Evolving dynamics of the Sudan conflict: Implications for humanitarian action and civil society

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Introduction

As of April 2025, Sudan's war enters its third year with little to no prospects for resolution—whether through political settlement, military victory, or external diplomatic intervention. The conflict, which erupted on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has resulted in one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in modern history. The conflict has severely affected millions of Sudanese people, compromising their physical safety, security, housing, health, livelihoods, and overall well-being. It has also torn apart the social fabric, destroyed infrastructure, and even threatened the very existence of the Sudanese state, with increasing risks of fragmentation.

Sudan's landscape is undergoing profound and rapid transformations, characterised by escalating military violence, shifts in the civilian political map, and a worsening humanitarian crisis—including challenges and restrictions that hinder the delivery of aid. These significant changes are reshaping the operational environment, particularly for civil society and humanitarian actors. This paper aims to provide an understanding of Sudan's dramatically evolving landscape two years after the outbreak of war and its specific impact on actors in the civil society and humanitarian sectors.

This paper presents broad recommendations and possible responses based on ongoing transformations, including the proposal of new initiatives and directions to safeguard and support civil society and humanitarian work.

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Key recommendations

1. **Humanitarian response strategies need to mirror the reality of geographic and political fragmentation**, with four areas under the control of different parties to the conflict, and adopt distinct, decentralised approaches nested within any overarching approach. This area-based approach can build on the distinct and varying capacities of local civil society and humanitarian actors to strengthen their resilience.

2. **Diplomatic efforts must pragmatically engage with recent political and military developments**, including addressing the challenges of sovereignty and legitimacy to ease access for humanitarian actors outside SAF control. Lessons can be drawn from comparative action in Yemen, Syria and Sudan Lifeline Operation. To achieve this, consider establishing a joint council of official humanitarian agencies working in areas controlled by different parties to the conflict and establishing dedicated civilian communication channels — not military or security — between parties to the conflict and civil society to ease coordination and support aid operations. Insist parties to the conflict protect the impartiality and independence of humanitarian action. This includes refraining from militarising humanitarian aid, as well as the surveillance and persecution of volunteers, organisations and staff, and cutting bureaucratic constraints and orders.

3. **Consider smart sanctions to respond to allegations of the use of humanitarian aid as a weapon of war.** Advocate for a United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution to reflect the humanitarian impact of the current military-security and political developments. This should include provisions related to access to aid, its security, monitoring of its distribution, and the protection of all humanitarian workers.

4. **Co-create an international conference on the humanitarian crisis with local civil society,** bringing together leaders from grassroots groups, mutual aid, independent civil society, political blocs and international agencies. The conference should be inclusive with collective ownership to address the humanitarian crisis. International actors should recognise and support diverse local expertise to ensure an inclusive approach to humanitarian action.

Overview of the humanitarian situation

Numerous international and local reports confirm that Sudan's war has triggered an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, ranking among the worst contemporary disasters. Approximately thirteen million people have been displaced from their homes, with almost four million seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Sudanese civilians face severe food insecurity, with many areas experiencing full-scale famine, including chronic malnutrition affecting millions of children and breastfeeding mothers. The war has also led to the destruction of essential services and infrastructure, particularly the healthcare system, resulting in outbreaks of cholera, dengue fever, and malaria. The collapse of the education system has left approximately seventeen million out of nineteen million school-going children without access to schooling.

Reports further indicate that parties to the conflict have weaponised humanitarian aid as part of their military strategies, obstructing its delivery and deliberately targeting infrastructure and food production services—effectively starving civilians, including children.

Two years into the conflict, the state of civilian protection in Sudan remains dire. Violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties to the conflict persist at alarming levels. Documented war crimes and abuses include deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including bombardment of residential areas and displacement camps, resulting in civilian casualties; summary executions in retaliation, particularly in areas where control shifts between factions; systematic targeting based on identity, accompanied by brutal torture and extrajudicial killings; sexual violence and mass rape used as tools of terror and intimidation; kidnappings and forced detentions, including the use of civilians as human

shields; child soldier recruitment, forcing minors into combat; looting and destruction of homes, public services, and infrastructure, including electricity, water, healthcare, and education facilities; occupation of civilian homes by armed forces; and mass displacement and forced migration affecting millions.

Despite numerous international and local efforts to address these issues, civilian protection remains weak and ineffective. The failure to mitigate the crisis stems from several factors, including the stubbornness and lack of political will among warring factions to allow humanitarian relief and protect civilians; the lack of agreement on safe corridors and areas for the delivery of aid, the weaponisation of humanitarian conditions by both sides; the international community's limited pressure on warring parties regarding civilian protection and humanitarian operations; insufficient funding from donors to meet humanitarian needs; unrealistic burdens placed on local service providers, including volunteers and grassroots organisations such as emergency response groups, Sufi Takkaya (Sufi Islam community kitchens), and communal kitchens; and the lack of serious engagement with influential civil and political forces in developing strategies for humanitarian operations.

Through analysis and review, the paper offers an overview of the humanitarian situation, the composition of civil society, military-security developments, current political shifts and the challenges and obstacles facing humanitarian work and civil society. Additionally, it presents broad recommendations and possible responses based on ongoing transformations, including the proposal of new initiatives and directions to safeguard and support civil society and humanitarian work.

Sudan before the 15 April war

In December 2018, a revolution toppled the Islamist regime of the National Congress Party (NCP), which had ruled for over three decades. It was celebrated globally as a demonstration of how a peaceful civilian movement, led by youth, women, civil society and political parties, could overthrow a deeply entrenched dictatorship.

The period leading up to Sudan's war in April 2023 was marked by a mix of hope, challenges, and uncertainty regarding the country's future following the revolution. Sudan stood at a crossroads, with real opportunities for comprehensive peace and democratic transition, but also threats from political divisions, on-going armed conflicts in peripheral regions and economic difficulties.

Despite the optimism surrounding the transitional government, complexities and challenges hindered its progress. The transition was marred by continuous power struggles between the civilian bloc (Forces of Freedom and Change - FFC) and the military component (SAF and RSF) over power, wealth and natural resources, and institutional reform. The deep state influence of the dissolved NCP remained entrenched in many government institutions, obstructing reform efforts, delaying justice, and resisting security sector reform. Additional challenges included ethnic conflicts, economic crises, foreign debt, inflation and structural corruption of the old regime.

In this context, the civilian transitional government managed to achieve partial successes, including reintegrating Sudan into the global community, removing it from the list of state sponsors of terrorism; making progress on debt relief and economic stabilisation; expanding freedoms and human rights protections; and initiating institutional reforms to dismantle the old regime. These limited successes prompted the military component led by SAF and RSF together to stage a coup on 25 October 2021, halting

the reform agenda initiated by the civilian government. Following the coup, both SAF and RSF struggled to govern due to widespread public protest. Tensions between the two military factions escalated, exacerbated by NCP loyalists, who played a key role in deepening divisions. Meanwhile, civilian forces attempted to mediate and prevent armed conflict, launching the Framework Agreement to reform the security sector and restore constitutional governance. However, these efforts failed, and tensions between the SAF and RSF escalated into full-scale war on 15 April 2023.

Evolving of the military and security landscape

The military-security landscape of Sudan's war has undergone dramatic transformations, both in its trajectory and in comparison, to previous conflicts. Past wars have been primarily confined to peripheral regions and rural areas – yet the 15 April war erupted in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, marking a significant shift. The RSF swiftly seized control of key political and financial centres of the capital, while the SAF's historical seat of power retreated to Port Sudan in the far east.

