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**FREE SUDAN GAZETTE**

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**الغazette السودانية الحرية**



**Issue 1 - December 10 , 2025**

970 days of displacement, steadfastness, and pain.. it continues and we continue



Free Sudan Gazette is an independent, open-source digital media platform covering news, developments, and political and social analysis focused on Sudan. Through critical research, investigation, and documentation of political, social, and cultural events related to Sudanese people at home and abroad, we seek to elevate the voice and experiences of Sudanese people.

# The borders industry

## Sudanese refugees as a source of income

In this issue of The Free Sudan Gazette, we are trying to open one of the most pressing issues in Sudan at the moment:

Refugees, asylum and migration, where Sudanese continue to pay a heavy price-both literally and figuratively-to escape a war that has destroyed the present and threatened the future.

The country's borders, which for decades had been a refuge for neighboring peoples in times of crisis and disaster, have transformed into closed and harsh crossings. They are no longer gateways to safety, but rather points of extortion and death, where those fleeing pay exorbitant sums to cross a few kilometers, while facing the dangers of thirst, abuse, and death on unforgiving desert roads.

This is not limited to the Arqin crossing point alone, but extends to most of Sudan's eastern, southern, and western borders, where crossings are closed or opened under conditions that exhaust families who carry with them only what remains of their lives.

In this coverage, we follow the journey of asylum in its most brutal stages: from the war in Sudan to Ethiopia to Chad and Egypt and Libya... to the boats of the Mediterranean... then to the prisons of Greece, where Sudanese minors are detained on charges related to steering the boat, distributing water or even operating the GPS, in one of the most unjust episodes of the tragedy.

## **This issue addresses the situation of the Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries:**

From Uganda, [Omar Sayed Ahmed](#) writes about what Sudanese people face in the refugee camp and the forms of self-organization they have developed to defend their rights.

As for Egypt, which hosts the largest Sudanese community, [Eiman Salih](#) offers a deep reading of how the Egyptian government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are dealing with this issue.

[Ibrahim Izzeldeen](#) writes about the issue of Sudanese minors detained [in Greek prisons](#), the charges they face, and the harsh conditions they endure.

In this issue, we are also republishing the article of Migration Control: From Revolution to NGOs Business, because of its importance in understanding how the tragedy has turned into a complex web of interests.

What the Sudanese are going through today is not just a movement of displacement, but a humanitarian disaster unfolding silently, revealing how the "refugee card" has become a lucrative business card and a source of profit at the expense of their just causes. It is a disaster that calls for serious questioning of political and humanitarian responsibility at a time when the homeland itself has become an impassable border.



Art work by : Elshafe Mukhtar



## **The Struggle of the Sudanese refugees in Uganda and the impact of self-organization on their new lives**

By : Omar Sayed Ahmed



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## **The Struggle of the Sudanese refugees in Uganda and the impact of self-organization on their new lives**

Since the outbreak of war in Khartoum in April 2023, Uganda has become one of the main destinations for those fleeing the war, with a number of Sudanese refugees having sought refuge there since the events of the "Operation Long Arm" in 2008. According to the February 2025 update issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Uganda, UNHCR the number of Sudanese refugees in Uganda since the start of the war in Sudan in April 2023 stands at 67,504, of whom 9,505 (14%) live in urban areas, and the rest live in the "Kiryandongo" Refugee Settlement alongside Congolese, Rwandan, Burundian, Tanzanian, Kenyan, and South Sudanese refugees. The Ugandan government provides each refugee with half an acre of land, as well as farming tools, seeds, and cooking utensils. There is also irregular financial support from the Refugee Commission in the form of food rations and cash transfers. Refugees receive free health care in governmental hospitals and health centers.

**Geography of the Kiryandongo settlement:** The settlement is located in Kiryandongo District, in the West Central Region, which is crossed by the main road connecting the capital Kampala and South Sudan, at coordinates 32.06° east, and 1.83 north, 220 kilometers from the capital Kampala, a 4-5 hour drive from the capital. **Natural and topographical environment:** The camp is located on a flat plateau at an altitude of between 1,100 and 1,300 meters above sea level. The climate is humid subtropical, with average rainfall ranging from 1,100 to 1,200 mm per year. There are no permanent rivers in the camp, and people rely on rainfall for agriculture and on groundwater wells for domestic water, most of which are operated by rope and pulley or hand pumps known as (karjaka). The small number of wells contributes to almost constant friction between refugees of different nationalities over the wells and hand pumps, especially in the morning and when the heat is intense.

Despite Uganda's open policy towards refugees, which allows them freedom of movement, work, education, and property ownership, the large numbers who have arrived in a short period of time have put pressure on services and resources, leading to:

- Shortages of food, drinking water, and water for domestic use due to limited regional and international humanitarian aid funding.
- Deterioration of health services.
- Lack of sustainable employment opportunities.
- Psychological and social problems.
- Deterioration of social relations with host communities, which until recently were refugees' communities themselves but have become host communities due to their lengthy stay in Uganda, including refugees from South Sudan.

Due to the high organizational capabilities of Sudanese refugees during the five years prior to their arrival, in addition to the fact that many of them had experienced internal displacement in camps in Darfur, South Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and eastern Sudan, Sudanese refugees in Uganda stood out among their fellow refugees of other nationalities who relied on tribal or clan leadership, with self-organization represented by the first groups to arrive at the Kryandongo settlement in the first month. The self-organization of Sudanese refugees in Uganda is based on grassroots representation, which is represented in two bodies, one is in the planning level and the other executive, namely:

- 1- The leadership office of the Sudanese Refugee Community in Uganda.
- 2- The Executive Office of the Sudanese Refugee Community in Uganda.

The Sudanese refugees in the settlement have secured the right for each cluster to have a representative who directly represents them before the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the Humanitarian Aid Commission, the Red Cross, the World Food Programme, and other relevant organizations and bodies.



## Violence in the Kyandongo camp:

Monitoring of events between July 11 and 13, 2025:

Day 1 (July 11, 2025): Sudden attacks broke out in the evening hours by groups of Nuer inside the camp, using knives and sticks, resulting in serious injuries among Sudanese refugees, including women, children, and the elderly, and killing two. This sparked widespread panic, prompting families to flee their homes and seek shelter in public centers, government buildings, and the buildings of international organizations operating in the settlement. Since that day, Sudanese refugee communities have experienced displacement within the existing refugee situation.

Day 2 (July 12, 2025): The violence spread, and dozens of families were forcibly displaced from their homes in the camp under threat of violence. Humanitarian organizations remained silent until this day.

Day 3 (July 13, 2025): Tensions continued, with a relative decrease in the intensity of attacks after limited intervention by the authorities. However, the humanitarian situation worsened with a severe shortage of health services. On the third day, many families remained displaced or forcibly displaced within the camp, without shelter.

Currently, the prevailing interpretation and analysis of the events of July focuses solely on the encroachment of Sudanese refugees on agricultural land that was cultivated by the Nuer tribe, which has become a host community. In my opinion, the fundamental issue lies in the sudden transfer of an entire community—the Nuer tribe—from a pastoralist to an agricultural production model without adequate rehabilitation to enable them to accept the transition and understand the implications of practicing new livelihoods.

This change of the livelihood production model in a sudden manner and without sufficient training to enable them to accept the transition and understand the implications of the new livelihoods was imposed on them by their refugee status. The relationship of herders to the land is that it is the surface on which they and their livestock walk, and they know nothing about the issue of land ownership except of what their elders knew—and adopted in a customary manner—about the Sudanese Hawakeer system (collective tribal ownership of land), which conflicts with the system of the host country responsible for granting land to other refugees.



