

The Plight of War Prisoners in Sudan's Conflict

Sudan, a nation once grappling with the aftermath of a long civil war, has found itself embroiled in a fresh conflict. This time, the fight is not for independence, but for control within the very institutions tasked with protecting the country. The 2023 power struggle that began on 15th April between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has unleashed a wave of violence that has left thousands dead and millions displaced. The conflict has exposed a dark cloud, tending mostly to the systematic violation of the rights of war prisoners, the harsh realities faced by these individuals cannot be fathomed.

Reports from the ground paint a disturbing picture. Both the SAF and RSF are accused of detaining individuals affiliated with the opposing side without due process, a blatant disregard for Article 5 of the Third Geneva Convention. These detainees are then subjected to harrowing [experiences](#), including beatings, denial of basics like food, water, shelter, and medical care causing unreported loss of lives, electric shocks, and forced confessions, in clear violation of Article 3 of the third Geneva Convention which prohibits violence and humiliation against prisoners of war. An example is Members of the Rapid Support Forces [killed](#) 14 prisoners of war (POWs) in Baleela in West Kordofan, according to video evidence reviewed by Sudan War Monitor. Most alarming of all are the images of desecrated bodies of fallen combatants, a direct affront to Article 130 of the Geneva Conventions which mandates respect for the deceased.

The Geneva Conventions, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law ratified by Sudan in 1958, lays out a clear framework for the treatment of war prisoners. These principles are not mere suggestions; they are binding obligations. Their main mandate lies mostly in the principle of humane treatment, demanding that prisoners be shielded from violence, intimidation, and humiliation as showed in Article 3. Prisoners also have the fundamental right to a fair and impartial trial per Article 9, ensuring justice is served without resorting to barbaric practices. Additionally, detention facilities must provide basic necessities of food, water, shelter, and medical care, to ensure their well-being as per Articles 11-21, which clearly are most ignored.

Beyond the codified laws, customary international humanitarian law, built on established practices, offers further protections. This includes the fundamental right of civilians not taking part in hostilities to be shielded from violence and arbitrary detention.

In the face of such blatant disregard for human dignity, the following recommendations should be considered:

- √ Grant independent observers unfettered access to detention facilities to expose human rights abuses and holding perpetrators accountable.
- √ Both warring parties should issue specific instructions to their troops to strictly adhere to the Geneva Conventions when dealing with prisoners.
- √ Parties to the conflict should allow access to the Red Cross and other national and international NGOs to provide humanitarian aid to war prisoners, including food, medical care, and sanitation.
- √ Sharing information with families of war prisoners about their well-being and whereabouts is a crucial step in upholding their rights.
- √ A comprehensive investigation into alleged violations is essential to achieve justice and prevent future atrocities.

- √ Training for Armed Forces: Both the SAF and RSF require intensive training on international humanitarian law and the proper treatment of prisoners. Integrating such training into their military doctrine is crucial to ensure respect for human rights during conflict.

The suffering of war prisoners is a reminder of the importance of upholding international law. It's a call to action for the international community to demand accountability from all parties involved. By enforcing the Geneva Conventions and promoting a culture of respect for human dignity, we can work towards a future where even in the midst of conflict, the basic rights of all individuals are protected.

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