
Sudan Media Forum: Joint Statement

APRIL 15, 2024

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On April 15, 2023, a brutal conflict erupted in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, pitting the Sudanese Armed Forces against the Rapid Support Forces. The violence quickly spread to Darfur, Kordofan, and Al-Jazira states, and threatens to engulf even more regions. Urgent action is needed to prevent further escalation.

This war has inflicted a devastating toll. Tens of thousands of civilians, military personnel, and aid workers have been killed. Infrastructure, housing, and vital social, economic, and agricultural sectors lie in ruins. The country teeters on the brink of a catastrophic famine, potentially the worst the world has ever seen.

Sudan now faces the world's largest displacement crisis, especially for children. Over 6.3 million people are internally displaced, and roughly 1.8 million Sudanese have fled the country. UN reports estimate four million children suffer from acute malnutrition, and more than half the population needs urgent humanitarian aid.

The conflict has also silenced journalists. Hundreds of reporters, both men and women, have fled conflict zones and even Sudan itself, fearing accusations of treason and threats of detention, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or even death, depending on the whims of the warring parties. Women journalists face additional risks of gender-based violence, as women and girls in Sudan are already vulnerable to all forms of discrimination and sexual violence.

This year of war has seen a brutal assault on journalists in Sudan. Five journalists, including a woman, were killed. Dozens of others, both men and women, have been arrested and detained for varying lengths of time. Their homes, property, and work tools were looted. Many more faced threats and harassment simply for expressing opinions that differed from the warring parties. This has forced dozens of journalists, men, and women alike, to flee the country, abandon the profession, or disappear. They now face a harsh reality: the near-impossible choice of continuing journalism under extreme hardship or starting over in a new field.

Currently, journalists in conflict zones and areas controlled by either side face immense challenges. Lack of protection and violations of international agreements by the warring parties make free movement for press coverage nearly impossible. These agreements guarantee freedom of the press, freedom of expression, and the safety of journalists during armed conflicts.

One year into the war, newspapers, radio, and television stations (both government and private), and media training centres across the country remain largely non-functional. Some are located in the midst of fighting, making them inaccessible. Others have been looted or occupied during the war. Millions of displaced Sudanese have fled to areas with limited or no media coverage due to heavy restrictions and intimidation from both sides of the conflict. This makes independent, professional journalism and the transmission of accurate information extremely difficult.

The war plunged Sudan into isolation, cutting it off from press coverage due to disrupted communication networks and unreliable internet access. The conflict, shrouded in darkness, has faded from public memory. This has pushed the conflict out of the headlines, overshadowed by other international crises. The lack of international scrutiny emboldens warring parties to commit further atrocities.

This “media blackout” was exacerbated on April 2nd, 2024, when authorities suspended Al-Arabiya, Al-Hadath, and Sky News, citing a lack of professionalism. This arbitrary decision violates press freedom and the right to report on the conflict. It’s a dangerous step towards a complete media blackout.

In light of this critical situation, the Sudanese Media Forum and its co-signatories call for:

First: Urgent Demands to the Warring Parties, Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces:

• **Immediate Ceasefire and Humanitarian Action:**

- Declare a state of famine and request urgent international aid.
- Grant unrestricted access to international organizations and UN agencies for famine relief.
- Open safe passage for delivering food and medicine to affected areas.
- Allow uncensored press coverage by male and female journalists to document the situation.

☐ **Support for Displaced Persons and Press Freedom:**

- Establish open-access shelters for war refugees with unrestricted press coverage.
- Allow journalists to document the experiences and opinions of displaced individuals.

☐ **Unimpeded Access for Journalists:**

- Guarantee free movement for journalists with their equipment to conflict zones.
- Eliminate harassment, restrictions, and censorship faced by journalists.

☐ **Protection of Journalists and Media Infrastructure:**

- End all attacks on journalists, media outlets (visual, audio, print, online), and equipment.
- Ensure journalist safety based on international humanitarian law for civilians.

- Recognise media centres (radio, TV, newspapers, online platforms) as civilian areas.
- Criminalise attacks on media by all parties.

□ **Media Access and Damage Assessment:**

- Allow journalists to inspect and assess damage at media headquarters and facilities.

● **Foreign Press Access:**

- Permit international journalists to enter Sudan and cover all conflict areas freely, including displacement zones, shelters, crossing points, and conflict zones.

Secondly: Call to Action for Journalists and Media

The Sudanese Media Forum urges all journalists and media outlets to:

- **Uphold Professional Standards:** Combat misinformation, especially on social media, by adhering to rigorous journalistic ethics during sensitive conflict coverage. This war has been particularly damaging to professional journalism, so let's reclaim our role by prioritizing accuracy and integrity.
- **Challenge Biased Narratives:** The absence of a strong national press has allowed biased and misleading media to dominate the narrative. We must work together to present a clear and truthful picture of the conflict. Both warring parties share responsibility for creating a media blackout in Sudan.
- **Unify for a Free Press:** The Sudanese Media Forum, representing media organizations and the Journalists Syndicate, stands united for a free press built on integrity, accuracy, and independence. We will present a document outlining principles and rules for responsible media coverage during wartime. We invite all journalists, media professionals, and institutions to join us and adapt these guidelines to their existing editorial policies.
- **Promote Peace and Unity:** Journalists have a crucial role to play in fostering peace and unity. We must actively combat hate speech, racism, and terrorism by refusing to amplify these messages on our platforms. Let's work together to create a joint media discourse that promotes understanding and reconciliation.

Third: Demands for the Sudanese Civil Forces:

- **Media Freedom as a Strategic Priority:**
The media is a vital part of civil society. We urge political forces to elevate the issue of free and

independent press to a strategic priority on their agenda, both now and in the future.

- **Combating Hate Speech and Racism:** Escalating hate speech and racism threaten national unity. We call on civil society organizations, political forces, emergency committees, and resistance groups to make confronting this a top priority. Partner with the press and journalists to develop a joint media strategy to combat these issues.
- **Protection and Support for Journalists:** Work with national and international bodies to provide protection, support, and legal advocacy for Sudanese journalists, both within Sudan and in neighbouring countries.
- **Post-War Media and Peacebuilding:** Start planning for “peace journalism” in the post-war period. Collaborate to restore Sudan’s democratic path, emphasizing accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide.

Urgent Actions Needed from the International Community:

- **Enforce Ceasefire and Aid Delivery:**
 - Advocate for the immediate implementation of the UN Security Council’s ceasefire resolution.
 - Establish effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance.
 - Guarantee unrestricted access for humanitarian aid to prevent famine.
 - Facilitate the delivery of food and essential supplies to those affected.
- **Support Sudanese Media:**
 - Establish a dedicated fund to support Sudanese journalists.
 - Assist in creating professional, cultural, and social centres for journalists in neighbouring countries.
 - Equip these centres with the necessary technology for media production.

Proposed Initiatives:

- **A. Journalist Assistance:**
 - Encourage unemployed journalists to continue their work by connecting them with independent media outlets.
 - Provide financial support for publishing their work, funded by donors and media organizations.
 - Create a joint platform for the Sudanese Media Forum to share war stories and humanitarian crises.
- **B. Independent Media Support:**
 - Bolster independent news websites and radio/TV stations operating in Sudan.
 - Enable them to deliver accurate and unbiased news with wider reach.

- **C. Journalist Welfare Programme:**
 - Establish a network with international organizations to provide psychological and social support services to journalists impacted by war trauma.
 - Create safe havens with support and supplies for journalists in conflict-free areas.
- **D. Post-Conflict Media Recovery:**
 - Collaborate with the Sudanese Media Forum on post-war media projects.
 - Provide urgent financial and technical support for journalists and media outlets.
 - Foster a press-friendly environment for journalists to resume their work effectively.
- **E. Training and Development:**
 - Offer specialised training programmes to enhance journalists' abilities for conflict and peacetime reporting.
 - Emphasise training in combating hate speech, racism, and all forms of discrimination.
- **F. Media Centre Restoration:**
 - Assist war-damaged media training and production centres in resuming operations from neighbouring countries.

The Sudan Media Forum, committed to free and independent press coverage during conflict, issues this joint statement on the critical conditions faced by journalists in Sudan.

Following extensive discussions, we, the undersigned members, express our deep concern about the state of the press and the safety of journalists since the war began on April 15, 2023.

Media and press institutions endorsing this statement:

- Dabanga – Radio / TV / Online
- Sudanese Journalists Syndicate
- Sudan Tribune
- Al-Tayar newspaper
- Aljreeda Newspaper
- Sudan-Bukra Media
- Altaghyeer newspaper
- Ayin Network
- Alrakoba

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- Sudanile
 - Journalists for Human Rights - JHR – Sudan
 - Female Journalists Network-Sudan
 - The Democrat Newspaper
 - Hala Radio - 96 FM
 - Radio (PRO FM) 106.6
 - Medameek newspaper
 - Darfur 24
 - Al-Ayam Centre for Cultural Studies and Development
 - Teeba Press
 - Alalg Centre for Press Service
 - Sudanese Centre for Research, Training, and Development Services
 - Article Centre for Training and Media Production
 - Mashaweer
 - Sudans Reporters
 - Televzyon Platform

On April 15, 2024

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Sudan Media Forum
#StandWithSudan