Following its rapid and unexpected takeover of Khartoum, the RSF leveraged its firepower and large troop numbers to expand its territorial control across central, western and southern Sudan. It captured most of Darfur, except for isolated pockets and the besieged city of El Fasher in North Darfur. The RSF also gained control over large areas in the Kordofan states, Gezira State and parts of Sinnar and White Nile States. Meanwhile, SAF maintained control over the three eastern states (Gadarif, Kassala and Red Sea), River Nile State, Northern State and some pockets within RSF-controlled areas.

The RSF's numerical advantage stemmed from successful recruitment campaigns among tribal and regional bases in western Sudan, particularly after targeting and co-opting traditional leadership structures. They mobilised fighters from cross-border ethnic groups spanning Sudan's western frontier and neighbouring countries.

By early 2025, the SAF regained its military footing, addressing previous weaknesses and launching counteroffensives. It first recaptured Sinnar State, followed by Gezira State, and then retook Khartoum State, including symbolic sites such as the presidential palace, SAF headquarters and federal ministry main offices.

These territorial gains by the SAF seemingly came with limited major military confrontations between the two factions. Some suggest that informal agreements facilitated withdrawals and repositioning by the RSF, particularly given their relatively safe exit from Khartoum state without intense SAF aerial bombardment as they crossed westward beyond the White Nile River. With the SAF's recapture of Khartoum, Sudan's military theatre reflects a near-even territorial split between the two factions and their allied militias.

Another notable development is the SAF's ability to replenish its troop numbers following initial setbacks. It achieved this through mass recruitment campaigns led by Islamist cadres and former NCP loyalists, including popular resistance forces and direct military participation by Islamist militias. Additionally, Juba Peace Agreement signatory movements, including the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), actively fought alongside SAF. The SAF's allied forces also include tribal militias from the Blue Nile and eastern Sudan, as well as Sudan Shield Forces, which initially fought alongside the RSF but later switched allegiance to the SAF.

Islamist factions have been accused of fuelling and prolonging the war, obstructing peace efforts, and sabotaging ceasefire negotiations. Reports also indicate that both the SAF and RSF receive significant foreign military aid, with competing regional powers jockeying for influence, given Sudan's natural resources and

strategic geopolitical location. Egypt allegedly provides strategic backing to the SAF (e.g., air force support), while the UAE supplies sustained military aid to the RSF. Additionally, large quantities of advanced military equipment from Iran and Türkiye have contributed to the SAF's recent battlefield advancements.

As Sudan's war enters its third year, the military-security landscape remains fluid and volatile, shaped by ethnic and regional mobilisation, heightened hate speech and deepening polarisation. The SAF frames its campaign as 'The War of Dignity', while the RSF brands it as 'The War to Dismantle the Old State (Sudan 1956)'. These competing narratives fuel military recruitment, ideological mobilisation and continued escalation. The prolongation of the war, along with the binary military and regional polarisation, has already led to the involvement and support of numerous civil society groups and organisations on both sides of the conflict, influenced by each party's narratives and methods of mobilisation.

This polarisation has also diminished prospects for a unified and professional security sector in post-war Sudan—particularly amid competing calls for establishing a new security architecture versus preserving the existing military apparatus. This dilemma has consistently plagued Sudan's previous conflicts.

Developments in the political landscape

The political landscape in Sudan, two years into the war, can be characterised by a direct correlation between rising military confrontations and the diminishing influence of civil and political groups. Before the outbreak of war on 15 April 2023, civilian political organisations were at the forefront of efforts to de-escalate tensions between SAF and RSF. The Framework Agreement was one of the key initiatives aimed at preventing war, addressing security sector reform, and restoring constitutional order and civilian rule.

At the onset of the war, civilian political forces – including the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), armed movements that signed the Juba Peace Agreement and various civil society organisations – condemned and rejected the conflict, adopting a neutral stance and advocating for a swift cessation of hostilities. Within the first few weeks, they established the Civil Front for Ending the War, followed by Taqaddum (Coordination of Democratic Civil Forces—a coalition primarily composed of FFC-affiliated groups seeking to build the largest civilian anti-war front).