## The organizations formed by Sudanese refugees succeeded

The organizations formed by Sudanese refugees succeeded in a conscious and decisive manner, and had the greatest impact in overcoming the July violence in the Kiryandongo settlement. The Sudanese refugee organizations relied on documenting the damage first, then opening and managing direct discussions involving the South Sudanese refugee community from various tribes, not just the Nuer, in addition to the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the governor of Kiryandongo area, the county army commander, the county security director, the county police director, the representative of the Refugee Commission, and representatives of the refugee communities of seven countries in the settlement. The discussions ended with the adoption of a report and recommendations by the leadership and executive offices of the Sudanese refugee community, the most important of which was the formation of a joint committee of refugees of different nationalities to manage any conflicts that may arise in the future. All participants in these discussions praised the ability of Sudanese refugee organizations to bring all these parties together under one roof. The suffering of Sudanese and other refugees and those who have recently transitioned from refugee status to a host community should not be compounded, and refugee communities should be dealt with after a comprehensive and accurate historical and social study.



# **Sudanese Refugees in Egypt: Migration and Border Politics**

**By: Eiman Salih**



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## Sudanese Refugees in Egypt: Migration and Border Politics

When fighting erupted in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, on the morning of April 15, 2023 - just days before Eid al-Fitr - millions of civilians found themselves trapped between two warring factions; The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). What began as a power struggle between generals quickly spiraled into a full-blown war, engulfing entire cities and forcing families to flee in what would become the largest internal displacement crisis in the world today.

Before the war, Sudan was already dealing with overlapping humanitarian emergencies. It hosted over a million refugees from neighboring countries like South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia, while internally, millions had already been displaced by past conflicts. But the war that started in 2023 led to an unprecedented crisis. According to the UNHCR, by the end of 2024, more than 12 million Sudanese had fled their homes, with 8.8 million internally displaced and 3.2 million seeking refuge abroad, primarily in neighboring countries. Egypt, with its proximity and historical ties, became a key destination.

Egypt and Sudan enjoy a special relationship. In 2004, both countries signed the Four Freedoms Agreement granting their citizens mutual rights to move freely, reside, work, and own property without a visa. These provisions were particularly helpful for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly. When the conflict broke out, many Sudanese, especially those from Khartoum headed north. With Khartoum's airport attacked on the first day of the conflict, air travel became impossible. Buses began transporting families to the Egyptian border, often through dangerous roads and active war zones.

Initially, Egyptian authorities allowed Sudanese citizens to enter, but the situation changed rapidly. In May 2023 barely a month after the war began, Egypt imposed new visa requirements for all Sudanese nationals, replacing earlier restrictions that had targeted only males between the ages of 16 and 50. The change came suddenly with little warning leaving many families stranded at border crossings, international airports, and deserted towns, many without the means or knowledge to navigate a rapidly changing bureaucratic landscape. The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed the decision aimed to regulate not restrict entry, but to the tens of thousands stuck in limbo, the message was clear: the doors were closing.

Getting a visa to enter Egypt quickly became a logistical nightmare. Only two visa processing offices operated in Sudan, one in Port Sudan, the new administrative capital, 800 kilometers from the capital Khartoum, and the other in the remote northern town of Wadi Halfa. Refugees were forced to travel lengthy journeys often risking getting caught in crossfire, sleeping in mosques, schools or streets, surviving on minimal aid and waiting months just to submit their papers and with no guarantee of success. With legal avenues to Egypt diminishing, a growing number of refugees turned to smugglers to cross into southern Egypt illegally risking arrest or worse.

Egypt's economic crisis only complexes the hardship. The 2023 devaluation of the Egyptian pound led to a sharp rise in the cost of living. Prices for food, housing, and basic goods have soared. Egyptian authorities, for their part, continue to portray refugees as an economic burden, a narrative echoed by some segments of the media and amplified on social media. These portrayals stoke xenophobia and justify restrictive measures. Amid a broader economic downturn and rising unemployment, the presence of refugees becomes a scapegoat for deeper systemic issues.



The new legal framework has done little to alleviate the daily struggles faced by refugees. In fact, for many, it has made life even more dangerous. Registered Sudanese refugees are still denied access to public schools, and Sudanese primary and secondary schools - once a lifeline for displaced students - have been shut down by the authorities. Refugee students now need residency permits to enroll in Egyptian schools, a requirement few can meet. University education has also become increasingly inaccessible, tuition discounts for Sudanese students were reduced from 90 percent to 60 percent and then cancelled altogether in most governmental universities and institutes, while base tuition fees have tripled. Refugees who arrived without documents or proof of previous education are often unable to continue their studies, and many have returned to Sudan despite the dangers, simply because they see no future in Egypt.

The European Union has played a controversial role in shaping Egypt's refugee policies. In March 2024, six EU leaders signed a €7.4 billion deal with Egypt aimed at preventing irregular migration to Europe. The agreement, hailed as a strategic partnership to stabilize the region,

effectively incentivizes Egypt to curb its refugee population. It requires the Egyptian government to increase surveillance at its borders especially with Libya, a known transit point for migrants heading to Europe via the Mediterranean.

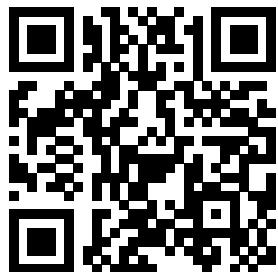
This strategy of “externalizing” EU border control has drawn criticism from human rights groups, who argue that the EU is outsourcing its migration problem at the expense of refugees’ rights and safety. Despite the EU’s financial backing, the number of refugees attempting to cross from Libya remains high, with Sudanese nationals increasingly represented among those making the hazardous journey. Although almost zero boats leave from Egyptian shores, even before the current wars in Sudan and Gaza, nearly 20% of the refugees reaching Europe via the Mediterranean in 2022 were Egyptians, indicating a larger migration trend fueled by regional instability, not simply war.

In April 2024, the Global Detention Project called on both the EU and the United Nations to pressure Egypt to halt deportations, lift visa restrictions for Sudanese fleeing war, and ensure access to fair asylum procedures. So far, there has been little response.

Despite everything, Egypt remains a preferred destination for many Sudanese. The countries share deep historical, linguistic, and cultural ties. Arabic is the primary language in both nations, and Sunni Islam is the dominant religion. Many Sudanese refugees have family connections in Egypt, or prior experience studying, working, or traveling there. This familiarity provides a sense of stability in an otherwise chaotic time. Moreover, Egypt’s geographic proximity allows displaced people to stay close to home, hold onto hope of return and maintain ties with relatives still inside Sudan.

For now, Sudanese refugees in Egypt remain trapped in a difficult reality, barred from fully participating in society, unable to return home, and left with shrinking options elsewhere. Unless there is a shift in both domestic and international policy, the future for these refugees remains one of continued marginalization, legal uncertainty, and profound vulnerability. Refugees view their presence as temporary, a waiting room until they can return home and rebuild their lives. Yet without rights, services or protection, even this temporary existence is under threat.

That pushed millions back to Sudan especially after the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) regained Khartoum and Al-Jazirah states in March this year, in addition to the parts of other states that were previously under the control of the rapid support forces (RSF) such as Sinnar, White & Blue Nile states. Conditions in these states remains very dire with minimal rebuilding efforts in the horizon and health and security challenges still present, in addition to the high living expenses and no job opportunities, Yet, according to the UN numbers more than 1.3 million Sudanese people have already returned to Sudan between March and July 2025, more than 190 thousands of them were from Egypt.



