



# Women in Sudan

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## 1. Background on Sudan Conflict

Starting with protests in December 2018, the Sudanese revolution led to major changes in governance in the following year. President Omar al-Bashir, who had ruled for the previous 30 years, was deposed by the end of April 2019<sup>[4]</sup>. A culmination of agreements between military leaders and protest leaders came to a power-sharing deal signed by the end of July 2019. The deal set out to create a balanced council that would serve during a transitional period before an election could be held in 2022<sup>[1]</sup>.

This revolution garnered support from the UN as an example of ideals of freedom and justice surpassing tyranny. The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) was created in June 2020 to provide support during the transitionary period<sup>[2]</sup>. Despite a military coup in October 2021, and the resignation of Prime Minister Hamdok in January 2022, hope for a troubled but successful transition to a Sudanese democratic solution remained<sup>[2]</sup>.

However, April 2023 marked the start of an armed conflict that is continuing to this day<sup>[5]</sup>. The UN Human Rights Office believes that both sides of the current conflict have committed grave violations of international law, including physical and sexual violence against civilians and detainment of activists<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2. Women in the Conflict

Women have been a critical part of the pivotal moments in Sudan's history, including the recent turmoil. Women made up a majority of protestors during the initial protests in December 2018, and took upon themselves the responsibility to lead resistance efforts despite the harsh and unjust treatment that the government would respond with<sup>[3]</sup>. Women continued to play key roles in a variety of organizations and coalitions, contributing to the

shape of Sudan's transition to a democracy through their activism and demands<sup>[2,3]</sup>. In the face of the 2021 coup's threat to Sudan's commitments, women were quick to return to action and demand safeguarding of their rights<sup>[2]</sup>.

Part of the agreement made in 2019 stipulated a 40% quota for representation of women at all levels within decision-making bodies, to spur progress from substantially lower levels from previous years<sup>[3]</sup>. Despite these goals unfortunately not being achieved, UNITAMS' consultation continues to show Sudanese support for the quota<sup>[2]</sup>. The consultation further reveals measures that Sudan could have taken, including establishing a Women and Gender Equality Commission in the transitional government, reforming laws and practices, and improving training among the armed forces<sup>[2]</sup>.

With the recent escalation of the conflict, many issues have come to a crisis in need of urgent solutions. Millions of women and girls require humanitarian assistance, hundreds of thousands are pregnant and in need of service to aid with safe delivery, and many are experiencing sexual violence at the hands of the current military<sup>[7]</sup>.

## 3. Foreign and Future Perspectives

The conflict in Sudan has potentially served as a playground for external actors. Conflicting reports suggest involvement in Sudan by actors such as the Russian Wagner Group, the UAE, and others<sup>[5]</sup>.

On one hand, the United Nations stresses that the path to democracy must be Sudanese-made and owned<sup>[2]</sup>. On the other hand, appropriate pressure must be applied to cease the current conflict<sup>[6]</sup>.

It is hard to tell what the outcome in the near future will be for Sudan's turmoil, and in particular for the rights of women within it. Appropriate decisions made outside of Sudan could provide the support necessary to return to a path towards democracy and increased representation and rights.

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