

Humanitarianism Under Siege

Millions at Risk as Belligerents Abuse Humanitarian Aid



Cover art by graphic artist Obada Gumaa Gabir

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Introduction

The need to address the humanitarian disaster inflicted on Sudan's people by the warring parties has recently led to the convening of indirect talks in Geneva, initiated by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, to discuss the implementation of a humanitarian ceasefire and improving humanitarian access and civilian protection. As mediators engaged with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) on August 21, following earlier engagement with Rapid Support Forces (RSF), they must recognize the ways in which both parties have obstructed and diverted humanitarian assistance since the conflict began. This paper briefly outlines the key methods the warring parties have employed to misappropriate and misuse humanitarian aid, which can serve as a basis for such engagement and concludes with a number of recommendations.

Obstruction amidst talks on access

There are serious challenges to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those affected by war in Sudan, prompting Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs to describe the current conflict in Sudan as “one of the worst humanitarian nightmares in recent history.”

This nightmare is driven by several factors, but one been the belligerents' response, or lack thereof, to facilitating humanitarian access. Slow donor responses have also played a role. While international talks in Geneva and elsewhere have sought to find a formula for increasing humanitarian aid, most recently in proximity talks July 11-19, these have failed to make progress as both the SAF and RSF have shown considerable callousness to those under their control. Though the UN special envoy Lamamra said the talks [represented](#) “an encouraging initial step in a longer and complex process,” the record shows that the two parties have little concern for civilians living in areas under their respective control. Both have diverted humanitarian aid meant for war victims and attacked facilities and supplies essential for the survival and well-being of civilians since the war began on April 15, 2023. Food and other humanitarian assistance have been weaponized since the outbreak of the April 15 war in Sudan. Also, both sides raced to grab relief and use it to provide for their soldiers. This paper highlights the diversion of humanitarian aid in the war and the role that this is playing in the developing war economy.

These actions are consistent with a history of obstruction of humanitarian assistance in Sudan. One expert observed that belligerents have attempted to [control](#) or deny access to humanitarian aid to achieve political and military goals over the last four decades. This control was used in past wars as a tool to force opponent populations out of their land, as a pull factor to bring IDPs into areas that could be easily controlled, or to direct resources, in such as way as to allow them to be taxed or plundered.

Suspicious of corruption emerged as reports indicated that relief supplies had [leaked](#) into markets since the first days of the war. The continuation of fighting led both parties to place pressure on international and local organizations through restrictions on relief routes as a first step in appropriating the supplies and using them to put pressure on enemies and civilians alike.

Our investigations confirm that both sides of the war are appropriating humanitarian assistance and diverting it to combatants. They do this by exerting pressure on aid providers in areas under their control and controlling distribution methods. The goal of these maneuvers is to use assistance as a tool to pressure opponents on the battlefield or to blackmail civilians and the international community.

The failure to smoothly deliver humanitarian assistance to the victims of war has resulted in the loss of thousands of civilian lives due to hunger, disease, malnutrition, war injuries, and environmental pollution.

Bureaucracy, kleptocracy, controls and fees

Last May, the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) suddenly announced a significant increase in the registration and re-registration [fees](#) for national and foreign organizations as well as voluntary networks. The registration fees for foreign organizations, reached USD 10,000, a prime source of foreign currency for the cash-strapped authorities, while registration fees for a Sudanese voluntary network, who are not supposed to have foreign currency, amounted to 5,000,000 Sudanese pounds.

This illustrates that the authorities aim to put pressure on aid organizations by imposing material and procedural obstacles on them. This obstructs the delivery of aid to those affected, tightens monitoring of the work of aid organizations, blackmailing them into submission, curtailing their work and/or threatening to expel them, as Sudanese authorities have done for decades.

The decision to increase registration fees also indicates the authorities' eagerness to extract resources to meet their operating expenses after the state's resources declined. It has been observed that government authorities have recently resorted to levying excessive [fees](#) for the services they provide, such as issuing passports, personal papers, road travel, traffic tickets, and medical services.

[Some states](#) have even added top-up fees to federal services. The fees imposed on organizations were introduced by HAC without reference to the Ministry of Finance or 2024 state budget.