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Art work by : Elshafe Mukhtar



## **From Hell to Hell: Sudanese Youth Criminalized in Greek Prisons**

By : Ibrahim Izzeldeen



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## From Hell to Hell: Sudanese Youth Criminalized in Greek Prisons

### Youth From War to Prison

In Greek prisons from Crete to Volos, more than 200 Sudanese teenagers and young men sit behind bars. Their alleged crime is not violence, theft, or exploitation. It is survival. Fleeing one of the world's deadliest wars, they crossed the Mediterranean seeking safety—only to be prosecuted as “smugglers” under Greece's sweeping anti-smuggling laws. Most are between 17 and 26 years old, boys on the threshold of adulthood. Instead of schools and apprenticeships, their youth is being spent in prison cells thousands of kilometers from home.

### War in Sudan: The Push Factors

Since April 2023, Sudan has been consumed by a brutal war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). What began as a power struggle in Khartoum quickly escalated into nationwide devastation.

According to the United Nations, more than 10 million people have been displaced—the largest displacement crisis in the world today. Cities such as Khartoum, Omdurman, El Fasher, and El Geneina have been reduced to rubble. Mass killings, sexual violence, and forced recruitment campaigns have targeted young men in particular. Education has collapsed, livelihoods have vanished, and families have been torn apart. For many Sudanese youth, flight was not a choice but the only path to survival. Yet escape has rarely meant safety. Many who managed to reach Greece—after harrowing journeys through Egypt and Libya—now find themselves criminalized for the act of steering a boat, handing out water, or even holding a GPS during the crossing.

## Criminalization at Europe's Borders

Under Greek law, steering or assisting in boat crossings is classified as smuggling, punishable by sentences of up to 25 years per person transported. In practice, this means that a 17-year-old refugee who touches the wheel of a dinghy can be prosecuted as a criminal trafficker.

"Since 2014, if any one of us was forced to steer the boat or help the others, they call us criminals," explained J, a young Sudanese man currently imprisoned in Crete. "Most of us had no choice—either cooperate or risk our lives at sea."

Human rights groups have long argued that Greece's framework is not dismantling smuggling networks but targeting the very refugees it claims to protect. According to a 2023 report by Refugee Support Aegean (RSA), trials often last less than an hour, with inadequate interpretation, minimal legal defense, and an almost automatic presumption of guilt.

"These laws are formulated so broadly that any act during a border crossing—holding the GPS, distributing water, or simply being near the helm—can be treated as smuggling," said Julia, a member of de:criminalize, a European activist network. "The state uses this to create scapegoats while hiding its own responsibility for deaths at sea."

Greece currently holds more than 2,300 migrants accused of smuggling, many of them Sudanese minors at the time of arrest.

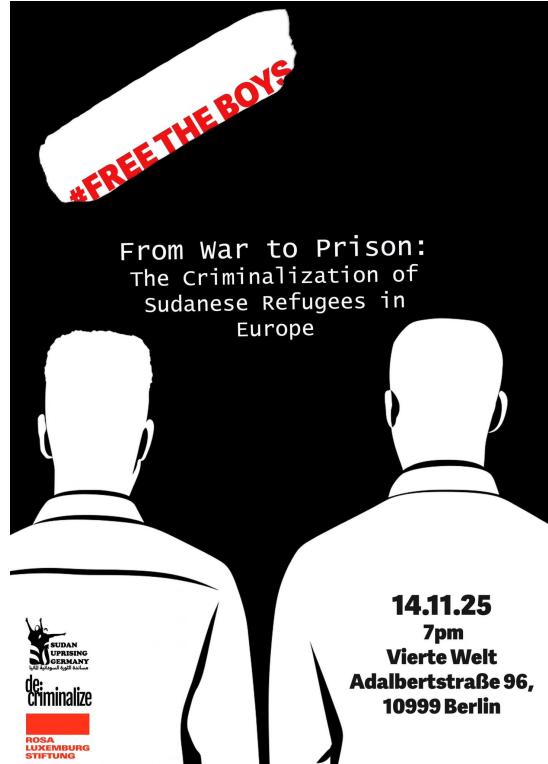
## Life Behind Bars

Inside prison, the cost is measured not only in lost years but in broken spirits.

"We live behind bars, not as refugees seeking safety, but as accused criminals for crimes we never chose," said J. "Many of us have suicidal thoughts because of the lack of a future and separation from our families."

Psychologists report high levels of trauma, depression, and hopelessness among Sudanese youth in detention. Families back home, already displaced by war, struggle to stay in touch. Some cannot even confirm whether their sons are alive.

Mustafa, a Sudanese activist living in Greece, described the ripple effect: "Parents and siblings are desperate. They try to send money, letters, or moral support, but communication is limited. Many of these young men are alone, and families feel powerless to help."



## Four Sudanese Boys, Four voices and Four lifes.

Bada Ruman Steven, 19

Bada fled Sudan after losing his parents in the war. He tried to survive with his sisters in Egypt, then Libya, where he worked as a cleaner under exploitative conditions. Forced at gunpoint to hold a GPS during the crossing, he was arrested upon arrival in Greece. Six months later, he remains imprisoned, separated from his sisters. "I am not a criminal. I am a victim of war," he said.

Mousab, 19

Coerced into driving a boat for 12 hours under threat from smugglers, Mousab was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He has not spoken to his family in seven months. "I spoke out, but no one wanted to listen. I'm innocent of what they accuse me of."

Suleman Mazen, 18

After losing his family in Sudan, Suleiman endured overcrowded detention in Libya before reaching Greece, where he was immediately arrested. "You are my voice and my strength," he said in a letter from prison. "We are only human beings trying to survive in life."

Chol Hani Zacheria, 17

The youngest among them, Chol worked odd jobs in Libya to afford passage to Europe. Arrested upon arrival in Greece, he was imprisoned with older men. Soon after, his mother died of a panic attack upon hearing of his imprisonment. "We are not criminals," he pleaded. "We are children of war and destruction, searching for a safe place."

## Solidarity in a move

Across Europe, solidarity networks have mobilized under the banner of #FreeTheBoys. Lawyers, activists, and diaspora communities are fighting for the release of Sudanese prisoners and for reform of anti-smuggling laws.

Mustafa described grassroots efforts: "We organize awareness events, fundraising, and letter-writing sessions. We connect with lawyers to track trials, support those released in applying for asylum, and help them find housing. It is all about making sure they know they are not forgotten."

In Athens, the [Alma Community](#) provides holistic care to refugees through therapy, art, and community-led workshops. Founder Erinia Tsilafaki explained: "Trauma is not only personal but political, rooted in war, borders, and displacement. Alma is a safe space where refugees are not just recipients—they lead, teach, and shape the community."

## The Legal Battlefield

In early September 2025, courtrooms in Crete became the stage for a rare moment of scrutiny. Fourteen migrants, including several Sudanese boys, faced trial under Greece's anti-smuggling laws. For the first time, international observers were allowed inside.

Outcomes varied sharply. Four Sudanese were acquitted—the court acknowledging that fleeing war cannot be equated with smuggling. But others, including Egyptians and Nigerians, received sentences ranging from 10 to 25 years.

"Not only is the imposition of criminal sanctions on refugees prohibited under Article 31 of the Geneva Convention," argued [HIAS Greece](#), "but those who facilitate their own entry for survival are also excluded from the scope of the smuggling offense."

Activists warn that justice must not depend on nationality or asylum status. "Linking innocence to nationality is dangerous," noted the [Border Violence Monitoring Network](#). "Justice must be universal!"

## Europe's Migration Dilemma

The plight of Sudanese teenagers in Greece exposes a broader European trend: the criminalization of migration itself.

"Across the EU, borders are militarized," said Julia of de:criminalize. "Irregular movement is treated as a crime rather than a human right."

Mustafa added: "It's not just Greece. Italy, Spain, and others follow the same logic. Young refugees are criminalized while real smugglers remain largely untouched."

Legal experts argue that the [EU Facilitation Directive](#), which criminalizes assistance in migration regardless of motive, stands in direct violation of international refugee law. Without reform, cases like those of Sudanese boys in Crete will continue to multiply.

## Justice on European Trial

The testimonies of Bada, Mousab, Suleman, and Chol illuminate a painful truth: Europe's border policies are transforming refugees into criminals. Their only "crime" was steering a boat, holding a GPS, or offering water to fellow passengers—acts of survival punished with decades in prison.

"We have done nothing wrong," said J from his cell. "We are refugees fleeing war. Our only wish was to find safety and support our families. We are human beings, not criminals."

For now, the fight for justice continues in courtrooms and solidarity networks across Greece and Europe. But as one activist noted, the stakes reach far beyond Crete: "The question is not only whether these boys will be free. It is whether Europe itself can live up to its principles of justice, dignity, and humanity.



**#FREE THE BOYS!**



**GREECE**

# OVER 300 SUDANESE WHO FLED THE WAR ARE FACING LIFE SENTENCES FOR BOAT DRIVING

Their alleged "crime"? Steering a boat or taking on others tasks during their own flight to safety. Some have already been sentenced to 10 to 25 years, or even life imprisonment, while others are still waiting for their trials.

These young people – most of them between 15 and 21 years old – are arrested upon arrival, placed in pre-trial detention for months, and face court proceedings without interpreters, legal assistance, or any substantial support.

**THE EU'S FIGHT AGAINST SMUGGLING**

The so-called fight against smuggling has become a key pillar of EU border policy. Under the pretext of "fighting crime" and "protecting people on the move", nearly any action that helps someone reach Europe is criminalized – effectively criminalizing migration itself.

As a result, in most EU countries, at least one person on every arriving boat (or car) is arrested and charged with "facilitating the unauthorized entry" of the others simply for steering or taking on another necessary task.

In Greece, people charged with smuggling now make up the second-largest group in Greek prisons. Penalties are particularly harsh and are calculated per person transported.



*"I did not choose to be at sea, but I had no choice if I wanted to stay alive and keep the passengers alive."*  
Garan – 16 years old

With the ongoing atrocities in Sudan, most of the people currently arriving in Greece—and subsequently arrested—are Sudanese. While some courts have acknowledged that they are refugees fleeing a war zone and have, in accordance with international law, issued acquittals, the majority—dozens to hundreds—have already been found guilty and sentenced to prison terms throughout 2025. These trials often last no longer than ten minutes, with dozens of defendants chained together in the courtroom, all taking place with almost no public attention or scrutiny.

The journey of Sudanese youth lays bare the continuum of neocolonial violence: barely adults, they fled a brutal war fueled by imperialist and geopolitical interests, survived Libya's EU-funded detention industry – only to be punished with imprisonment in Europe for facilitating their own and others' arrival and survival.

**FREE THE BOYS**

This is why we launched the Free The Boys campaign: to fight for the release of the Sudanese youths imprisoned, for the freedom of all those arrested for driving the boat, and for an end to the criminalization of migration.

**SUPPORT THE BOYS WITH LEGAL COSTS**

 de:  
**criminalize**




## From Revolution to NGO Business



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## From Revolution to NGO Business

### 1. War Disaster: Killing, Displacement, and Starvation

The war in Sudan, similar to that in Gaza, is a prototype of the [New Wars](#) which are directed against populations. As Alex de Waal has recently argued, there is a [Return of the Starvation Weapon](#) worldwide, and large parts of the population have been cut off from food aid.

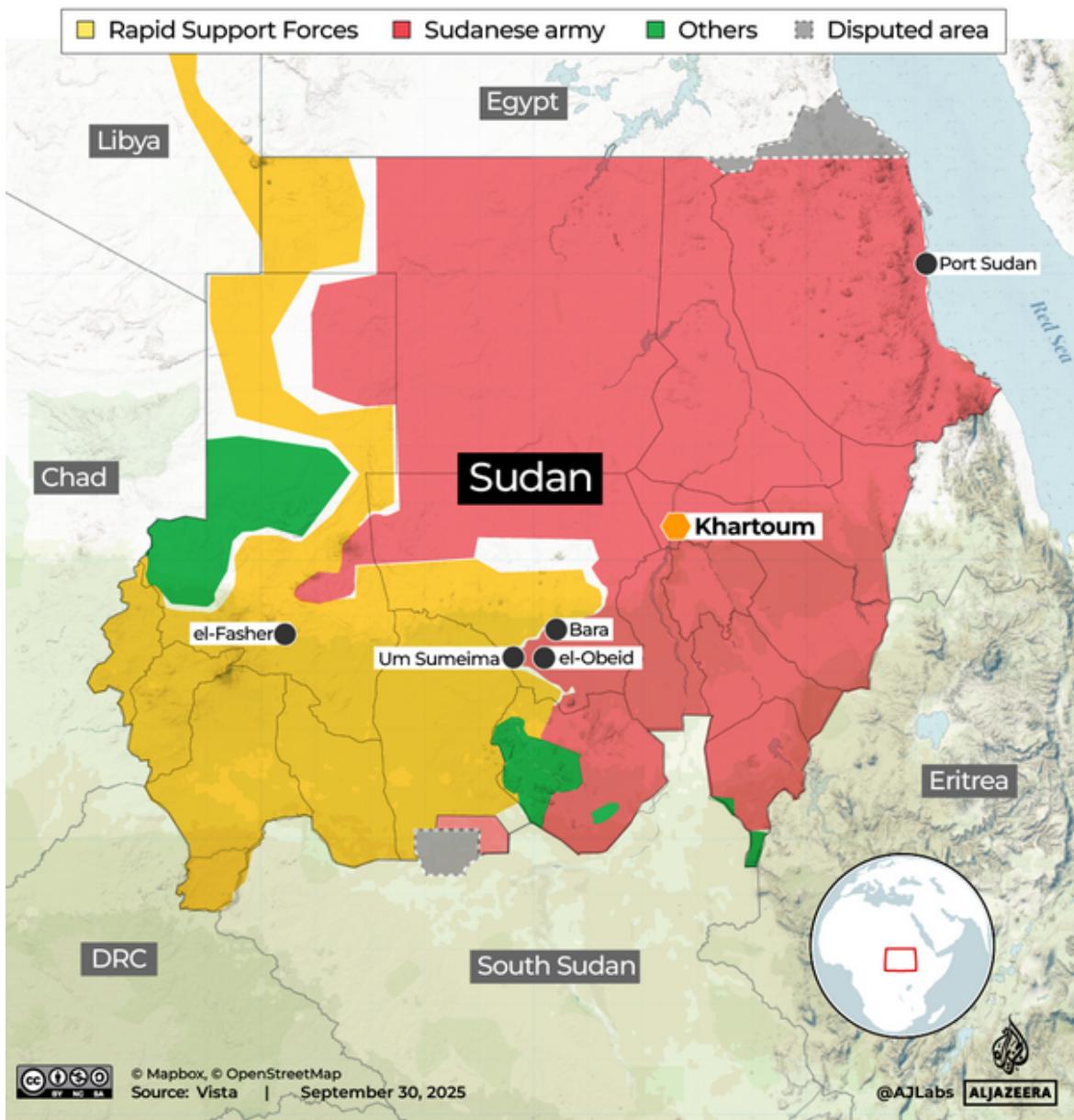
What is that war about? This is not just a war between two generals. This war started as [a war of counter-revolution](#) in the first place, and it has been developed into an economy of starvation, extraction, and displacement.

