

West Darfur: Rapid Support Forces accused of killing civilians in Ardamata town

The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) condemns the unlawful killing of civilians by the warring parties particularly Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and its allied militia. We call upon the Sudanese authorities to publicly condemn the incidents and launch an independent and impartial investigation into the incidents. We further call upon the warring parties to respect the citizens' rights to life as guaranteed by the Sudanese constitution and international treaties to which Sudan is a party. In this release, ACJPS documents incidents where several civilians were gruesomely killed by RSF and allied militia in Ardamata, West Darfur.

In November 2023, ACJPS obtained a 45-second video linked to a blogger called Ali (not real name). The video was published in a WhatsApp group called “Fasal Alkhetab”, an Arabic term loosely translated as “Discourse Chapter” and in a Facebook group called Elgenina. The video shows five young male civilians standing in a line approximately four meters from three armed men dressed in a Rapid Support Force (RSF) uniform. The armed men then opened fire at the civilians instantly killing two, injuring two others and the other survived unharmed. Despite several challenges such as network shutdown in Darfur, ACJPS went ahead and launched an investigation the facts surrounding the incident.

The investigation was done with the help of researchers and monitors in three areas in West Darfur, South Darfur States, and Adrie town in Chad. One eyewitness who was hiding in Ansar Alsuna Mosque confirmed to ACJPS that the incident happened in the Alrasafa neighborhood in Ardamata.

The incident happened on 5 November 2023, at around 08:00am in Ardamata town located a few kilometers from Elgenina, the Central Darfur capital following the seizure and control of the SAF headquarters (Division 15) by RSF on 4 November 2023 as announced by Major Gen. Abdul Rahim Dagalo, the RSF second in command. The group was accused of being members of SPLM/SA formerly led by the late Gen. Khamis Abkar who also doubled as the West Darfur governor who was killed on 14 June 2023, in Elgenina. RSF however denies participating in the gruesome incident.

Ms. Fatimah Yahya Azraq the mother to Mr. Amir Yagoup Burah (one of the victims who died on the spot) testified that *“my son was brickmaker who wasn't involved in politics. We moved here two years after being displaced from Monrney. Those responsible for displacing us have now killed my son. Our tribe has constantly been targeted but revenge is for Allah”* she lamented.

Mr. Ahmed (not real name) aged 30, one of the survivors testified that *“... We were stopped by a group of RSF men in Almatar aka airport street in Ardmata in front of Mr. Alsadiq Mohamed residence located next to Algamar aka Moon Pharmacy west of Ansar Alsuna Mosque while we were fleeing from Ardamata IDP camp because the camp was constantly targeted and raided by RSF and allied Arab militias following to capture of the SAF garrison in Armata by RSF. When we arrested, we were ordered to line up and questioned about our involvement with SPLM/SA. After*

a brief interrogation, one of the men said “**THIS IS YOUR DESTINY**” before firing bullets at us”. The other victims are;

1. Amir Yogup Burah (m) aged 27, died on spot
2. Mohamed Haroun Suleiman (m) aged 30, died on the spot
3. Adam (m) aged 26 survived with injuries
4. Ali (m) aged 24 survived with injuries

“After about one hour after the shooting, I was taken to Ibn Sina school where several “war prisoners” were being held. Many of whom were nursing injuries. Several days later, an officer of a lieutenant rank visited the premises and asked those who wished to go to the hospital for medical attention to step forward. I together with 20 others was taken to the Emergency Section/ward in Elgenina Hospital. While at the hospital, the officers kept hurling insults at the patients calling them Nwab and Nuna meaning slaves. At around 07:00 Pm when the officer had moved out of the hospital, I managed to escape to the Althura neighborhood next to the hospital. I was unable to go far because RSF was patrolling the area. After seven days in the Althura neighborhood, I moved to Ardamata where I spent three nights in hiding because youth were being targeted by RSF and the allied Arab militia. As soon as I was able to relocate, I fled to Chad. However, during the travel, I was constantly stopped at checkpoints and interrogated about my tribe, political affiliation, and where I was headed. When I reached Ardarai refugee camp, I sought medical assistance and was consequently admitted for six days...,” Mr. Ahmed narrated

Mr. Adam (not real name) aged 26 said “.... Knowing they were targeting the Masalite, I tried to explain to one of the RSF officers that I am a Tarjmawi from Bulbl Abu Jazo in South Darfur. At this point, one of the three armed men cocked his gun, shouted “**This is your destiny**” and started firing at us. Two of the men fell and died on the spot. The RSF officer then checked to see if any of us were still alive. When he touched me and I realized I was alive, he told me to stand up. He then asked me about my tribe and when I told him I am from Tarjmawi, he asked me to stand up and return home. I told him that one of the men lying down was my brother and he permitted me to pick him up and leave. I grabbed my brother (Ali) who had been shot in the head and moved to Azrni located North East of Elgenina where my brother got medical assistance. We were too afraid to leave and resultantly spent weeks in Azrni before fleeing to Chad...,”

On 16 March 2024, ACJPS attempted to access the scene of the crime in vain as the RSF had established a checkpoint at the location. A reliable source informed ACJPS that one of the RSF officers who appears in the video wearing a black face mask was a prisoner serving in Ardamata prison and escaped following the outbreak of the armed conflict in April 2023, and immediately joined RSF.

ACJPS was reliably informed that the victims’ families reached the scene hours later but did not find the bodies of the deceased. They were however informed that they had been buried at the cemetery located near Almtar Street in Sebera Airport. Another reliable source confirmed that indeed many corpses were buried at the cemetery the following day.

Other developments

The incident is not an isolated case and there are many others of the same kind that have been undocumented in Ardamata since RSF captured the area. The civilians most targeted are the Masalite living in the neighborhoods of Alkubri and Alrasfa and the IDP camp.

On 5 November 2023, at about 09:00 am, at least 40 Masalite men were arrested by RSF and allied militia and taken to an abandoned residence in the Alrasfa neighborhood where they were shot dead. At around 09:30 am that day, Major Gen. Abdul Rahim Dagalo, the RSF second command who supervised the attack on the SAF base in Ardamata arrived at Alrasfa neighborhood escorted by ten land cruiser vehicles. A reliable source who preferred anonymity informed ACJPS that they went to the house where the 40 men were detained and when the general arrived at the house, he found some of the victims alive and that he ordered Colonel Alibi, his assistant to take them to the hospital.

Major General Abdul Rahim also visited another RSF detention center. At the center, he asked if there was anyone from the Masalite tribe, but out of fear only two raised their hands and he ordered for their immediate release. The Major General then moved to Ardamata School located near Almuradah Square in the Aleza Radio Station neighborhood. The school hosts several women and children who have fled from different states across Sudan. The Major General asked Doctor Alsharif, the facility supervisor to supply the IDPs with food and ordered them not to relocate to the joint Sudanese-Chadian military base that was seized by RSF.

On 6 November 2023, RSF and its allied militia including the forces from the Falata tribe attacked a group of civilians while under the bridge in Ardamata and killed them. An eyewitness informed ACJPS that the corpses were left at the bridge for several days before they were collected and burned by civilians.

Background

In November 2023, RSF arrived in Ardamata in at least 400 military land Cruiser vehicles equipped with heavy weapons, unit crafts, and military drones. During the gunfight between SAF and RSF, RSF was supported by at least 5,000 men from the allied militias riding on motorcycles from West, Central, and North Darfur States. For example, they were supported by the Kanjaka militia. Thousands of civilians lost their lives during the incident and approximately 5,000 people fled their homes and are currently being hosted at Sebira International Airport, Kaja School, Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries.