

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

Ref.: AL OTH 49/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

1 July 2026

Mr. Hamdan Dagalo,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and and Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 61/22, 59/4, 60/10 and 59/12.

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 grave violations of the rights to association and assembly against the Sudan Social Development Organisation (SUDO), other civil society organizations, workers and trade unionists by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The **Sudan Social Development Organisation, SUDO** is a non-governmental organisation that provides humanitarian assistance and vital human rights to vulnerable populations across Sudan.

Rapid Support Forces

Concerns by Special Procedures were previously raised to the RSF in communication AL OTH 101/2023, sent to the RSF on 15 August 2023, regarding allegations of widespread and systematic sexual violence, harassment and abuse by the RSF against minority communities. A reply was received on 19 January 2024, acknowledging the concerns, and citing RSF efforts in delivering humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, we remain deeply concerned at the forced closure of a major humanitarian assistance organisation due to RSF threats in the Darfur region of Sudan, which is under its control.

The excessive use of force by armed militia in West Darfur was the subject of communication AL SDN 5/2022 sent to the Government of Sudan on 3 August 2022; killings of human rights defenders in West Darfur and threats of sexual violence against women human rights defenders, both attributed to the RSF were the subject of communication AL SDN 4/2023 sent to the Government of Sudan on 18 October 2023; gender -based violence by all sides to the war was the subject of communication AL SDN 2/2024. No replies were received.

In a statement on 10 February 2025, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan drew attention to restrictions imposed by the RSF-affiliated Sudanese Agency for Relief and Humanitarian Operations (SARHO) that prevent life-saving assistance to those in need.¹

In a statement issued on 14 April 2026, the UN Human Rights Expert on Sudan referred to acute food insecurity and near famine conditions on parts of Darfur and to patterns of serious violations.²

According to the information received:

Reports we have received concerning credible allegations of threats by the RSF in Darfur against SUDO forcing it to close its Darfur offices

Since the outbreak of the war in Sudan on 15 April 2023, violence has spread across the country, leaving tens of thousands of civilians dead, many more missing and nearly 14 million people internally displaced, in addition to thousands who have fled to neighbouring countries.³ Most of the civilians are reported to be women and children, who are in dire need of medical care, food and water, as well as access to shelters.

In October 2025, during the RSF capture of El-Fasher in Darfur leading to its control of the region, targeted attacks and sexual violence were used as weapons of war.⁴

Since the start of the war, local communities have actively mobilized to try and respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of those most in need. Their resources are very limited and have been hampered by the insecurity of the

¹ <https://sudan.un.org/en/288996-remove-restrictions-allow-aid-reach-people-need-sudan>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/04/un-human-rights-expert-sudan-renews-calls-dialogue-accountability-conflicts>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

ongoing fighting, limiting the capacity to provide lifesaving protection and assistance.

SUDO continued to operate across the country after the outbreak of the war, and it had maintained its presence in Darfur when it came under RSF control.

Around mid-2025, SUDO applied to the RSF-affiliated Sudanese Agency for Relief and Humanitarian Operations (SARHO) to register in the parts then occupied by the RSF. In early November, and after the fall of El-Fasher, SARHO informed SUDO that the RSF had instructed it to refuse SUDO's registration in Darfur based on accusations that the organisation was reporting on RSF actions. SARHO suggested that SUDO contact the RSF directly to solve the problem. SUDO declined to.

In November 2025, SUDO began phasing out its operations in Darfur, and asked its staff who were in danger to leave. In December 2025, SUDO closed its operational offices in Darfur and suspended its activities in the region, in order to ensure the security of its personnel.

The closure of SUDO meant that over 500,000 individuals have been denied access to essential service; its health services and emergency medical assistance have been halted, as well as its nutritional support for malnourished children and pregnant women. It has also led to the displacement of its staff and the loss of the primary source of income of over 100 employees.

Workers and trade unionists

Since the outbreak of the armed conflict, workers and trade unionists have been subjected to a systematic campaign of grave violations perpetrated allegedly by both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), in addition to affiliated militias and de facto authorities aligned with both sides.

These violations include killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, forced displacement, collective and arbitrary dismissal, prohibition of trade union activities, confiscation of unions property, and discrimination based on political opinion or identity.

The outbreak of war in April 2023 led to the near-total collapse of infrastructure, public services, and civilian state institutions. De facto authorities issued a series of administrative decisions undermining trade union independence, notably Administrative Decisions No. (8) and (9) of 2025 issued on 29 May 2025 by the Registrar of Trade Union Organizations, dissolving executive offices of unions and professional associations and replacing them with appointed committees.

These measures were based on the 2010 Trade Union Act, a law enacted under the former regime, which was in contradiction with international standards and ignoring the draft democratic trade union law drafted by the previous transitional government. In response, independent unions and professional coordination bodies emerged to document violations and defend workers' rights while preserving what remains of independent trade union action.

This period has also witnessed a dangerous escalation in the institutional and financial seizure of trade union organizations, particularly the Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation (SWTUF), within a policy framework aimed at financing the war and re-establishing political control through state-aligned unions.

Measures against SWTUF include: i) issuance of Administrative Decisions No. (8) and (9) of 2025 appointing pro-government committees, ii) issuance of Constitutional Decree No. (4) of 2025 lifting suspension of union activities, iii) forcing meeting between the unelected union leadership and the Minister of Finance, iv) directive by the Central Bank of Sudan (21 September 2025) to unfreeze union accounts for the new leadership, v) Imposition of forced salary deductions to support the war effort, notably in Gezira State. These measures aim to use union assets as a "war fund," dismantle independent unionism, and re-establish state-controlled unions.

These violations have resulted in the paralysis of independent trade union movements and the undermining of its vital role in peacebuilding and reconstruction.

At least 450 cases of violations against Sudanese workers across vital sectors, have been reported. Over 200 killings and serious injuries of workers and trade unionists including teachers, health workers, journalists, transport and other service sectors. These deaths resulted from indiscriminate shelling, direct targeting, or extrajudicial executions. Notable incidents include the attack on Saudi Maternity Hospital on 28 October 2025, which resulted in the killing of hundreds of patients and the abduction of medical personnel, the killing of 47 railway workers in Babanusa in November 2025.

Hundreds of trade unionists and employees have been arrested without judicial warrants, held in undisclosed locations, and subjected to physical and psychological torture.

Trade union leaders and activists have received death threats and were subjected to judicial harassment both in Sudan and abroad.

Besides, there has been a policy of mass arbitrary dismissal and denial of work affecting at least 200 workers, particularly in Khartoum and South Darfur, based on suspected political, ethnic, or regional affiliation, without due legal process. Also, tens of thousands of workers, particularly teachers, have been deprived of salaries since April 2023, with unlawful deductions recorded.

Along with schools and hospitals, unions premises have been destroyed or converted into military barracks, while union offices have been seized and converted to security facilities.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we express serious concern at the registration refusal and the conditions of insecurity in Darfur that forced the closure of a humanitarian organisation and its health care

facilities, leading to the denial of the right to health to vulnerable populations. This suggests a serious disregard of international human rights obligations in situations of armed conflict. These include, inter alia, respect to the right to life of its citizens, which constitutes a *jus cogens* norm and international customary law.

Furthermore, the systematic campaign of violence against workers and trade unionists must be unequivocally framed as an attack on human rights defenders. Trade unionists are recognized as legitimate human rights defenders whose work is vital for social justice and democracy. The killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, and the forced dissolution of independent unions to be replaced by state-aligned committees are directed at dismantling a fundamental pillar of civil society, eliminating dissent, and co-opting union resources for the war effort.

The practices against workers and unions constitute a deliberate breach of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and a direct violation of Sudan's obligations under International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, in particular convention No. 87 (Freedom of Association) and Convention No. 98 (Right to Organize and Collective Negotiating). It also affects ILO conventions 29 and 111. They are also contrary to the broader principles enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, constituting a deliberate strategy to erase independent social organization and consolidate authoritarian control.

The ILO Committee of Experts has expressed deep concern regarding reports of forced labour, sexual exploitation, and coercion, particularly in Darfur, and called for effective measures to prevent such violations, investigate them, and prosecute perpetrators. The Committee also noted the absence of information from Sudanese authorities regarding prosecutions or judicial rulings related to trafficking in persons and forced labour, despite the existence of national legislation criminalizing such acts.

The absence of accountability perpetuates a culture of impunity and exposes civilians, including women and children, to further exploitation.

We would like to remind the RSF of their obligations to conduct thorough, effective, credible and transparent investigations of all human rights abuses in line with international standards, and to bring perpetrators to account.

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 detailed explanation as to the refusal to register the humanitarian organisation, leading to its forced closure, and how it is in

line with international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

3. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that civil society organisations, humanitarian organisations and human rights defenders in areas under RSF control are able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment without fear of threats or acts of intimidation and harassment of any kind.

This communication, and any response received from you, 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.

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.

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

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

Andrea Bolaños Vargas
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Gina Romero
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Tlaleng Mofokeng
Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

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

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 (UDHR), 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 would like to point to article 25(1) of the UDHR which guarantees the right of everyone to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being, including medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of a lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond their control.

We would also like to refer to the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution which expresses concern at violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and recognizes its critical role (A/HRC/RES/24/5, No. 3,4).

We would like to recall article 20 of the UDHR, which states that everyone shall have the right to freedom of association.

We also wish to recall article 12 of the ICESCR, which guarantees the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Article 12(1), coupled with article 2.2 (non-discrimination) establishes the obligation to respect the rights of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health without discrimination. In this general comment No. 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), stresses that the right to health is “an inclusive right extending not only to timely and appropriate health care but also to the underlying determinants of health, such as access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, an adequate supply of safe food, nutrition and housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions, and access to health-related education and information” (general comment No. 14, para. 11).

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health emphasized that “[h]ealthcare systems in conflict affected areas are being overwhelmed by violence, infrastructure destruction, health worker shortages and large-scale displacement.” (A/80/184, para. 31). She reminded that “[d]espite the fact that international humanitarian law sets out a number of obligations for both State and non-State actors, in situations of conflict hospitals continue to be evacuated, closed or destroyed, further straining the availability of healthcare and sometimes depriving individuals of access

for several hundreds of kilometres [...]. The accessibility and acceptability of health facilities, goods and services are critical and in times of conflict [...]" (A/80/184, para. 33). She further recommended that "[i]n crisis, conflict, war and genocide, States must apply both international humanitarian law and human rights law, as they share the aim of protecting all persons and are grounded in the principle of respect for the life, well-being and human dignity of the person". She further recommended that "[s]takeholders should ensure the effective monitoring of violations of the right to health. Independent investigations, access to justice and accountability mechanisms should place the prevention power of early warning and human rights at the forefront" (A/80/184, paras. 87 (g) and (h)).

We would like to refer to The UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, stating the obligations to provide equal and effective access to justice; adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered; and access to relevant information concerning violations and reparation mechanisms. As set by the basic principles, reparations can be in the forms of restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and measures of satisfaction, such as public apologies, or public memorials, and guarantees of non-repetition and changes in relevant laws and practices, as well as bringing to justice perpetrators of human rights violations, while considering the situation of vulnerability of certain groups.

Finally, we would like to recall the Declaration on the Rights and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (also known as the 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 reiterates the prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.