Workers in international and local humanitarian organizations complained about the bureaucracy imposed by the warring parties on the pretext of security concerns. A worker at the Sudanese Red Crescent Society said: "Humanitarian organizations are facing difficulties in obtaining permits and licenses to work in affected areas." Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) also complained of [obstacles](#) caused by significant bureaucratic and administrative impediments imposed by Sudanese authorities, including restrictions on staff movements, denial of travel permits, delays in allowing the transit of medical supplies, and bans on specific supplies, such as those related to surgical operations.

In this context, General Ibrahim Jabr, a member of the Sovereignty Council, who had been responsible for economics since the October 2021 coup is associated with the increase in registration fees which appear to be a means to both tighten control of, and profit from, humanitarian assistance. Jabr also recommended that the Council of Ministers, represented

by its Prime Minister-designate Osman Hussein, supervise humanitarian assistance, circumventing the institutions established for this purpose.

Competition over control

Bureaucratic interventions stirred up conflicts among relevant governmental agencies, who appear to seek to consolidate humanitarian responsibility with those who are seen to be politically reliable. In September 2023, Nagm Al-Din Musa, who is affiliated with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), was [dismissed](#) as Humanitarian Aid Commissioner, after an [exchange](#) of accusations among officials regarding siphoning relief materials and rediverting them into the markets.

The Minister of Social Development, Ahmed Adam Bakheit, also affiliated with JEM, complained that he was [neither consulted](#) regarding the dismissal of his subordinate nor the appointment of his successor. The dismissal was the culmination of a process of manipulation of humanitarian structures within the *de facto* government in Port Sudan aimed at sidelining HAC. Resolution no. 205 dated April 25, 2023 (amended on April 29) formed a high committee to address the humanitarian situation headed by the Minister of Social Development and replaced the HAC Commissioner with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Development as rapporteur in [violation](#) of Sovereignty Council resolution no. 625 of December 20, 2022. The committee was granted the powers and competencies of the HAC Commissioner without him being represented. These shifts reflected conflict within the ministry.

Around one month later, the Prime Minister-designate issued resolution no. 215 on June 2, 2023, canceling resolution no. 205 and forming the Supreme Committee for Emergency and Crisis Management. The Prime Minister appointed himself head of the new committee, alongside several ministers and representatives of other state institutions, once again, bypassing the HAC Commissioner and entrusting these duties to the Peace Commissioner. The same was repeated on June 15, 2023, when the Supreme Committee for Emergency and Crisis Management, headed by the Prime Minister-designate, issued resolution no. 3 of 2023 to form a specialized committee for the humanitarian emergency headed by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Development again assigned tasks and powers that previously fell under the duties and powers of the HAC Commissioner.

Behind these successive and rapid changes in the official humanitarian structures lies a consistent tendency of marginalizing the authority of the HAC Commissioner, and increasing



Women carrying supplies in Tawila, June 2024, social media

the control of the military authorities, particularly the SAF's Department of Military Intelligence, in decision-making related to the reception and distribution of humanitarian relief supplies.

No popular participation in, or oversight of, humanitarian assistance

Since the outbreak of war on April 15, 2023, Sudanese military commanders have controlled decisions in civil service dealing with donors and humanitarian assistance. The RSF carried out similar measures in areas under their control, as we will detail later. Press [reports](#) and [opinion pieces](#) have revealed corruption in the transport and distribution of humanitarian assistance.

To tighten control over humanitarian assistance, the authorities excluded humanitarian volunteers from the Resistance Committees (RCs) and Emergency Response Rooms in areas controlled by SAF in the River Nile, Northern, Gedaref, Kassala, and Red Sea states from participating in extending aid to the internally displaced and other war victims.

Based on ministerial directive no. 1 issued by the Minister of Federal Government on January 16, 2024, state governors dissolved the Steering and Services Committees and formed new steering committees. In Kassala, the governor issued an official decision that HAC employees should undertake the distribution of relief and prevented volunteers from working. The same governor issued another decision that the management of shelters hosted at schools and youth centers would be transferred to the Ministry of Social Development, under his supervision.

The governor of River Nile was harsher with the RCs, in [emergency order](#) no. 2 (2024), banning them and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) from participation in coordination committees. The governor formed steering committees in all urban neighborhoods and villages in a way that ensured that they remained loyal to the de facto authorities. They consisted of an *imam*, representatives of war veterans, women, and youth, and a coordinator of the *Istinfar* (mobilization) campaign. The governor of Khartoum made a similar decision. Ironically, the [governor of Gezira](#) issued a similar decision on January 20, 2024, more than a month after the RSF took control of the state. Governors in SAF-controlled areas wield exceptional powers under the state of emergency triggered by the war. Some of the governors whose states fell to the RSF, such as Gezira's, continue to issue decisions, although these cannot be enforced as the SAF has lost control of that territory.

Decisions of the Port Sudan's military junta and its state governors banning Resistance Committees that spearheaded the 2018-2019 popular uprising against the Bashir regime and targeting the volunteers of grassroots Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) for arrest, detention, and at times torture, denote a deeply seated fear about the prodemocracy commitments of Sudan's youth movement. The decisions to create alternate bodies by decree betray the desire of military authorities to create an alternate political constituency, based on allegiance to the SAF and primarily recruited from amongst Islamists and mobilizers of the Popular Defense campaign, to take over the local participation in the distribution of aid and the services to the public.

The shrinking civic space does not allow for independent professional monitoring of humanitarian assistance entering across the western borders controlled by the RSF. At the

same time, local and [international](#) criticism of weapons and equipment transfers from the UAE to the RSF via Um Djéress Airport in Chad, the same airport through which the UAE says it provides humanitarian assistance. Because of the embarrassment and pressure, the UAE recently allocated 70% of its pledged \$100 million to UN agencies to provide humanitarian assistance to Sudan and recently shifted its field hospital to Abeche, but without, reportedly, ending arms transfers to the RSF.

Recently, the UAE, along with several African countries and Jordan, issued a statement expressing the signatories' [concern](#) about the June "Integrated Food Security Phase Classification" (IPC) report confirming a "stark and rapidly deteriorating food security situation" in Sudan. After reminding the warring parties and the Security Council of their obligations to protect civilians, the statement ironically called on "all foreign parties to stop providing armed support or materials to the warring parties."

Belligerents struggle to control humanitarian assistance

In late February 2024, SAF [barred](#) entry of aid across Sudan's western border with Chad. Despite the fact that the SAF had no direct control at the border, UN agencies refused to move goods across without SAF consent. Despite the disastrous situation in Darfur, specifically in West Darfur, since the RSF took control of El Geneina on November 4, 2023, SAF's focus has been on preventing the RSF from benefiting from aid rather than helping civilian populations, pointing to RSF use of the western border to bring in weapons and military equipment.

Although SAF does not have de facto control of the area and cannot practically stop the movement of aid, many UN agencies are concerned that violating SAF directives could lead to negative consequences for programming in the East. In March 2024, the UN renewed its request to the Sudan government to allow the entry of aid, but was [refused](#). The Minister for Foreign Affairs-designate at the time, Ali Al-Sadiq said, "the security and stability of the country cannot be compromised after it was proven that the Chadian border was used in arms transfers to the rebel RSF militia." The SAF position led to widespread international and local [criticism](#), so it relented, apparently in anticipation of Security Council Resolution No. [2724](#), which called on all parties to enable unhindered humanitarian access. On March 7, SAF [agreed](#) to allow aid across the border with Chad, but only through the Tine crossing, controlled by some of their allies of the Darfur Joint Forces. Since May, however, the RSF has largely blocked this route.

Despite its rhetorical commitment to allowing aid, RSF has engaged in obstruction of aid similar to that of SAF. These appear, however, to be efforts to leverage their control over border crossings and towns adjacent to Chad, CAR, and Libya to control humanitarian assistance, allowing its officers to intervene harshly.

Humanitarian workers said that they have been exposed to great risks. Despite coordination with the RSF command, armed men, most often RSF, on the road intercept the trucks, demanding money or confiscating some or all of the food supplies, especially if they are not aimed at RSF areas or communities seen as pro-RSF. A worker says, "We advise drivers and their companions to comply with the gunmen's demands to avoid endangering their lives."

