

Imminent threats to civilians in North Darfur

Nonviolent Peaceforce warns of cataclysmic situation in North Darfur, urges the international community to use all available diplomatic and humanitarian leverage to prevent imminent atrocities in El Fasher and surrounds

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SUDAN, 19 April 2024—As violence escalates in and around El Fasher, North Darfur, Nonviolent Peaceforce is deeply concerned about escalating violence and its impacts on civilians and urges the international community to use all available leverage to prevent further atrocities.

“We are rapidly approaching a cataclysmic scenario for El Fasher,” warned Nic Pyatt, Head of Mission for Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sudan, who coordinates with the team who remain on the ground. “Despite the ongoing threats this community has faced over the last year of war, the situation has never been more urgent.”

As hostilities between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have escalated, the frontlines of the conflict are moving ever closer to El Fasher, a critical strategic location. The immediate region is home to approximately 2.8 million civilians, as well as an estimated 1million internally displaced persons who fled to the capital due to its perceived relative safety from other areas of Sudan.

“With most transit routes closed to aid or civilian movement, there is real risk of a siege situation in the coming days and weeks. This leaves civilians exposed to major risks of violence and atrocities,” said Pyatt. “People are now stuck in the area, just waiting for the conflict to start, knowing they have nowhere safe to run.”

The escalation exacerbates existing lack of access to basic food, medicines and humanitarian aid. Prices of basic goods in El Fasher are rising by the hour due to shortages and are increasingly inaccessible to many already experiencing hunger and malnutrition.

Despite an ever-narrowing window of opportunity to arrest these harms, there are still urgent actions the international community can take today. We have an urgent responsibility to protect civilians and prevent further violations and atrocity crimes, and urge immediate and decisive action and support from the international community, including:

- The immediate negotiation and implementation of a safe passage route for civilians from El Fasher to safer areas;
- Representations from the highest levels of governmental leadership, including in the United States, to implore all parties to adhere to International Humanitarian Law and to push for an immediate ceasefire;
- Prioritising illumination of harm to civilians as a form of atrocity prevention, including through state hearings, investigating and cataloguing evidence of IHL violations and atrocity crimes, and public media reports;
- An immediate scale-up of humanitarian funding, expedited and directed to those local groups and on-the-ground INGOs with access to most affected areas and populations.

These calls stand alongside longstanding entreaties to all parties to the conflict, along with their associated non-state armed groups, to adhere to their commitments under International Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, as well as the directives outlined in the Jeddah Declaration. This includes ensuring that all individuals under their command follow these laws and obligations.

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NP is an international protection agency. Our mission is to protect civilians in violent conflicts through unarmed strategies, build peace side-by-side with local communities, and advocate for the wider adoption of these approaches to safeguard human lives and dignity.