

Urgent appeal for support to Sudanese media

Statement by the Sudan Media Forum

One year after the start of the conflict in Sudan on 15 April 2023, independent journalists, media outlets and representative organisations from Sudan gathered with international media support and assistance organisations in Kampala Uganda. The conference, was held between 23-25 April 2024 and was organised by CFI, the French Media Development Agency, under its “Kalimat Sudania” project, with funding from the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of the Sudan.

The groups, gathered under the umbrella of the Sudan Media Forum, with the facilitation of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), discussed the catastrophic crisis of war in Sudan. They discussed deeply about the role media and journalism can play in alleviating the plight of the citizens of Sudan. They issue this statement urging for more assistance from the international donor community to assist the Sudan Media Forum and the Sudanese media sector as a whole on four urgent priorities and lines of engagement:

1. Safety of journalists
2. Media survival
3. Disinformation and hate speech
4. Communications infrastructure

Media and journalism matter in times of crisis

In times of war, journalists play a vital role, bringing essential, lifesaving and humanitarian information to light and holding power to account. In the midst of the conflict, journalists and media outlets have bravely continued their information services to the people, including documenting and reporting on conflict-related human rights violations and violence and providing lifesaving information services to affected and hard-to-reach populations.

However, media and journalists have also been targeted by parties to the conflict for violations including physical harm, cases of targeted execution, arrest, and detention. This hampers the crucial work of independent media to inform the population, as journalists are targeted and forced to flee. Violations were thoroughly documented by the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, a constituent member of the Sudan Media Forum, in its annual report issued on Monday 6 May.

These attacks on the independent media also hindered survivors' access to urgent information services. They not only endanger the lives of those reporting from the frontlines but also deprive the global and local communities of vital information needed to make informed decisions. The total annihilation of the public telecommunications infrastructure has resulted in a breakdown of the communications infrastructure, opening opportunities for the warring parties to engage in a widespread campaign of hate speech and disinformation.

At the same time, the regular use of internet blackouts not only prevents communication at a personal and communal level, but also interferes with the ability of local and international humanitarian organisations to adequately respond to the growing humanitarian needs. Currently 95% of the citizens depend on online banking apps for money transfers.

We need to act now

The alarming trend of attacks against journalists during the conflict undermines the very foundation of the right to freedom of expression and protection of journalists, as per international humanitarian and human rights law.

The international community must stand united in condemning such acts of violence and take concerted actions to protect media freedom and ensure the protection of journalists so they can continue to provide life-saving information to the people of Sudan.

This is why the undersigned call on the international donor community, government actors, and big tech companies to act urgently, decisively, jointly, and comprehensively to restore the capacity of the independent Sudanese media. We emphasise the need for the member states of the Media Freedom Coalition, as well as the EU and its member states active in Sudan, to address these needs and endorse this statement.

Immediate needs for assistance

The Sudan Media Forum, the international journalist- and media assistance groups, as well as all international press freedom advocates, urge international donors, private foundations and contributors to provide assistance in four mentioned terrains.

1 - Media Survival

Most independent media houses in the Sudan context have lost their normal sources of revenue, audience and support due to the outbreak of hostilities in April 2023. There is an urgent need to support the survival of relevant media for independent information through:

- Support for freelance and unemployed journalists, with a focus on women journalists, to amplify independent Sudanese voices and provide accurate and fair reporting/information.
- Provision of lifeline resources and financial support for the survival of independent media by injecting funds to the media houses that are on the brink of collapse.
- Investment in the Sudan Media Forum (SMF)¹ to evolve as a collective platform for Sudanese independent media, including for co-dissemination and production of humanitarian content and reporting on human rights abuses.
- Investment in advancing the linguistic, editorial and technical skills of Sudanese journalists by supporting the collaborative, joint editorial room of SMF, which is the platform for independent, anti-war media.