Some political factions distanced themselves from Taqaddum, opting for independent opposition to the war. This included the Democratic Bloc (led by the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement), leftist factions (such as the Radical Alliance), and armed movements, including the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North and the Sudan Liberation Movement. Despite their shared strategic goal of opposing the war, these divisions reflect the fragmentation and polarisation that characterised Sudan's transitional period before the conflict.

As the war prolonged and intensified, Taqaddum faced increasing attacks and criticism from pro-SAF factions, particularly supporters of the 'War of Dignity' campaign. They accused Taqaddum of serving as the political wing of the RSF, an allegation the coalition repeatedly denied, emphasising its rejection of both parties to the conflict and their lack of legitimacy. Meanwhile, some political forces and armed movements— primarily within the Democratic Bloc—shifted from neutrality to openly supporting the SAF.,

The war's prolonged duration and escalating political polarisation have led to further fragmentation within civilian camps, even within individual political organisations. Many parties have split internally due to

pressure to align with either the SAF or RSF. Taqaddum itself has experienced internal divisions, particularly over the strategy for delegitimising both warring factions. Some members advocate for forming a parallel government to counter the SAF-controlled administration in Port Sudan. In contrast, others argue that such a move would implicitly align them with the RSF, exacerbating geopolitical fragmentation by creating two rival governments in eastern and western Sudan.

The Taqaddum alliance has already split into two camps: one led by the Prime Minister on the transitional period along with a group of political parties under the name the Civil Democratic Alliance for Revolutionary Forces (Somoud). Meanwhile, the other camp, led by several components of the Revolutionary Front, has worked to strengthen its alliance with RSF. The political landscape can now be broadly categorised into three main camps:

➔ Pro-SAF civilian forces, including the Democratic Bloc, National Movement Forces, National Consensus Forces, and various smaller parties, civil society groups and tribal leaders. These factions have developed foundational documents, such as the Amended Constitutional Document (previously governing the transitional period) and the Roadmap for Peace and Stability, which have received endorsement from SAF leadership.
➔ Pro-RSF civilian forces, including armed movements such as the Sudan Revolutionary Front, SPLM-North, and leaders from the National Umma Party, along with various political and tribal figures. These groups have drafted the political declaration for the Sudan Founding Charter and the 2025 Transitional Constitution for the Republic of Sudan.
➔ The civilian anti-war front (which is not unified under one structure) includes the Somoud Alliance, the Radical Alliance (led by the Sudanese Communist Party), the Sudan Liberation Movement, the Ba'ath original party and independent political and civil organisations.

This civilian anti-war front faces significant challenges, including managing internal ideological and political differences among its members, strengthening its legitimacy as a representative of Sudanese civilians and war victims, influencing humanitarian relief efforts, countering the intense media-driven defamation and disinformation campaigns targeting it, pressuring parties to the conflict to end hostilities, and advancing a comprehensive peace process that halts the war and re-establishes constitutional governance.

The state of civil society

Since Sudan's independence in 1956, civil society has played a pivotal role in driving social change, advocacy, service provision, political reform and economic development. These organisations include professional associations, cultural and artistic societies, sports clubs, regional and ethnic associations, labour and farmers' unions, youth and student groups, women's organisations, grassroots initiatives and political parties. Civil society has historically played a significant role in influencing democratic transformation, peacebuilding, humanitarian work and development. Their most significant contributions have been to Sudan's independence movement, the popular uprisings of October 1964 and April 1985, and the December 2018 revolution—all of which successfully overthrew three authoritarian regimes through mass strikes and peaceful civil disobedience.

The 15 April 2023 war fundamentally altered the nature, roles and future of civil society. As the war expanded geographically, spaces for peaceful civic engagement shrank, and civil society actors became increasingly fragmented.

The conflict has divided Sudan into four distinct zones, each with different operational environments for civil society: areas controlled by the SAF, areas controlled by the RSF, territories under the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) and areas controlled by the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM).