Moreover, Human Rights Watch has confirmed that RSF [impeded](#) humanitarian assistance in various ways including widespread looting of humanitarian supplies.

To strengthen its control over the management of humanitarian operations in areas under its control, RSF established a special agency for this purpose. In August 2023, RSF Commander General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, [established](#) the Sudanese Agency for Relief and Humanitarian Operations (SARHO) to facilitate and coordinate humanitarian operations in areas under control, a parallel to the HAC and the Ministry of Social Development, on the SAF side. The RSF is seeking international recognition for SARHO to facilitate humanitarian operations in areas it controls. In addition, General Dagalo [publicly called](#) for a large relief operation in RSF areas, invoking the precedent of Operation Lifeline Sudan.

Seeking to increase popular support, RSF replaced local governmental aid departments with civilian administrations made up of loyalists from within local populations. RSF civilian administrations operate under the supervision of its military. An eyewitness reported that RSF has, on many occasions, presented food supplies from international organizations as a donation from the RSF. The RSF is demanding to supervise humanitarian assistance through its new agency.

Despite the catastrophic situation in El Fasher reflected in the [displacement](#) of about hundreds of thousands between April 1 and June 30 and the declaration of famine in Zamzam IDP camp, disputes between the [warring parties](#) continued to impede the provision of humanitarian assistance to the city and the rest of Darfur. As the fighting has escalated in and around El Fasher, so did conflict over supply routes. Access for relief has not been secured, despite the [calls](#) by IDPs for urgent action. The belligerents exchange accusations of seeking to use relief routes to transport military supplies.

Unfortunately, it appears that not only the two major belligerents, but also other armed actors, are interfering with aid. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) revealed in a recent report that the Sudan Liberation Movement/Abdul Wahid Nour (SLA/AW), Darfuri rebel movement that has been controlling territory independent of the belligerents since the early 2000s and which continues to control territory while declaring neutrality in the ongoing war, imposed administrative and bureaucratic [impediments](#) on the work of the humanitarian assistance agencies through its Relief and Humanitarian Operations Agency. These include travel permits, registration procedures, and fees, and requiring international agencies to allow the SLA/AW to participate in the recruitment process and sign a technical memorandum with them. The movement [accused](#) OCHA of lying about its obstruction of the flow of aid, but it did not deny imposing these impediments. Ironically, these measures appear to be copied from the historical and ongoing practices of the Government of Sudan.

OCHA said that the RSF, through its new agency, imposed bureaucratic and administrative impediments such as registration and mandatory approval of travel permits for humanitarian workers and supplies as well in West, South, Central and East Darfur states. The office warned that these impediments may encourage other armed groups to impose similar restrictions, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis throughout Sudan.

In April, at the height of tension over relief routes, SAF leadership began [negotiations](#) with the SPLM-N Al Hilu faction with the aim of reaching an agreement to stop hostilities and agree on aid delivery in the areas controlled by the SPLM-N in southern Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

The negotiations did not reach any concrete agreement. Rather, observers pointed out that the parties had divergent [goals](#) and agendas.

Later, the SPLM-N leader, Abdulaziz Al Hilu, surprised the public saying that the paths and corridors proposed by the Port Sudan government delegation were aimed at delivering food and medicine to their soldiers in military [garrisons](#) in the two regions. If this is true (the Sudanese army has not commented), is it a glaring example of manipulation of aid.

Humanitarian assistance: political bribery and food for fighters

Humanitarian volunteers and journalists confirmed that significant corruption has emerged in the distribution of aid items since state governments took over their distribution. It is used to buy citizens' loyalty to SAF and promote civilian mobilization into the army through the *Istinfar* (Arabic for mobilization) campaign. A journalist from Gedaref State said: "Saudi relief packages are distributed in the neighborhoods of Gedaref to well-off families." He went on to say, "My relatives received relief packages although they own property." He pointed out that SAF uses civilian personnel to distribute relief materials and at the same time as entry points to approach youth to fight in the ranks of the SAF as *mustanfaren* (mobilized) fighters or as part of the Popular Resistance.