2 - Safety of journalists

Media and journalists have been targeted by parties to the conflict or forced to flee, hampering the crucial work of independent media to inform the population. Violations are thoroughly documented by the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, a constituent member of the Sudan Media Forum, in its annual report issued on Monday 6 May. Additional needs are:

- Support for the protection of Sudanese journalists on the ground by remote digital training and instruction videos on physical, psycho-socials and digital protection.
- Create an international emergency fund for the protection of Sudanese journalists that can interact with the SJS (vetting) and Journalists in Distress network (coordination), including for the relocation, financial assistance or psychological support of journalists.
- Call for the UN, MFC member states and iNGO's to ensure that there will be a full, transparent and independent investigation of crimes against journalists and to hold those responsible accountable
- Support the Sudan Journalist Syndicate in increasing their capacity to analyse trends and needs, and report and document violations against journalists.
- Improved support, protection and safeguards should be provided by international media towards the security and well being of Sudanese freelancers working for them.

3 - Hate speech and disinformation

Hate-speech is proliferating in the current conflict, making advocacy with IT experts / tech companies urgently required to ensure and address security threats online: remove harmful content, deactivate disinformation, and hate speech accounts. With WhatsApp and Facebook

1 Sudan Media Forum, eg.: <https://www.altaghyeer.info/en/2024/04/15/sudanese-media-forum-joint-statement/>

being the most prominent dissemination channels of information to the population, there is a need to fast-track engagement channels between Sudanese independent media and META. The specific requests to META and the Media Freedom Coalition, the EU, and its member states active in Sudan are:

- Increase attention from the oversight board and Meta to expedite responses to reports from Sudan. Arrange a meeting between GFMD, Beam Reports, the Sudan Media Forum, Meta, and the Oversight Board by the end of May.
- Meta to onboard Sudanese organisations that are certified by the International Fact Check Network (IFCN) certified organisation, as "Third-Party fact checkers" for Sudan.
- Meta to support a faster and more streamlined verification process for Sudanese newsrooms and journalists. A list of verified/trustworthy media can be provided by the Sudan Media Forum.
- Open Meta Newsroom resources to Sudanese media and prioritise their access. Provide faster and dedicated support for countering misinformation and hate speech on the platform by employing additional moderators.
- The Media Freedom Coalition to act firmly and decisively against foreign governments invested in perpetuating the war against civilians through disinformation.
- The EU to use the Digital Services Act (DSA) to demand accountability for hate speech in Sudan. Engagements through the GFMD EU Media Advocacy Group.

4 - Communications Infrastructure

Urge all warring parties to restore communication services in all of Sudan, ending internet blackouts that violate Sudanese people's right to information, hinder the delivery of humanitarian and emergency services, impact on the safety and protection of civilians and obstruct crucial monitoring and reporting on ongoing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Examples of equipment and communication support that would improve connectivity and communication channels both inside Sudan and outside are:

- Investment in 400 mobile phones as reporting tools and their subscriptions. Equipment for 200 satellite upload and download facilities, 800 sim cards that cannot be tracked and the provision of subscriptions for secure meeting links for media (Teams and/or Zoom)
- Access and creation of shared production facilities for live and on-demand radio and tv shows in places relevant to the exiled journalists reception countries (Kenya, Uganda and one other)
- Survey of the media devastation and destruction of equipment, to be prepared for the future SMF to develop a roadmap for the future of the media sector.
- It should be noted that a network of dedicated security advisors would help the undersigned organisations to provide ongoing detailed analysis and regional differentiation of which tools can be used with what risks and provide training for that

We call on the international donor community to implement the [OECD Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment](#) in the Sudanese context.²

Noting that the Media Freedom Coalition's Working Group on Media Development played a vital role in the consultations, drafting, and adoption of the principles and that the principles have been welcomed by 50 MFC member states,³ we ask that the member states of the MFC reinvigorate coordination efforts to galvanise support to journalists in Sudan and exiled journalists in neighbouring countries. We also call on the MFC, UNESCO and others to ensure the safety of journalists is included in the peace talks between the warring parties.

About the Sudan Media Forum

Sudan's independent journalists and media organisations have united under the Sudanese Media Forum (SMF). The Forum demands an immediate ceasefire from all warring parties. They urge unrestricted passage for humanitarian aid and the establishment of safe corridors to deliver food and vital supplies to suffering people in every corner of Sudan - cities, villages, and rural areas alike.

The forum has launched a critical campaign for global solidarity with the Sudanese people as they face the devastating threat of famine and a worsening humanitarian crisis, under the slogan #StandWithSudan. The campaign aims to raise *Global Awareness*, demand an *End to Suffering*, *Amplify Sudanese Voices*, intensify *Media Outreach* on the humanitarian crisis and human rights violations in Sudan; conduct *Global Advocacy*; develop a *Social Media Drive* using the hashtag #StandWithSudan.

The Sudan Media Forum is a coalition of independent media outlets and organisations including:

Dabanga – Radio / TV / Online; Sudanese Journalists Syndicate; Sudan Tribune; Al-Tayar newspaper; Aljreeda Newspaper; Sudan-Bukra Media Org; Altaghyeer newspaper; Ayin Network; Alrakoba.net; Sudanile.com; 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 Center for Cultural Studies and Development; Teeba Press; Alalg Center for Press Service; Sudanese Center for Research, Training, and Development Services; Article Center for Training and Media Production; mashaweer-news.com; Sudans Reporters; Televzyon Platform

2 OECD: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-principles-for-relevant-and-effective-support-to-media-and-the-information-environment_76d82856-en

3 Media Freedom Coalition: <https://mediafreedomcoalition.org/joint-statement/2024/oecd-development-assistance-committees-media-and-information-principles/>

About the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)

The members and partners of the Global Forum for Media Development who were involved in drafting this statement in Kampala, Uganda, from 23-25 April were:

- CFI, the French Media Development Agency
- FreePress Unlimited (FPU)
- Internews
- Media in Conflict and Transition (MiCT)

GFMD members and partners who have also endorsed this statement include:

The **Global Forum for Media Development** is the largest global community for media development, media freedom, and journalism support. Through collaboration, coordination, and collective action our network of [188 member organisations](#) — as well as dozens of [partners](#) — creates, promotes, and delivers policies and programmes to sustain journalism as a public good.

About the humanitarian situation in Sudan

The crisis in Sudan is the biggest humanitarian tragedy that has gone unnoticed in the 21st century. Since fighting broke out in Sudan both the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have repeatedly used heavy explosive weapons in densely populated areas of the capital and conducted indiscriminate attacks, resulting in numerous civilian casualties and the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure and institutions, including schools, hospitals, mosques and churches.

The fighting and attacks on civilians have spread to other regions, including in South Kordofan and Aj Jazirah State, prompting a dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation. Serious violations of international humanitarian law, some amounting to war crimes, took place in multiple towns of West Darfur.⁴ United Nations (UN) experts, NGOs and civil society have raised concerns about the surge of sexual violence.⁵ Sudan now has the highest rate of internal displacement in the world, 25 million people (14 mln children) dependent on humanitarian assistance, 9 million internally displaced, 17 million facing severe hunger and 4,9 million at the brink of starvation, according to UN OCHA.⁶

The massive cost for civilians of the dramatic human rights and humanitarian crisis in the country needs urgent, strategic and concrete steps by the international community to prevent further bloodshed and violations from taking place. Also, to address the humanitarian crisis, it

⁴ HRW: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/26/sudan-new-mass-ethnic-killings-pillage-darfur>

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/un-experts-alarmed-reported-widespread-use-rape-and-sexual-violence-against>

⁶ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/>

is necessary to take urgent steps to protect journalists, counter the use of disinformation and hate speech and reinject communications infrastructure to ease the information blackout on Sudan.