The war is now deemed [responsible for the deaths](#) of up to 150,000 people in mass casualty incidents, and of more than 500,000 people due to hunger. There are [11,8 million people displaced](#), and millions under [threat of starvation](#). While both of the warring parties, and the militias associated with them, [have committed war crimes](#), it is obvious that the RSF, drawing on their Darfur experience, and the Emirates in the background, have developed a system to make [profit from disaster](#).

SUDAN WAR

## Who controls what?

The Rapid Support Forces control most of the western region of Darfur, with the exception of el-Fasher, which is controlled by the Sudanese army. The paramilitary is besieging el-Fasher in hopes of controlling all of Darfur.



Source: Al Jazeera

Apart from the Red Sea Hills in the East, the Marra Mountains in the West, and the Nuba Mountains in the South, Sudan is a flat country. This explains why it was quite easy for the Hemeti militias (RSF) to call for mercenaries from the Sahel and to swiftly advance into the centre of Sudan with their technicals in the first year of the war. The army (SAF) had no infantry, instead they dropped bombs. Khartoum and Omdurman were bombed by the SAF, and looted by the RSF. Lorries full of looted belongings moved westwards.

In March 2025, the SAF was able to re-conquer the capital with its three cities and the Eastern and Central regions of Sudan. The SAF received new weapons from Turkey, Egypt, and Iran, and activated Islamist militias, the latter being a nasty curse for the future. The RSF was [continuously supported by the UAE](#), which delivered arms, drones, and Columbian mercenaries to them, in exchange mainly for gold, but also for future profits from displacement.

The timeline of the war can be followed on the Sudan War Monitor. At the moment, the war has two main theatres: Kordofan, with changing frontlines in the region of El Obeid, and with ongoing massacres and displacements, and Darfur, where the RSF has recently captured El Fasher (26 October) and thus won definite supremacy in the North Darfur state. During the preceding months, a large influx of new weapons came from the Emirates, via Haftar's Libya. Since summer 2025, the RSF is in control of the border region to Libya, which will give them weight in future negotiations with the EU.

In Kordofan, the SPLA-(N) has allied with the RSF and is attacking from the Nuba Mountains. Their leader is meanwhile the vice president of a parallel government, under the presidency of Hemedti. As the two sides vie for more power in the area, more civilians are being killed in what rights groups say is the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

In Darfur, near El Fasher, huge refugee camps were situated, dating back to the Darfur genocidal wars of the early 2000s. The greatest of these camps, Zamzan, was turned into a military barracks and an artillery base, as hundred thousands of civilians had to flee, suffering from countless abuses. But this was only the prelude. The capture of El Fasher has been accompanied with mass killings and war crimes. Not only men who were considered fighters, but also patients and disabled persons in the last existing hospital, the medical staff, and members of the Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) were deliberately killed, and women raped and mistreated.

For many of the displaced people there is no chance to resettle. The current war is a continuation of the Darfur war, but this time with an explicit capitalisation perspective. The Emirates and their militia leader have a project of land grab through displacement. The Massalit must be driven from their fields, the Fur from their mango orchards, the Zaghawa and Berti from their extensive economies. The winner takes it all and establishes plantations or cattle ranches on the land formerly held by peasants and herders. This project will certainly be easier to realise in a Darfur warlord state separated from Sudan. In the end, UAE is not only winning gold, minerals, and land, but also takes profit from the humanitarian logistics, feeding the displaced populations in the camps. But we will come back to this later.



## 2. Humanitarianism, Intervention, and Logistics

In Western Sudan, food is the most pressing problem for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Apart from RSF killing, raping, and looting, these are areas of severe need because it's the third season of no possibility to farm anything. The land is totally dependent on rain fed irrigation. WFP, ICRC, and NRC are trying to bring in some food, but convoys regularly come under fire from the RSF. Through scarcity, they want to drive the population into camps. There are other needs connected to health aid, especially the areas under the control of the RSF. Hemedti does not care about this, because population for them is a burden without a future.

Since November 2024, more than 2 million IDPs have resettled in Central Sudan, especially in the states Gezira, Khartoum, Sennar, and White Nile. There are many Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) working for community kitchens, health, and education. But there are restrictions on the ERRs volunteers., like compulsory registration. Aid shipments are deliberately being held up by the SAF-government for security reasons.

The official Aid for Sudan is severely underfunded. OCHA has earmarked \$ 4bn for the Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025, of which only 26% has been covered. The largest donors are the USA and the EU, while the Emirates are only involved with a small contribution of \$9 million.

The funds from the German government and the EU mainly address the large organisations such as WFP, FAO, UN Children's Fund (and also to the IOM, as the Better Migration Management Program (BMM) is continuing also in times of war. Keeping the refugees stay put is central for the donors). Grass-root organisations cannot receive government grants; only occasionally do informal supplies reach the ERRs via the large agencies

So what we see in Sudan at the moment is a combination of deliberate displacement and starvation on the territory which is controlled by RSF, and on the side of SAF a combination of securitization of humanitarian aid, in combination with restrictions on the ERRs and an Islamist resurgence. Both sides are establishing their own regime that bury the revolution.

## Humanitarian Warfare and Logistics

Generally speaking, emergency aid since the end of the Cold War is characterized by the growing gap between the internal logic of the large aid organisations and local aid requirements, the increasing involvement of humanitarianism in military interventions, and last but not least the omission of emergency aid and the staging of wars as population policy. Emergency aid had increased continuously until 2022 / 23, but no more so in recent years, and it is currently declining.

Let us go back to the end of the Cold War, in order to understand these things better. Michael Barnet, in his book Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism (2011), has described the situation in the 1990s, with a striking similarity to the present times. He describes that a

simultaneous decline of the state's ability to provide security or perform basic governance tasks and the rise of paramilitary organizations led to wars with no „fronts”, engulfing cities, towns, and villages. Civilians were no longer a tragic consequence of war but rather war's intended targets. (p.161)

In this situation, the UN Agenda for Peace shifted towards an Agenda of Humanitarian Intervention. Starting 1991, with the response to the plight of the Kurds after the First Gulf War, “Safe Havens” came up as a concept of intervention. One year later, the response to the famine in Somalia triggered military protection for humanitarian operations (Shoot to Feed). “State-building” now became a humanitarian goal, addressing “Failed States”, as the “Root Causes” of human suffering

While one of the root causes of states to fail was not addressed in Barnet's book, namely the Washington Consensus and the conditionality of loans, which forced the states to reduce welfare expenses, the results of these politics are well described:

States began shredding their welfare „burden”. The state now claimed that basic protections were properly the purview of, and more efficiently delivered by, NGOs, faith-based agencies, and even a private sector. (p.165)



The rise of NGOs is a topic which we cannot really address in this context. As Gregory Mann has argued, NGOs like WFP, USAID, MSF and Save the Children established their own sort of NGO governance in the Sahel states, already in the 1970s. And as Islah Jad has described, NGOs not only substituted state governance, but there also was what she called a "NGO-ization of Movements". As she wrote in 2004,

The Arab women's NGOs in their actual forms and structures might be able to play a role in advocating Arab women's rights in the international arena, provide services for certain needy groups, propose new policies and visions, generate and disseminate information. But, in order to affect a comprehensive, sustainable development and democratisation, a different form of organisation is needed with a different, locally grounded vision and a more sustainable power basis for social change.