Despite these divisions, there are five main civil society categories in Sudan, each with overlapping roles, areas of work and operational challenges:

1. **The first group consists of modern non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**, which require formal registration and government-issued permits to operate, typically under the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC). Their work spans development, culture, civil and political rights, environmental protection and service provision. Many NGOs experienced severe disruptions after the war, with mass displacement forcing them to relocate or shut down, while others shifted their focus to emergency humanitarian support.

2. **The second group comprises civil society organisations that have historically operated in conflict zones**, such as Darfur, Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains. These organisations focus on humanitarian aid, peacebuilding, and community activities. Their longstanding experience in conflict zones has enabled them to adapt and survive despite the war's devastating impact.

3. **The third group comprises grassroots and ethnic-based organisations,** including faith-based groups, tribal associations and regional networks, which provide basic services and community support. Their operations remain localised, with limited external engagement beyond their immediate communities.

4. **The fourth group includes post-war emergency response organisations** that emerged after 15 April 2023, primarily to facilitate humanitarian aid and provide some measures to protect civilians. Examples include Emergency Response Rooms, Community Kitchens, Sufi *Takkaya*, Neighbourhood Committees and other grassroots initiatives that either expanded their pre-war activities or formed to address the crisis. This category also includes a group of organisations established after the war in areas that had not seen a significant presence of modern civil society, such as the Nile River and Northern States. Their formation followed waves of displacement from central Sudan to these areas.

5. **The fifth category of civil society formations includes organisations in the diaspora,** which are longstanding groups that existed before the war. Their focus areas vary according to the evolving needs in Sudan—from advocacy on human rights violations to development issues and cultural promotion and outreach within migrant communities. After the 15 April war, diaspora groups significantly expanded their roles in contributing to and supporting humanitarian work, particularly through fundraising and advocacy with international organisations. However, some face criticism for attempting to play leadership or representative roles on behalf of local organisations or in carrying out field-level executive tasks.

These five categories of civil society organisations operate across Sudan's divided territories, upholding core civic values such as solidarity, participation, transparency, representation, independence and voluntarism, in addition to the four humanitarian principles—humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. However, the war has severely challenged their ability to uphold these principles. For instance, NGOs and conflict-zone civil society organisations have suffered significant setbacks, losing field presence and community engagement. At the same time, grassroots and emergency response groups have demonstrated greater resilience, adapting to wartime conditions despite severe humanitarian constraints.

Moreover, issues such as adherence to humanitarian principles—such as accountability, neutrality and independence—pose complex challenges for many local organisations, both in their relations with the parties to the conflict and in their interactions with international bodies operating in Sudan. Issues include

the multiplicity (and, in some cases, contradiction) of accountability levels for local groups (towards donors, de facto authorities/governments and beneficiary communities). Another issue is the constraints that limit the capacity of local organisations in terms of flexibility, adaptation and the various resilience strategies they adopt in their work across frontlines and conflict geographies – in particular, regarding their roles in negotiations and building relationships and trust with the parties to the conflict to facilitate their work on the ground and mitigate the security risks they face daily.

With state institutions weakened and militarisation encroaching on civic spaces, ongoing discussions within civil society focus on how to navigate Sudan's deepening divisions and redefine priorities—particularly in humanitarian aid, advocacy and community resilience efforts.

Sudan's civil society, in the shadow of the 15 April war, faces a wide range of challenges and risks, including—but not limited to—persistent insecurity and ongoing violence, systematic targeting of activists, concerns over representation and inclusivity, issues of independence and neutrality, disturbing of internal organisational structures, communication complexities and information flow, coherent principles and values, and relationships with international partners. Additionally, the war's expansion and increasing complexity have led to fragmentation, polarisation and geographic, regional and ethnic divisions within civil society, resulting in alignment, politicisation and militarisation based on the geographic and operational environment of these organisations.

Despite the significant risks and challenges facing civil society after the war, many organisations have managed to develop new roles and tools, drawing from their local knowledge and historical experience. These adaptations have provided them with a relative ability to endure and continue their work, including efforts to navigate and address the systematic obstacles imposed by the parties to the conflict on humanitarian and civil society organisations.

Challenges and obstacles facing humanitarian work and civil society

Independent Sudanese civil society organisations have operated for decades under persistent challenges, restrictions and obstacles imposed by state institutions, particularly during the NCP's rule since 1989. The right to peaceful assembly and the formation of associations and unions faced systematic violations, similar to broader infringements on freedoms and human rights.

The outbreak of war on 15 April 2023 ushered in a new era of restrictions and obstacles for civil society organisations, including grassroots and local entities, that either emerged or took on new roles in providing humanitarian aid and services after the war. The politicisation and militarisation of humanitarian work and civil society activities have become defining features of this period, with various mechanisms and strategies employed to limit the independence and effectiveness of these organisations.

The scope of humanitarian and civil society work, as well as the restrictions imposed on them, varies depending on the geographic and military-security context controlled by the parties to the conflict. Civilian administrative bodies regulate and coordinate civil society activities based on territorial control by the parties to the conflict. The Humanitarian Aid Commission oversees organisations in areas controlled by SAF, while the Sudan Agency for Relief and Humanitarian Operation (SARHO) manages activities in

RSF-controlled regions. The Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (SRRA) operates in areas under the control of the SPLM-North. The General Commission for the Humanitarian Work and Organisations oversees civil society and humanitarian activities in territories controlled by the Sudan Liberation Movement (al-Nur).

Despite the presence of these civilian-governmental and semi-governmental institutions to regulate and coordinate civil society activities, politicisation and militarisation continue to shape their operations, particularly in areas controlled by the SAF and RSF.

Based on this background, there are several challenges, obstacles and restrictions facing humanitarian work and civil society:

1. The expansion of the war and its impact across most regions of Sudan, which has led to insecurity, widespread violence and the collapse of infrastructure and essential services. This has resulted in **daily security risks for civil society and local humanitarian workers**, including threats to life, injuries, arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances and movement restrictions.

2. The **fragmentation of military-security control, the disintegration of central authority, and the absence of a unified government** capable of organising and coordinating humanitarian efforts and civil society activities, including the proliferation of parallel governing entities.

3. **The shrinking civic space**, forcing many national civil society organisations with extensive experience to flee internally or externally due to the war and its consequences.

4. Despite the critical role of local grassroots entities in facilitating humanitarian services—such as emergency response rooms, communal kitchens, Sufi *Takaya*, and regional and ethnic associations—the scale of the war, societal and geographic divisions, and **the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis present challenges that exceed their capacities and expertise**.

5. **Difficulties in coordination and joint efforts among grassroots and local organisations** at national and regional levels due to differences in their structures, backgrounds, and experiences, as well as the geographic and regional divisions caused by the war.

6. **Weak administrative and organisational capacities within many civil society organisations**, particularly in technical areas such as conducting assessments, drafting project proposals and reports, accountability, and engaging with international agencies and donors.

7. **Security-related complexities in communication, information exchange and flow,** as well as the spread of hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, including challenges posed by power outages, disruptions in telecommunications and internet blackouts.

8. **Bureaucratic obstacles**, predominantly imposed by the Humanitarian Aid Commission's regulation of local and international organisations and characterised by excessive administrative procedures and the imposition of high fees on organisations. Registration, license renewals, staff movement and prior approvals are highly complex and restrictive, including attempts to control hiring processes, define operational areas and limit mobility. There are reports of other coordinating entities also imposing bureaucratic hurdles, although interviewees concluded that these obstacles are not applied to the same extent.

9. **The military-security control exercised over humanitarian work** through the establishment of the Joint Supreme Emergency Humanitarian Committee, chaired by a senior SAF commander and a member of the Sovereign Council, with a dominant presence of security agency representatives. This committee has effectively taken over the roles of the federal and state Humanitarian Aid Commission, embedding security personnel in all its activities.

