

AFRICAN CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE STUDIES



ETHNIC CLEANSING IN THE VOLATILE DARFUR

Two decades ago, Darfur became synonymous with war crimes and genocide, particularly by Arab Janjawid militias against populations of African ethnicity, i.e., the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa ethnic groups. An estimated 200,000 people were killed between 2003 and 2005. This appears to be the case again, as there are reasons to believe that both sides are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in the context of ethnic cleansing in Darfur region. The conflict between the Sudanese Army (SAF) and the rival Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that broke out in April 2023, has since turned ethnic, raising fears of a possible ethnic cleansing and Genocide.

The RSF and their allied Arab militias, including the Third-Front Tamazuj, an armed group that currently controls part of the Darfur Region, have been involved in committing despicable violations against the non-Arab population with the apparent objective of at least having them permanently leave the region, thus constituting ethnic cleansing. Some of the violations committed include; mass killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture, enforced disappearances and rape.

El-Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, where the Masalits make up more than half of the population, has seen some of the fiercest fighting. Violence in Elgenina started a few days after the armed conflict broke out in Khartoum, the RSF and its allied groups attacked majority Massalit neighborhoods, clashing with predominantly Massalit armed groups defending their communities. These attacks saw the entire neighborhoods majorly occupied by displaced Masalit communities looted, burned, shelled, and razed to the ground. Even after the Massalit armed groups were defeated and lost control of their neighborhoods, the RSF and allied militias continued systematically targeting unarmed civilians. One of the worst episodes of Sudan's ongoing war was in June 2024 when the RSF and its allies attacked a kilometres-long convoy of civilians as people attempted to [leave](#) El Geneina, escorted by Masalit fighters. The UN reported that about **15,000** people are feared to have been killed in the West Darfur city of El Geneina last year alone. The particular context in which the widespread killings took place raises the possibility that the RSF and their allies have the intent to destroy in whole or in part the Massalit community in at least West Darfur, which would indicate that genocide has been and is being committed there.

On 01 November 2023, the RSF started attacking the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) military base in Ardamata town, West Darfur. After that, they (RSF) attacked and took over an IDP camp in the same town on 4 November. During the attack on the camp, men, women, and children belonging to the Masalit community were targeted, along with some members of other non-Arab tribes. Civilians were executed in their homes, on the streets, and while attempting to flee the camp. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), [an estimated 800 people](#)

[were killed](#) during the early November attacks in Ardamata. Other reports estimate the death toll (mainly civilians) at [between 1,300 and 2,000](#), including dozens killed on the road to Chad. At least 8,000 people have fled into Chad, joining around [450,000](#), mostly women and children, displaced by attacks in West Darfur, notably between April and June 2023.

In April, the RSF and allied Arab militias carried out attacks on approximately 15 villages west of Elfashir, predominantly occupied by the Zaghawa ethnic group. These attacks resulted in widespread human rights abuses, including mass ethnic killings and enforced disappearances, forcing many residents to flee their homes.

Civilians from areas East and West of Elfashir, the capital of North Darfur, were abducted based on their ethnicity. The abductions, targeting individuals from the Moro villages, Abu Zureiga, and the Zamzam camp for displaced people, were based on tribal and regional affiliations. The RSF demands ransom from the families of victims and threatens death or forced recruitment if the payments are not met.

There have also been incidents where the national army has been accused of systematically targeting Arab communities. The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies [reported](#) an incident where the SAF airforce unit aerial bombed Alkuma, a locality predominantly occupied by the Alzayida Arab group, resulting in the death of 63 civilians and injuring approximately 250 others.

Conclusion

Although the Sudanese army has also been accused of targetting Arab communities, these events are rather isolated compared to the systematic that constitute genocide and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Paramilitary RSF and allied groups. Additionally, the attacks by the RSF and its allied militia, particularly in North Darfur, have impacts beyond Sudan's borders. This is because the Zaghawa tribe in North Darfur extends beyond the borders of Sudan into Chad, and therefore, a tribal conflict in North Darfur could very well trigger and draw in Chadian fighters. Zaghawa people from the Chadian villages bordering Sudan are very armed and could be implicated in the conflict in North Darfur. Therefore, the situation in Darfur requires urgent action from all governments and international institutions to protect civilians.

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