

## **SURVIVORS SPEAK OUT: SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SUDAN**

### **Executive Summary**

Women in Sudan are living in crisis. *Survivors Speak Out: Sexual Violence in Sudan* tells the stories of sexual violence survivors and the women's grassroots organizations that support them. The report documents the myriad forms of violence women in Sudan are facing—sexual violence is used against women as a weapon of war and political repression, and within the context of domestic labour and displacement. The victims are women and children of all ages and in all parts of Sudan. They have been subjected to rape, gang rape, genital mutilation and other cruel acts of sexual violence.

A key finding of the report is that the women of Sudan are being punished for being raped. Rape survivors find themselves re-victimized by a political and legal system that is exacerbating impunity and uninterested in addressing the issue. What it leads to is a society where rape is normalized.

Speaking out about sexual violence in Sudan comes with grave risks, especially in cases where government officials or military forces are implicated. Women who have reported rape cases have been threatened, jailed or live in exile. One activist interviewed told us: "Even coming here, I came scared. We have been threatened several times. We have been detained several times because of the work we do...I have been detained three times." Yet, the women cannot be silenced. They find ways to tell their stories and support each other. The stories paint a damning picture of widespread sexual violence and a social and legal environment that leave rape survivors with no access to services, protection or justice.

While the crisis in Darfur received global attention and a number of international organizations provided much needed services to survivors of sexual violence, the expulsion of 13 humanitarian organizations in 2009 has left survivors cut off from medical and psychosocial services that had been previously available. What's more, it has effectively made the sexual violence crisis in Sudan invisible. It was mostly humanitarian agencies that were collecting data on sexual violence and bringing the issue to the attention of the international community and policy-makers.

Areas such as South Kordofan and Blue Nile, where conflict is ongoing, have been completely inaccessible to journalists, human rights monitors and aid groups. Only the anecdotes of women who have fled the country give us an idea of the severity of their situation. The refugee women interviewed said that





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hundreds of women and girls had been abducted and the military sexually assaulted them as they fled. One Nuba woman inside the Yida refugee camp in South Sudan told us that “I saw two girls from Angolo captured and then raped to death. If someone isn’t dying quickly, they just finish them off with a knife or bullet. This is what happens to us. I’ve seen it with my own eyes.”

The legal environment leaves most rape survivors with no access to protection or justice. Many women and girls who come forward to report their assault are immediately accused of *zina* (adultery) which is a crime in Sudan. Moreover, the burden of proof for rape usually falls on the victim. Women must either obtain a confession from the perpetrator or produce testimony of four adult male witnesses.

A document known as ‘Form 8’ poses another legal challenge. Although the law requiring that victims obtain this form was changed in 2005, women continue to be told they need the form from the police station before they can receive medical treatment. Many doctors refuse to provide a medical exam without the form for fear of reprisal. Yet, the form does not collect enough evidence for conviction in rape cases. Not only is this form a source of confusion, but it is used as a deliberate tactic to prevent the reporting of rape.

Meanwhile, Sudanese president Omar Al-Bashir blatantly denies the existence of rape in Sudan and the Justice Minister has stated that 25 percent of the country’s population—the majority of government and military agents—enjoys immunity from prosecution of all crimes. Rampant impunity signals that rape is permissible and, as a result, violence against women has become normalized.

A watershed case of breaking the silence on rape against activists in Sudan is the case of Safia Ishag, who spoke about her experience in a YouTube video. Kidnapped and gang-raped by three members of the National Security Services in Khartoum in 2011, she was harassed and followed by police and security agents when she insisted on filing a police report. She had to flee Sudan, but the case is open and ongoing. Those who had been supporting Safia Ishag were arrested or had to flee the country as well.

National and local organizations are doing their best to provide whatever legal, medical and psychosocial support they can to survivors. But they must do so quietly and at great risk. Given their extremely limited resources and a lack of support and cooperation from relevant government departments, they cannot come close to meeting the essential needs of the many women traumatized by sexual violence. The international community can do a great deal to support these organizations and ensure they receive the resources they need to address this crisis.





## ***Regional Highlights***

### ***Darfur***

The Sudanese army and the Janjaweed have systematically used rape to terrorize and displace populations and to target non-Arab tribes in Darfur. While the army and its allied militias bear the majority of responsibility for rape and violence, sexual violence has also been committed by all parties to the conflict. Our research revealed that Darfuri women have actually reported a greater number of attacks in the lulls between bouts of active armed conflict than during the periods of active fighting.

### ***Eastern Sudan***

Eastern Sudan is home to some of the country's most impoverished people. Some international organizations fear that the region is on the brink of a full-scale war, particularly since the government's expulsion of aid groups in June 2012. According to reports, Rashaida and Beja women are subject of targeted sexual violence from government forces as well as from attacks amongst the two groups. In addition to this, female refugees entering from neighbouring Eritrea and Ethiopia also find themselves as targets of rape and sexual violence.

### ***South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains and Abyei) and Blue Nile***

South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains and Abyei) has witnessed a significant increase of violence since the creation of South Sudan in 2011. That being said, women in the region have been subjected to rape as a systematic weapon since 1987 as part of a governmental campaign to "eliminate the Nuba identity" and displace populations. Although sexual violence remains widespread and documented, it is difficult to assess the extent in certain areas like the Blue Nile, partially because of the denied access to members of the international community as well as the stigma associated with rape and sexual violence.

### ***Khartoum & Surrounding Areas***

Khartoum is the site of elevated violence against women from marginalised groups or ethnicities, where women often come to the city as displaced persons or refugees, taking up jobs in the informal economy and working in insecure areas that leave them vulnerable to targeted sexual assaults. Over the past few decades the region has experienced a surge in sexual violence, as Al-Bashir has clamped down on civilians through the use of brutal methods including rape and threat of rape.



### ***Recommendations***

Women's organizations in Sudan must be supported and funded directly to address the sexual violence crisis in Sudan and provide services to survivors, including legal, medical and psychosocial services.

In-country diplomatic missions must implement strategic protection plans for women human rights defenders, including public support for their work, strong condemnation of attacks against women activists and organizations, and regular meetings with them.

The international community must work together to put more pressure on the Sudanese government to increase access for international and humanitarian agencies to conflict areas.

More funding must be provided to increase research and data collection capacity of women's organizations and to conduct a comprehensive study on sexual violence in Sudan in order to determine the scale of the crisis and adequate responses.

The international community must support a fact-finding mission to Sudan by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women to be able to present a report on the situation of women in Sudan to the United Nations.