Follow the Money. We are quite sure that an analysis of the role of NGOs in the age of neo-liberalism is not possible without an analysis of their finances, and the financialization of their business. This task remains unfinished.

Back to the 1990s again:

The UN was an indifferent bystander during the genocide in Rwanda, 1994, but it was different in Europe. The wars in former Yugoslavia triggered new developments towards humanitarian interventions. In Bosnia, in 1992, the concept of "Save Havens" was resumed, and UNHCR coordinated more than 250 agencies, in order to deliver aid, and at the same time keeping away the refugees from Western Europe ("Containment through Charity"). In March 1999, after the NATO air strikes on Belgrade had been answered by the Serbian regime with a wave of ethnic cleansing, NATO, side to side with UNHCR, took control over the organization of relief,

militarizing the refugee camps, and turning the whole humanitarian business into "humanitarian warriors".

The same concepts were also used for the US invasions in Afghanistan (2001 – 2021), and Iraq (2003). In the "War on Terror", Humanitarianism became part of the US military strategy. At that time, UAE stepped in. The Emirs did not only send their fighter Jets to Afghanistan, but also opened their International Humanitarian City as a logistic hub in Dubai. Today, this district is home to the UNHCR's global stockpile, and an important location of the World Food Programme.

In this context, one could speak of a "logistic turn" of humanitarianism. In his remarkable essay, Rafeef Ziadah has analysed the connection between humanitarian logistics, commercial interests, and military projections, using the example of the Emirates. He does not forget to mention that migrant work, under the strong surveillance in a police state, is an essential factor for both humanitarian and military logistics. Ziadah has summarized his findings in an article in MERP, stating that

Rather than reading military intervention separately from so-called humanitarian agendas, it is essential to trace the symbiotic relationship between humanitarian, commercial and military logistics.

The Emirates have a vivid history of military-logistical embrace of Africa. In Yemen and Libya, the Emirates have learnt how to use proxy militias for their agenda, and this is what they are now doing now in Darfur, on a larger scale. Following an economy of displacement, they want to drive the population into Refugee Camps, and erect a regime of humanitarianism, extraction and Agro business.

It is obvious that local structures of resistance and mutual aid, like Resistance Committees and Emergency Response Rooms, do not fit into this agenda. When they took over El Fasher, they martyred a large number of members from community kitchens and volunteer initiatives, along with thousands of other victims.

### **3. Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) as the Backbone of Relief Efforts**

As any state structures, in respect of supply with food, health and education are absent, the Resistance Committees (RCs) and ERRs have filled that void since the beginning of that war. As The New Humaitarian (TNH) wrote a few months ago,

The backbone of relief efforts has been youth-driven and neighbourhood-based mutual aid groups known as emergency response rooms – which were set up at the outset of the war – as well as other local community initiatives.

With support from local and diaspora networks, as well as international donors, community responders have reached millions – running soup kitchens, supporting clinics, keeping infrastructure going, and launching education and women's initiatives.

Mutual aid is central to many crises, but the scale and impact of local efforts in Sudan has been profound, and volunteers say their solidarity-based model offers a blueprint for both a new kind of politics and a radically different humanitarian response.



TNH has published a series of articles on mutual aid and the ERRs since June 2023, up to the article on the community kitchen in the Tawila Camp, near El Fasher, in July 2025. Meanwhile, this camp is host for many refugees fleeing from El Fasher.

The ERRs are of revolutionary origin. They were organized by Resistance Committees (RCs), which emerged as a central actor in the struggle against the previous Islamist regime. Many political actors were counting on the RCs to play a central role in the country's democratic transition process. Thanks to their experience with self-government and their local presence, they offered real prospects for direct grassroots democracy.

A year ago, we had a conversation with Osman Abdallah, a former activist in Omdurman. He told us that working in the RCs

was political from the beginning, but the political themes of the committees were starting from the needs of the neighbourhoods. And this is a point of strength. It wasn't a weakness like non-political. Working on the gas, the food, the transportation and so forth. They were not just working on servicing those things. [...] So it was political from the beginning, but they always say that when there is a crisis, humanitarian work is the work to access the community. But it is for a political cause.

In April this year, after 2 years of war, Quantara called the ERRs "A revolutionary aid network", and in August, there was a great article on Women's ERRs in African Arguments, by Hana Jafar, in which she also insisted on the connection between the RCs and the ERRs:

Since the early days of the mid-April 2023 war, Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) have emerged as a practical extension of the Resistance Committees. [...] The ERRs too are more than a coordinated humanitarian response, as their work and ethos build on the Committees' original political vision: building a grassroots civic space that is people-centred with the aim of reconfiguring the uneven dynamic between society and the state.

Adapting the Resistance Committees' revolutionary discourse to wartime realities, the rooms became a unique sociopolitical phenomenon. They preserved their participatory essence even as their role shifted from protest organizing to service delivery. Their concept of "popular sovereignty" manifested direct citizen engagement in decision-making processes through the diffusion of power across community institutions.

The future of the ERRs remains in uncertainty. The allies of SAF, like Turkey and Qatar, are in favour Islamist structures, and Egypt fears the spillover of any revolutionary heritage. In the West of Sudan, the RSF is killing every obstacle on their way. And, as we will see now, there are internal debates about what ERRs should be like in the future. Can they stay with their concept of democracy from below, or will they be transformed in a process which we might call "NGO-ization of a Revolution".

## 4.A Confrontation of Discourses

With the tides of crises and regimes, international aid in Sudan has alternated between emergency aid in the periphery and traditional development aid in Khartoum. In the 1980s, which were years of drought, war and starvation in the periphery, a new docile elite gathered around the NGOs in Khartoum, and adopted the ideology and practices of "NGO governance", under the umbrella of what was called a civil society. Beyond poverty and hunger, there was now talk about human rights and empowerment. The Sudanese researcher Ragaa Makawi has described this process impressively in an interview with MERIP.

In the 1980s, Sudan (like many states in the global South) was subject to liberalization through its encounter with international financial institutions, like the IMF, who made economic policies and loans conditional on political and economic liberalization: With IMF conditionalities came a new civil society, heavily funded by international donors. It led to a situation of more civil society, but less representation—compared to the sort of grass roots civil society, which was something that had existed throughout Sudan's history[...]. With liberalization, the focus shifted firmly to a western idea of a women's empowerment agenda, which enforced the vertical elevation of women through professionalization towards upward social mobility. This resulted in a small circle of elite women.

[...]

By the 2000s, Liberal Peace became the dominant framework. Funding poured into projects aligned with the Women, Peace and Security agenda (as set forth by the 2000 UN security council resolution). [...] Ultimately these systems isolated the general public from their own control over whatever peace is and civil society's interventions in it. Worse still they created parallel and siloed political tracks for groups depending on their geographical and ethnic background. Peace in Darfur, as it was in South Sudan, assumes an approach and process as well as tools and a language that is separate from mainstream politics. Peace fragmented the Sudanese polity at the level of regions and communities, weakening the national sense of identity.



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Since the beginning of the war, the NGO activities inside Sudan largely ceased. The offices in Khartoum were closed, the expats went home, and the Sudanese personnel scattered. A report by CCU-Sudan gave an impression of the variety of groups and networks of mutual help, and especially the ERRs. Their coordination was weak, and their main sources were from local contributions. So CCU-Sudan tried to connect these local actors with diaspora organizations, as well as bigger donors, with respect to their locality and self-determination. As they argued, ERRs are best thought of not as institutions in the traditional sense but as networking hubs built around mobilising local resources using local capacities.

