

# Sudan: International community should prioritise the will of Sudanese civilians as Hemeti and Burhan tour Africa

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**As the world watches Hemeti and Burhan -the leaders of the two forces at war in Sudan- undertake diplomatic engagements across the African continent, it is paramount that countries receiving them steadfastly prioritise the fundamental demands of the Sudanese people, including the earnest call for a cessation of hostilities, unhindered humanitarian aid access to the country, and the restoration of democracy and civilian rule.**

Paris-Nairobi, 29 January 2024. Over the last few months, the world has witnessed the increased activity of both Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (Hemeti). Between September 2023 and January 2024, Burhan has visited the United States of America (USA) for the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, countries in East Africa, and in the Middle-East, in an effort to reinforce himself as the de facto leader of the country. Similarly, in the last weeks, Hemeti has toured a number of African capitals, including Uganda, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda, where he was received by civilian politicians and heads of state. On 2 January 2024, Hemeti and Abdalla Hamdok (the former Sudan Prime Minister, deposed during the military coup on 25 October, and current representative for the Coordination of Civilian Democratic Forces, known as Taqaddum), signed the Addis Ababa Declaration, intended to serve as the basis for further negotiations and a political settlement.

At the same time, both SAF and RSF continue to demonstrate a blatant disregard for civilian life as they continue fuelling the armed war in Sudan. The RSF now controls significant areas of Sudan, including the streets of Khartoum, nearly all of the western Darfur region, and increasing territory in Gezira state. [It has been accused](#) of committing war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, including murder, massive looting of civilian properties, deportation, persecution, rape and other forms of sexual violence. These actions raise serious concerns about Hemeti's shuttle diplomacy to gain more international legitimacy, positioning himself as a political leader, and re-defining the RSF as a legitimate security force.

Similarly, Burhan and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), who still hold sway in much of the east, continue to bomb civilians indiscriminately. Their recent, [brutal air raids](#) in a densely populated area of Nyala, South Darfur left numerous people dead, including women and children, as reported by the Sudanese Human Rights Monitor (SHRM).

The brunt of the on-going conflict has and continues to be borne by Sudanese civilians. Urgent action is needed to put an end to this crisis. [The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) estimates that since April 2023, up to 12,000 Sudanese have been

killed in the fighting and eight million people are displaced. Continued attacks on civilian infrastructure and medical facilities make delivery of critical aid and medical assistance to affected populations nearly impossible. As Mossaad Mohamed Ali, Executive Director of the African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) argues, however, **"the true extent of the tragedy is likely much higher due to the intensity of the fighting and the challenges in documenting and confirming casualties"**.

These harrowing realities lived by Sudanese civilians create an imperative for leaders engaging in conversations with Hemeti and Burhan, to respect the suffering and victimhood of Sudanese citizens, and to prioritise, above all, interests and calls of the Sudanese people. These particularly include **the earnest call for a cessation of hostilities, the unhindered humanitarian aid access to the country, and restoration of democracy and civilian rule**. As Ahmed Elzobier, Executive Director of SHRM describes, "far too often, diplomatic negotiations unfold as distant spectacles, detached from the genuine concerns and aspirations of the affected communities. Lasting peace in Sudan requires a deliberate effort to incorporate the voices of those directly impacted, ensuring that the negotiated terms align with the genuine desires of its people, and not with the strategic interests of the few, be it Hemeti, Burhan, or anyone else".

FIDH and its Sudanese member organisations SHRM and ACJPS urge regional powers to come together in a major, coordinated, high-level diplomatic effort to:

- ensure they are firm with both Hemeti and Burhan on the priority of resolving the conflict and eventual power being handed back to the people of Sudan, as committed to during [the 42nd Extraordinary Assembly of IGAD Heads of State and Government](#);
- persuade Burhan and Hemeti to fulfill their commitments of the 9 December 2023 IGAD Summit to engage in direct talks without preconditions;
- continue to call for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire among both parties;
- advocate for the delivery of humanitarian aid to address the immediate needs of the affected population, including food, medical assistance, and shelter;
- promote inclusive and transparent political processes that involve all relevant parties, including resistance committees, opposition groups, women and youth groups, acknowledging that peace, at its core, must be a bottom-up endeavor that resonates with those most affected by conflict; and
- encourage Burhan and Hemeti to cooperate fully with international justice mechanisms, namely: (1) the International Criminal Court pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1593 (2005) including the arrest and surrender of the four at large suspects who are still at large; (2) the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan and ensure it has access to the country and all resources necessary to fulfill its mandate.