and properly maintained (rule 115). Additionally, parties to the conflict must record all available information prior to disposal of remains, mark grave locations (rule 116) and endeavor to facilitate the return of remains where requested to the next of kin or the party to the conflict to which they belong (rule 114).

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on <http://www.ohchr.org/> or can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response as soon as possible on the initial steps taken to safeguard the right to life and the physical and mental integrity of all individuals detained in Shala Prison, including women, in Shala Prison, in accordance with applicable international human rights and humanitarian law provisions.

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 also be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide the number and the categories of persons detained in Shala Prison.
3. Please provide information on the reported deaths of detainees in Shala Prison, including the number of persons who have died since October 2025, the registered cause manner and circumstances of these deaths.
4. Please provide information on whether deaths in custody reported in Shala Prison and other places of detention have been carried out and whether these conform with international standards for death investigations, including the [Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death](#) (2016). Please provide information on the findings and results of such investigations. In case investigations have not been carried out, or they failed to meet required standards of forensic best practice, please explain the reasons for this.

5. Please also explain measures taken to prevent further arbitrary deprivation of life in Shala prison, including measures to ensure the accountability for violations committed against detainees.
6. Please provide information on the legal basis for the detention of civilians in Shala Prison, including the grounds for their detention, any procedural safeguards in place, and measures taken to ensure that no one is subjected to arbitrary detention.
7. Please provide information on the measures taken to prevent and prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in Shala Prison and other detention facilities operated by the RSF, and ensuring humane detention conditions, including measures to ensure access to adequate food, potable water, sanitation and timely medical care, including the specific health requirements of women.
8. Please provide information on the steps taken to ensure that the bodies and remains of deceased detainees are respectfully handed over to their families as required under international law.

This communication, and any response received will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should you respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

Further, we would like to inform you that having transmitted a communication, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may also transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether the deprivation was arbitrary or not. The present communication in no way prejudices any opinion the Working Group may render. The recipient is required to respond separately to this letter and the regular procedure.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to provide urgent and necessary medical care to infected detainees in Shala prison, prevent further foreseeable deaths and halt, ensure proper investigations into cases of deaths in custody and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the deaths to be unlawful, to ensure the accountability of any person responsible, including the chain of command.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter has also been sent to the Government of Sudan.

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

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Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

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