A source at the Ministry of Social Development said that the Emergency Committee responsible for receiving and distributing humanitarian assistance is completely beholden to SAF leaders. He added that "several SAF officers are permanently present in the offices of the Emergency Committee or in the humanitarian assistance warehouses in addition to several officers from other security agencies. They consider humanitarian assistance a security file."

The source indicated that the military and security services impose restrictions on the work of humanitarian organizations and closely monitor them for fear that relief materials might reach RSF areas. Other sources revealed that the SAF appropriates relief materials and transports them to its camps. A video clip circulated on social media shows RSF soldiers displaying Saudi relief meals found at a SAF site they captured. Activists reported similar practices in RSF-controlled areas, i.e., diverting relief to fighters.

Looting humanitarian warehouses

As the RSF took control of Gezira State in mid-December 2023, they looted World Food Program (WFP) [warehouses](#) packed with food, medicines, and other materials. An eyewitness said: "The RSF continued to transport materials from the warehouses over two days."

USAID published a fact sheet indicating that this [stock](#) contained 2,500 metric tons of food, enough to feed approximately 1.5 million people who suffer from severe food insecurity in Gezira for one month. According to military experts, these looted materials contributed to allowing them to move around Gezira without the need to transport supplies over long distances.

Humanitarian assistance has flowed into Port Sudan since the outbreak of war in the capital, Khartoum. In the first two months of the war, 2290 tons of aid, including food, medicine and shelter, were received, according to a document prepared by the governmental Supreme Committee to Address the Humanitarian Situation. The aid was provided by numerous parties, most notably Saudi Arabia, through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre; the UAE; Qatar; Kuwait; Jordan; Egypt; Bahrain; Turkey; India; China; and Russia, in addition to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the World Health Organization, UNICEF, WFP and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

Looting medical supplies

In the first months of the war, food and medicine were not a concern for the two warring parties, as supply lines were open. At the time, the real challenge was the shortage of consumables needed for small surgeries, sutures and first aid. Therefore, we often heard about soldiers seizing drug stores and warehouses and buying supplies from civilians who had not yet been displaced. Experts believe that SAF was better off than the RSF, at least initially, as it had an established medical system experienced in evacuations and management of medical supplies, while the RSF Medical Support Authority is still at a nascent stage.

In early May 2023, SAF [accused](#) RSF of seizing medical supplies belonging to the Sudanese Red Crescent Society, along with food supplies and four-wheel vehicles. The testimony of a worker from the National Medical Supplies Fund (NMSF) shows how medical supply stores were looted in central Khartoum. He said: "RSF looted a number of stores, using the trucks that were parked in front of them, after forcing the guards to open the doors and allow them to take the trucks and large quantities of medicines." The source indicated that they asked the guards to guide them to specific materials related to first aid and treating wounds. "But in the end," he added, "they took different types of medications, including children's medications."

A week later, SAF soldiers came accompanied with armed civilians and seized the contents of several warehouses saying, "They will be stored in the Military Medical Corps in Omdurman for later distribution to hospitals."

The value of the medicines stolen from the warehouses of the Sudan's Medical Supplies Authority is estimated at five hundred million dollars. International efforts to secure the stock and distribute it to various states have failed due to the slowness and reluctance of the concerned parties.

The Professional Pharmacists Association, a voluntary group of Sudanese pharmacists, confirmed that RSF attacks on medical supplies have affected their [availability](#) throughout Sudan. They reported that RSF looted and destroyed 41 pharmaceutical companies and 12 pharmaceutical factories, representing approximately 50% of the pharmaceutical factories in the country. They said, "RSF or the outlaws looted 216 pharmacies in the capital, Khartoum, including 103 pharmacies in Khartoum, 65 in Khartoum North, and 48 in Omdurman."

SAF practices were no better in this regard than RSF. According to emergency room activists, the former seized stocks of medical supplies to treat their wounded soldiers and/or to block RSF access to them. SAF treated its wounded soldiers and civilians fighting in its ranks (Islamist brigades and *mustanfareen* (mobilized)) in civilian hospitals, benefiting from the medical care made available by humanitarian aid and the support of local organizations and

individual donations. One activist said, "Sometimes wounded soldiers come to Al-Nao Hospital in Omdurman for treatment. It is a hospital supported by local organizations and initiatives."

According to Amnesty International, fighters [stormed](#) and looted a number of hospitals in Khartoum and elsewhere. RSF attacked hospitals in [River Nile](#) and [El Fasher](#), where they seized medicines and medical supplies and/or forced medical personnel to treat their wounded. On August 14, MSF [denounced](#) multiple shelling incidents by the warring parties on the MSF-supported El-Fasher's Saudi Hospital, the largest in North Darfur state. Several medical personnel and patients were killed and injured in these attacks. Eleven such attacks occurred between May 10 and August 11, 2024. A local official informed us that most of these attacks were attributable to the RSF and were deliberate.

MSF also reported that medical supplies were looted from [El Geneina Hospital](#), which it supports. A doctor who worked at Al Ban Jadid Hospital in the capital's suburb Sharq El-Nil (East of the Nile) locality said that they treated wounded members of RSF at gunpoint, as MSF did in Khartoum, leading to the closure of the Turkish hospital where the incident occurred. The MSF-supported Saudi hospital in El Fasher, the last hospital in North Darfur able to treat war wounded was attacked in the context of fighting, reportedly in targeted attacks by RSF, over El Fasher leaving the hospital only partially functional.

[Seizure](#) of supplies by one of the parties to the conflict is only one of the mechanisms of disruption. Administrative impediments include permits and passes that are often secured too late when they are no longer useful. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations are affected.

MSF [called](#) on the warring parties to ensure the safety of medical personnel and health facilities, allow safe passage of ambulances and civilians seeking health care, and facilitate the movement of humanitarian assistance providers early in the conflict. Other humanitarian organizations [repeated](#) these requests without an effective response. On July 12, 2024, MSF [ended](#) its services at the Turkish Hospital in RSF-controlled Khartoum due to repeated attacks on its staff. They warned that the ongoing blockade imposed by the Sudanese authorities on humanitarian organizations caused many facilities to struggle to keep their doors open. Unfortunately, MSF's withdrawal meant a suspension of surgeries at that hospital, which is one of a handful of hospitals currently operating in Khartoum.

On June 18, a senior staff member at the Sudan Family Planning Association (SFPA), which has assisted large numbers of victims of war-related sexual violence, reported before the Security Council that the [association](#) had lost an employee. SFPA clinics were burned and looted, and the association was forced to move its headquarters to areas outside the control of RSF.

Silencing critics

SAF does not tolerate any attempt to expose its record of seizing or diverting humanitarian assistance. Army Intelligence arrested the political activist and surgeon Alaaddin Nugud after he revealed to the media that the army seized medical supplies provided as aid to civilians by the WHO in May 2023, one month after the eruption of war. WHO sent relief materials to Port Sudan, but they were distributed improperly. Nugud later indicated that he was interrogated by security services for his disclosure of this information.

Later, military intelligence briefly [arrested](#) the emergency room volunteer and influencer Mu'men Wad Zeinab because he wrote on his popular Facebook page that influential elements of the former regime, namely the Islamists, had seized all the medicines donated to Al-Nao Hospital, which at the time was the only hospital serving civilians in Omdurman, and wondered, "How did a pharmacy at Al-Nao Hospital full of medicine disappear?"

Relief materials: accumulation in Port Sudan but shortage in other states

The lack of transparency and monitoring has contributed to rising doubts about the fairness of the distribution of humanitarian assistance by SAF authorities in Port Sudan. There seems to be no problem in the distribution of aid coming from governments and charities in the Gulf Cooperation Council, in addition to Turkey, Egypt, Russia, etc. Aid from these bilateral donors is directly handed over to the Port Sudan de facto government. However, multilateral donors and the UN and EU humanitarian agencies insist on overseeing the handling and distribution of their aid. As a result, despite the flow of assistance from the latter, the distribution rate is very low. The authorities always use insecurity as an excuse. However, the government is both preventing what is being provided from being appropriately distributed to the most vulnerable and undermining the willingness of international donors to support future efforts through its diversion of resources, leading to the accumulation of humanitarian assistance in federal warehouses, and the inability to deliver them to the needy, even in safe states.