10. **Competition among warring factions for legitimacy and sovereignty in securing and distributing humanitarian aid.** This includes control over entry points, such as SAF's dominance over relief supplies arriving via Port Sudan and the border crossing with Egypt, and RSF's control over several airports and border crossings with four neighbouring countries—additionally, joint forces allied with SAF control many frontline areas.

11. **The politicisation of humanitarian work,** due to the establishment of civilian fronts affiliated with military factions, which are granted operational licenses based on political, ethnic or factional loyalties, and facilitating their engagement with international aid agencies.

12. **Due to the prolonged duration of the war and the dominance of its narratives**— the 'The War of Dignity' versus the 'The War to Dismantle the Old State (Sudan 1956)'— several civil society groups have aligned with the warring parties, indirectly mirroring their narratives and leveraging their professional capabilities and resources to support one side or the other.

13. **The manipulation of humanitarian aid** particularly supplies from Arab countries, which are handed over to government authorities and redirected to support military efforts based on territorial control. Numerous documented cases and published images show aid materials appearing in military zones and among soldiers, bearing the logos of donor agencies and countries.

14. **The looting and resale of humanitarian aid** in commercial markets, particularly in relatively stable cities in eastern and northern Sudan. Large quantities of relief supplies bearing donor markings have been found in markets in Port Sudan, Kassala, El Duweim, Sabrin Market in Omdurman and Gedaref, as well as reports of looted aid convoys along highway road between Kosti in White Nile State and El-Obeid in North Kordofan.

15. **The use of humanitarian aid for political propaganda**, with warring factions attempting to portray themselves as saviours of displaced populations and seeking public support through the distribution of relief supplies. This has been particularly evident in RSF-controlled areas in the Gezira and Khartoum regions.

16. Despite the organisation of several international conferences to mobilise humanitarian support for communities affected by the 15 April war, the **actual response and fulfilment of pledges remain far below the required levels,** with Sudan's humanitarian crisis classified as the worst in the contemporary world.

17. **The international community's lack of unconventional and pragmatic solutions to addressing the humanitarian crisis**, with a primary focus on supporting initiatives that place excessive burdens on grassroots organisations, exposing them to significant risks of violence.

Recommendations

The recommendations below aim to respond to the key transformations that have emerged as Sudan's war enters its third year. They are grouped into target categories, cover policy and operational level, and should be considered as an integrated package.

Recommendations to strengthen civil society and grassroots humanitarian entities

➔ **Adopt a horizontal area-based approach** that recognises geographic and ethnic divisions, as well as military developments, and builds on the capacities of local aid actors.

➔ **Develop specific security approaches designed for Sudanese volunteers and staff of local organisations**, including advocacy to pressure warring factions to safeguard humanitarian and civil society personnel, training on security and risk mitigation, as well as financial and psychological support initiatives. Strengthen secure comms channels between groups and enhance negotiation, trust-building and relationship management skills with warring parties, particularly through the development of adaptive communication strategies in line with evolving military-security conditions.

➔ **Ensure all have access to technical tools to address harmful information, information disorder and connectivity challenges,** including tackling issues arising from power outages and disruptions to telecommunications and internet networks.

➔ **Provide demand-driven support to enhance the resilience of experienced national organisations and grassroots local groups**. Offer knowledge and skills exchange (as needed, e.g., financial management, project development, reporting and accountability to affected communities). Support experienced independent local civil society organisations to reposition inside Sudan by providing emergency grants to return and resume operations.

➔ **Better link up with alternative financial resource sources such as diaspora**. This may include more clearly highlighting existing contributions of diaspora organisations to local civil society and aid groups in resource mobilisation, advocacy, media, and raising external awareness.

Recommendations for parties to the conflict

➔ **Agree on a cessation of hostilities for humanitarian purposes**, to ensure unimpeded access to humanitarian aid for all areas and populations affected by the war, and to adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law.