Since recently, the need for a different humanitarian response has been a topic of many press releases. This is the story behind it: In February 2024, three ERR organizers visited UN Headquarters and called on the international community to recognize ERRs as an actor in the humanitarian field, and provide support to them. In the same year, they went online as an NGO, with filmmaker Hajooj Kuka, as an "External Communications Officer". They founded the Localisation Coordination Council (LCC), and were, in the USA, able to connect with the Unitarian Church, as well as with the North Carolina group Proximity2Humanity. It was a great achievement that the ERRs, as organized by LCC, were given the Rafto Prize 2025, and the Alternative Nobel Prize 2025. But in this game we must also keep in mind the words by Jérôme Tubiana:

Western policymakers now think Sudan's woes can be cured by its 'civilians' and 'civil society' (ill-defined categories, given their fragmentation and helplessness), especially the ERRs. This is a sign that they have abdicated all responsibility for providing aid and ending the violence.

The ERRs were nominated last year and this year for the Nobel Peace Prize. Never mind the Nobel, one of the founders of the ERR in Zamzam told me, the priority is to stop the war. He is now in a refugee camp in Chad, dependent on unreliable aid supplies from the West.

After the fall of El Fasher, we talked to a member of ERR Tawila. Together with MSF, they are taking responsibility for more than half a million refugees, with thousands of new arrivals from Al Fasher. They are building up a second camp, and have asked LCC for support, to no avail. They are getting some aid from WFP, NRC, and other donors. And they hope that the fragile protection by SLA will hold



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With this paper, we are definitely not opposing direct support to the ERRs. What we want to address here is the re-branding of the ERRs, which originate from the revolutionary RCs and traditions of mutuality, into NGOs, transforming them from democratic grassroots projects into civil society projects. The before-mentioned Hajooj Kuka, for example, has re-framed Khartoum's ERRs as "civil society projects". As he said, "We organize with markets, traders, individuals". Similarly, UUSC is calling for support of the Sudanese "pop-up facilities", which they claim were founded during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Some of them were, but this is not to the point.) Similarly, in Germany, Gerrit Kurtz and Andrea Böhm recommend giving greater consideration to the ERRs. They also just skip the revolutionary origin of the ERRs. LCC may thus find more donors, but this comes with a price. They present the ERR model on the global market, but they distort it.

The transition from revolutionary committees to NGOs is not just about wording and branding, but a fundamental confrontation of discourses. It is about grassroots democracy versus hierarchies, collective responsibility versus career, and about the power to command voluntary work and dispose of donations. Anyone who gets involved with the big NGOs has no choice but to accept their rules. At the beginning, you are a supplicant, but access to power and money is addictive. Later, you become a supervisor and controller.

"RC was the backbone of the resistance. With the ERRs, we are doing what we couldn't do with the RCs because ERRs are not political," said Yan Elobaid, Fundraising Officer at LCC, when they were nominated for the Livelihood Award. And Hajooj Kuka added that they were bringing a new democracy to Sudan. We will see in a minute what sort of democracy this is about.



If you compare the Revolutionary Charter January 2023, which was produced in numerous discussions by the delegates of the committees, with the ready-made Charter of the LCC, you will see the difference of the concepts of "democracy" at first glance. The Revolutionary Charter speaks of people's power; the LCC Charter speaks of good governance. It is made to address international donors. It talks about decolonised aid, but the main exponents, like the Fundraising Officer and two External Communication Officers, are part of Western NGO governance of the McKinsey sort. They come with their whiteboards and moderation kits, and they know before what the outcome has to be like. They feel at home in the world of paperwork, project applications and invoices. Compare this to the RC activists, who, with their spirit and with facebook, tried to get a revolutionary process going. It is a fundamentally different mentality working on the two sides.

In his blog post on The Battle of Charters, Taharqa Elnour has characterized the shift of political attitudes during the Transitional Government in Sudan (mid 2019 until October 2021), and the fragmentation between the RCs, torn between calls for a “soft landing”, and demands for “radical change.”

At the center of this shift was a familiar logic: Stability first. Pushed by international donors, development agencies, and multilateral institutions, the idea was seductive—end the unrest, secure investments, and build institutions. But beneath it lay an implicit trade-off: Sacrifice justice for order, transformation for reform, and people’s demands for donor priorities.

As Elnour writes, the liberal peace model—emphasizing market liberalization, elite pacts, and technocratic governance—quickly became the dominant framework of that short intermezzo, before the military coup of 2021

Funding streams dictated agendas, and grassroots movements were fragmented into professionalized silos competing for legitimacy through donor frameworks rather than through the street.

NGOs, once seen as allies of transformation, became intermediaries in a depoliticized game. With international funding came conditionality—not overt, but structural. Local civil society organizations adapted, not by deepening their political roots, but by aligning with donor checklists. As a result, the revolutionary space became diluted—its unity fractured by the scramble for visibility, access, and survival.

One of the striking examples of these NGOs, mentioned by Elnour, is Hajooj Kuka’s NGO Sudan Civic Lab, founded in 2021, tapping into widespread youth disillusionment with traditional parties—drawing in unaffiliated activists and channeling their energy from the streets into

At the beginning of the war, in April 2023, there was much discussion inside and between the ERRs, whether to register with the government's Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC) to obtain a legal permit to carry out their activities. As the report by CCU-Sudan points out, opinions were mixed, and conditions in different parts of the country and within the ERRs led to the adoption of different strategies. Today it is similar, as some ERRs join the LCC initiative, hoping to get some funding, while others resist strongly. They know that Kuka's initiative was launched and funded by the International Republican Institute. In this context, we quote from a statement by the Khartoum State Coordination Committee of Resistance Committees, dated October 21, 2024:

We reject the so-called Resistance Committees Conference scheduled to be held in Entebbe, Uganda. [...] This is a blatant attempt to circumvent and deceive in order to fulfill financial obligations agreed upon with donors in exchange for the political agenda they are trying to advance. Therefore, it is imperative for us to reveal who coordinated this event: Musab al-Mahjoub, a member of the Humanitarian Action Committee of the "Progress" Coordination Committee; Ibrahim al-Hajj, a coordinator of the American "International Republican Institute" (IRI); and Hajouj Kuka, a representative of the "Qissat" organization. These aforementioned figures have long worked as brokers to attract resistance committees to the workshops of organizations planned by international intelligence and to invest in projects with intelligence agendas targeting the resistance committees. [...]

We will not tolerate this deliberate sabotage, no matter the cost. The actions of IRI coordinators, its donors, and the individuals coordinating this conference, with all its forms of undermining the independence of popular organizations and civil society groups in Sudan, hijacking their voices,

and employing nearly \$400,000 to influence their political positions and organizational structures, in collusion with some Sudanese political forces, are shameful. This act amounts to a full-fledged crime of political corruption, ignoring the most basic principles and values of research centers and civil society organizations, which should strive to ensure the independence of all components of the civil society space, not to polarize or co-opt them.

As can be seen from this statement, the differences are profound, and LCC is playing rough to achieve their goals. We are not blaming any ERRs which are in urgent need of donations, but the problems of obedience to the donors are a more valid topic than ever. There must be other ways to directly support the ERRs. In the words by Taharqa Elnoun,

Today, that vision [of the RCs] is under siege—from bombs and bullets, but also from boardrooms and bargaining tables and regional and international “peace initiatives”. Yet the revolution endures—not only in memory, but in the quiet infrastructures of mutual aid, the networks of trust, the enduring clarity of those early vows:

No Negotiation. No Legitimacy. No Compromise.