Sources in Port Sudan revealed that tons of international assistance, including food, shelter, and medical supplies, remained piled up in Sea Port Authority warehouses. They remained there for extended periods but were constantly decreasing.



Women bringing aid to those fleeing El Fasher, June 2024, social media

The source pointed out that "humanitarian assistance that is likely subject to seizure by the government authorities is provided by governments, not by UN organizations," especially when a donor country does not follow up on the course of its aid. For example, "there were quantities of relief from Qatar and Turkey that were seized by the army," the source said.

Gamal Al-Neil Abdullah, head of the Specialized Committee for Humanitarian Emergencies, which is responsible for inventorying, storing, and distributing relief materials, confirmed that the aid provided by Arab countries between May and September 2023 amounted to 70,000 tons, in addition to 67,000 tons received from the UN. However, these materials rarely reach those affected in Khartoum and Darfur, and only limited quantities reach IDP shelters in safe states, due to diversion, SAF hostility to crossline assistance, and difficulties in transportation.

A mother of three living in a school in Kassala said, "We have not received assistance for three months, and sometimes benefactors donate meals to us." In Kassala State, merchants revealed that employees of the Ministry of Social Development or local organizations sold them

relief materials including non-food items and mosquito nets provided by the WFP and the Sudanese Red Crescent.

Although thousands of tons of assistance arrived in Port Sudan, hundreds of thousands of IDPs in Darfur did not receive aid, while they watched it being diverted and sold in various markets. A source in Darfur told the press, "Trucks come loaded with food supplies and tents, unloaded into the warehouses and then taken out at night and end up in the [markets](#) in the morning."

According to the same source, some humanitarian aid items marked as "not for sale" were offered for sale in the markets. Another source reported that the Commissioner of Kutum Locality in North Darfur [sold](#) around 2,200 sacks of assistance flour donated by Saudi Arabia and allocated to Kutum, Fataberno, and Kassab IDP camps in October 2023 instead of delivering them to the intended populations.

Manipulation of humanitarian assistance is longstanding in Darfur IDP camps but has increased dramatically since the start of the current war. An activist in Kalma IDP camp said: "The aid does not reach the beneficiaries, or it arrives in limited quantities, and the officials seize the largest share. This was known from an early stage."

He added, "With the current war and the increase in displaced people, the situation has worsened, and there is no longer an official who can be asked to provide aid! The combatants are controlling everything."

In early February 2024, IDPs complained that relief had not reached their camps. Adam Rujal, head of the General Coordination Committee for IDP and Refugee Camps, reported that the situation in the IDP camps had become [catastrophic](#), as assistance had not been delivered to most of the camps due to the SAF's stubborn opposition to sending assistance through Chad and the lack of security on the roads from the Chadian border to Darfur's cities.

A breakthrough, but will it last?

After protracted negotiations with SAF, the UN was able to reach an understanding with the Sudanese government in March 2024 that [allowed](#) the entry of 60 trucks loaded with humanitarian assistance into Darfur through the Tine and Adre crossings from Chad.

Trucks arrived in El Geneina, Zalingei, Nyala, and El Daein carrying 1,364 tons of food supplies, while six trucks that were supposed to drive to El Fasher, were blocked in Mellit by the RSF. International organizations distributed aid to those in need in El Geneina, with its three administrative units (El Geneina, Ardamata, and Um Dowein) and Sirba locality, although much population had already fled to Chad. The materials included oil, rice, lentils, and salt.

A source reported only three trucks, one of them loaded with high-energy biscuits and two trucks loaded with sanitation materials, arrived in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur State. The source reported that the biscuits were distributed through the Ministry of Health to 93 nutrition centers in the state's localities in coordination with health organizations. Sanitation materials were distributed through UNICEF partners to IDPs and those affected by the war as well as the host community.