➔ **Consider establishing a council of coordinating entities** in areas controlled by the different parties to the conflict for coordination, information sharing and joint humanitarian advocacy. This council should include grassroots organisations and independent civil society.

➔ **Respect and protect the independence of humanitarian and civil society actors**, ensuring they are not targeted, intimidated, or harmed and safeguarding their rights.

➔ **Establish civilian—not military or security—communication channels with humanitarian** and civil society organisations to build trust and understanding, ease daily coordination and support aid operations.

➔ **Guarantee the neutrality and independence of humanitarian action and humanitarian/civil society actors** by all parties to the conflict. This includes refraining from politicising or militarising civil work and humanitarian assistance, lifting security surveillance and persecution of organisations and their staff, and eliminating bureaucratic constraints and obstructive military or administrative orders.

Recommendations for the international community

➔ **Humanitarian response strategies must reflect the current reality of geographic and political fragmentation,** with four areas under the control of different warring parties, as this necessitates the provision of humanitarian assistance to millions of people in disconnected regions. This includes working and supporting local and international humanitarian actors to advance and adopt a decentralised horizontal approach that recognises the existing divisions.

➔ **Diplomatic efforts must pragmatically engage with recent political and military developments, including addressing the challenges of sovereignty and legitimacy to allow and facilitate access of humanitarian action and actors outside SAF control.** A way forward may be to draw lessons from previous humanitarian approaches to crossline and cross-border operations (e.g., Yemen, Syria and the 'Sudan Lifeline Operation' during the war between North and South Sudan).

➔ **Recognise and leverage diverse local expertise.** Sudan has developed a rich and diverse civil society landscape, yet representation and legitimacy are contentious as polarisation increases. International actors can take further steps to recognise and listen to diverse voices within civil society and ensure an inclusive approach. A practical way forward would be to consult more broadly with local actors under the access working group.

➔ **Increase *collective* efforts to improve accountability to communities**. The common interagency feedback mechanism developed by the Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) working group is a good step to build upon. This is particularly crucial to ensure value for money from aid investments as overall resources contract.

➔ **Require new working approaches between international agencies and Sudanese organisations by integrating civil society capacities for flexibility, adaptability and resilience into the design of humanitarian strategies and action plans**. This includes elevating their relationship from that of implementing partners to that of equitable partners.

➔ **Establish continuous channels of communication and information exchange between international humanitarian agencies and key civilian political players or alliances**, as referred to above. Make an effort to utilise their insights, roles and influence to support the humanitarian response.

➔ **Together with local civil society, organise an international conference on the humanitarian crisis in Sudan**—not limited to technical/ financial aspects— brings leaders from local grassroots groups, independent civil society and political blocs, and international humanitarian agencies in an inclusive manner to assess the humanitarian response, and develop a collective actionable agenda to address the crisis.

➔ **Prioritise the set-up of a UN civil-military coordination structure.** This coordination ensures that humanitarian principles are upheld, resources are used efficiently, and cooperation between civilian and military actors is maximised.

➔ **Leverage the Humanitarian Country Team-endorsed 'Joint Operating Principles' and establish innovative monitoring systems for humanitarian aid to track** and follow its distribution, prevent its diversion for military purposes, and avoid its smuggling, leakage or sale in markets.

➔ **Consider smart sanctions** to respond to allegations of the politicisation and militarisation of humanitarian and civil society work, including claims of the use of humanitarian aid as a weapon of war.

➔ **Urge the international community to fulfil financial commitments,** ensuring adequate funding for Sudan's humanitarian response.

➔ **Advocate for a United Nations Security Council resolution** to address the humanitarian impact of the military-security and political developments. This should include provisions related to access to aid, its security, monitoring of its distribution, and the protection of local and international humanitarian workers.

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➔ Dr. Salah Elamin, humanitarian expert and former international staff member of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

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