## 5. Sudanese Arguments

The analysis and experiences from within Sudan's grassroots movements offer a powerful critique of the conventional humanitarian system and present a clear, alternative path forward.

The central critique, echoed by researchers like Ragaa Makawi, is that the international donor model of "civil society," established since the 1980s, has often created a professionalized elite disconnected from grassroots realities. This system prioritizes a "sanitized" language of human rights and empowerment over the messy, political work of addressing everyday socioeconomic needs. The result is "more civil society, but less representation," undermining historic, self-reliant community models like the Jamiat Ahliyah[1]

We have asked Sudanese friends for a comment on the actual needs of aid delivery in Sudan. Their arguments are not merely theoretical but are born from the practical struggle for survival and sovereignty.

## As our friend H explained,

There are many big problems regarding humanitarian aid. First is the small amount of aid that is dedicated to Sudan. The other which contributed greatly to the Sudan situation is the bureaucracy of the de facto government. And the difficulties of reaching out to the people with humanitarian aid, especially areas under RSF control, also getting permission from the government to deliver aid takes a long time, both HAC & SAK\*[2] are managed by the security bodies. So they are dealing with humanitarian aid from a security perspective which makes the aiding people of a higher cost in addition to the already destroyed infrastructure. In general the management of the aid is almost 40% of its value and sometimes more than that!!

Despite that the Sudanese people have great experience in humanitarian aid from below with the local initiatives, e.g. ERRs, in buying stuff from the local market, the international NGOs do not flow with that. Of course this has something to do with the bureaucracy but also it's deeply connected to the interests of transportation companies and other capitalist factors involved in the process. There's another political dimension that lies deep in the desire of keeping the needy communities dependent on aid.

The idea of LCC was meant to coordinate between the ERRs and sharing knowledge and experiences, but with the days it transformed into a body that confiscated the decision of the local/below emergency rooms, this is a trial to transform these ERRs from being grassroots with their own decisions and visions into mere mechanisms for implementing the vision of the LCC. There's another problem, that LCC members are not elected or even nominated by the emergency rooms, which creates a fundamental problem: the lack of accountability, which makes their loyalty to donors greater than their loyalty to humanitarian needs and strips the spirit out of grassroots works. This is something that is intended in itself, to narrow the circle of decision and centralize it. There are efforts to bring LCC back to the starting point, which should be a space for learning from each other and coordination rather than being solo in taking decisions.

The experiences shared by Razaz Bashir and her colleagues with the ISTinaD research center[3] provide a concrete contemporary example of this clash and a potential way out. Their work with Agriculture ERRs in Darfur highlights the fundamental "funding question" as a bottleneck. From the outset, these ERRs expressed a desire to move beyond mere service provision to establishing productive activities that could ensure long-term self-sufficiency.

This vision stands in direct opposition to a system of perpetual dependency. As Bashir explains, the "obvious answer" is the transformation from being fund-dependent to self-sustaining. This is not a distant ideal but a practical goal. In rain-fed agriculture, for instance, modest initial

investment can allow farmers to achieve self-sufficiency within two to three seasons. The logical next step, which Bashir identifies as "the clearest path," is adding value to agricultural products through local manufacturing, thereby expanding the beneficiary base and building resilient local economies.

Beyond critique, Sudanese civil society is actively prototyping alternative funding models that align with their revolutionary principles of solidarity and self-reliance:

**The Diaspora Subscription Model:** Initiatives like the Sudan Solidarity Collective in Canada demonstrate a community-driven approach where the diaspora provides direct, collective funding to specific projects, bypassing large bureaucratic intermediaries.

**The Social Assets Model:** This is a radical re-imagining of resources, moving beyond monetary transactions. It involves mobilizing local, non-financial assets—a truck, a skill, a piece of land, or labour—where the return is based on sharing and collective benefit, not monetary profit. This model leverages existing community strength and distributes resources justly. This participatory model is a guarantee against hegemony and co-option. It ensures that the process remains in the hands of the people, allowing them to develop their skills and engagement. As Bashir concludes, this is, "in absolute terms... a political action." It is a direct effort to build a civic space where popular sovereignty is practiced daily, ensuring that the emergent bodies born from revolution can survive and define their own future, independent of external agendas.

Underpinning these practical efforts is a profound political imperative. The main discussion, as Bashir reveals, is about preventing the hijacking of these grassroots groups. The ERRs and Resistance Committees (RCs) are popular, revolutionary structures. The key to protecting them and preserving the "revolutionary seeds within them" is widening popular participation.

## Summary of Sudanese Arguments:

1. A Rejection of Dependency: The current international aid system often creates a professionalized class and fosters long-term dependency, eroding local autonomy and accountability.
2. A Demand for Sovereignty: Support must be channeled in ways that reinforce, rather than undermine, the revolutionary principles of self-reliance, direct democracy, and popular sovereignty embodied by the ERRs and RCs.
3. An Investment in Production, Not Just Consumption: The priority for local groups is to establish productive, sustainable economies—from agriculture to value-added manufacturing—that break the cycle of emergency aid.
4. Innovation in Resource Mobilization: Grassroots groups are pioneering non-extractive funding models based on diaspora solidarity and the mobilization of social assets, which are more aligned with their communal values.
5. Participation as Protection: Broad-based community participation is seen as the primary defense against the hijacking of these movements by armed factions, political elites, or NGOs. Solidarity must therefore aim to widen, not narrow, this participatory base.



Art work by : Elshafe Mukhtar



## Sudan's Emergency Response Rooms



Learn more by visiting our website

## Sudan's Emergency Response Rooms

As war rages in Sudan, where the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been locked in a brutal conflict since April 2023, a remarkable grassroots movement has emerged to fill the void left by the collapse of the state and the paralysis of international relief. The Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs)—locally known as Ghoraf Al-Tawari (غرف الطوارئ)—have become the beating heart of a people-led humanitarian revolution.

Formed by the same neighborhood resistance committees that helped overthrow President Omar al-Bashir during the 2018 Sudanese Revolution, the ERRs represent a decentralized, volunteer-powered lifeline for millions of Sudanese civilians. Operating under extraordinary conditions, the ERRs have not only provided clean water, food, healthcare, education, and evacuation services to over 11.5 million people as of December 2024, but have also redefined what humanitarian aid can—and perhaps should—look like.

While traditional humanitarian responses remain constrained by logistics, bureaucracy, and security concerns, ERRs have moved quickly and effectively by drawing on Sudan's deep-rooted culture of mutual aid, known locally as nafir—a communal call to mobilize in times of crisis. With a decentralized structure that cuts across ethnicity, gender, and political lines, these youth-led networks have created an agile, community-centric model that bypasses the red tape that often entangles international aid. As Sudan drifts to the brink of collapse, ERRs stand as a symbol of resilience, dignity, and the boundless capacity of ordinary citizens to rise in extraordinary times. Their story is not just about emergency relief—it's about reclaiming power, agency, and humanity in the face of war and abandonment.



In a world where humanitarian aid is often entangled with geopolitics, branding, and bureaucracy, Sudan's Emergency Response Rooms offer a starkly different vision: one of radical local ownership, courage under fire, and a politics of care that transcends borders.

And in doing so, they may not only save a nation—but change the future of global aid itself. This **Gazette** dedicates a significant part of its content to highlight these great efforts of people on ground and their creative initiatives and help them in raising funds.



[Moves Charity](#)



[Tawilla Emergency Room](#)

## غرفة طوارئ البراري



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