In early April 2024, the WFP announced in a post on its account on X (formerly Twitter) that it was able to [deliver](#) food assistance to Darfur for the first time in a year. Two assistance [convoys](#)

loaded with food supplies were delivered, benefiting about 250,000 people in West and Central Darfur.

Also, a separate aid convoy arrived in North Darfur State from [Port Sudan](#) in March 2024, for the first time in six months. Although a convoy carrying 1,300 tons of supplies was able to West and Central Darfur through Adre, both have already witnessed severe levels of [hunger](#) after RSF took control of them.

This breakthrough was also reflected in an increase in the rate of response to the visa and travel permit applications submitted by the UN agencies, according to the testimony of a prominent [UN](#) official before the Security Council.

However, the same official warned that the rainy season is approaching and is likely to cut off roads and transportation is difficult in areas that desperately need assistance to avoid starvation.

Despite the relative relief provided by the March-April assistance, on July 10, 2024, RSF prevented commercial trucks loaded with goods coming via Shangil Tobay from entering El Fasher. Trucks in Kebkabiya were also blocked. RSF threatened truck owners with confiscation of their goods if they traveled this route again, or even took other routes to the city that had been under siege since May 10.

Al-Burhan was no less harsh, stating on July 11 that the negotiations in Geneva on humanitarian aid depended on the RSF leaving homes and withdrawing from the states in which they were deployed. All of these inhibit agreement on a ceasefire, on which access is most dependent.

Fighting makes it difficult to resolve the humanitarian crisis

Humanitarian aid has been diverted and manipulated in various ways. Both warring parties and government employees managing humanitarian aid management have profited from it. Relief trucks were stolen, and no one was held accountable.

Despite the frantic efforts of both sides to exploit relief materials and the lack of international aid, popular efforts are providing significant relief to those affected by war through Emergency Rooms, *Takaya* (charity food centers), central kitchens, and other initiatives in all regions of the country.

Many believe that the atmosphere of war, the brutal nature of the fighting, and the lack of respect for international humanitarian law have further complicated the humanitarian crisis and turned it into a full-fledged disaster. Providing effective assistance has become largely linked to ending the war itself, because both sides have consistently failed to fulfill their pledges.

It is alarming that humanitarian workers, medical service providers, and volunteers are now at serious risk. Both the SAF and the RSF have arrested, detained, and tortured volunteers and service providers, and [24 lives](#) were lost, including six in recent months.

The lack of transparency and oversight, due to the policies of the warring parties, in addition to limited resources, have made humanitarian aid a significant target and leverage to mobilize civilian support.

International action is needed to remedy these concerns. The international community must push harder on the parties to negotiate a ceasefire and humanitarian access. With famine now declared, at least at a localized level, they should take bold action to provide aid in whatever ways feasible. This will in part include supporting local civil society and ERRs. Strong and direct [international action](#) to criminalize those responsible for obstructing the delivery of assistance could also prevent the situation from growing even more dire.

Specifically, international actors should:

- Support the negotiation of a ceasefire and humanitarian access, which is a vital first step for response. Measures to minimize diversion of aid could be included in such an agreement.
- Make it clear that the world will no longer tolerate the warring parties' widespread and systematic attacks on civilians and facilities essential for civilian survival and well-being.
- Impress upon the parties that there will be zero tolerance for their abuse of humanitarian assistance.
- Create a robust and independent monitoring mechanism to track and document incidents of deliberate obstruction and diversion of humanitarian aid, as well as attacks on humanitarian workers, medical personnel, and volunteers. This would strengthen trust from international organizations on aid delivery.
- Demand that the belligerents permit the delivery of humanitarian relief supplies through both crossline and cross-border routes.
- Present a technical proposal to enable the safe deployment of Sudanese government from the health, education, agriculture, and animal health sectors across battle lines, ensuring they can continue to serve the population's critical needs in these vital areas.
- Appeal to the government and multilateral agencies that pledged to fund disaster relief operations during the International Humanitarian Conference for Sudan held in Paris in April 2024 to fulfill their pledges.
- Support local humanitarian actors, including national NGOs and Emergency Response Rooms, to respond to immediate humanitarian concerns through flexible and responsive funding.



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