

## AFRICAN CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE STUDIES



### **Darfur: A Region Ravaged by Enforced Disappearances**

Since April 2023, Darfur has been at the epicenter of Sudan's escalating conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Entire towns, such as El Geneina, Nyala, and Zalingei, have been reduced to ruins due to targeted attacks. Ethnic-based violence, particularly against Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa communities of the African ethnicity, has intensified, with enforced disappearances used as a deliberate tool to silence dissent and terrorize civilians. This practice, involving the abduction and concealment of individuals by armed groups, has escalated significantly amidst ongoing violence, further destabilizing the region and compounding the suffering of its people.

The RSF's role in abductions, forced conscriptions, and ransom-related detentions in Darfur further complicates the situation. In some cases, victims remain missing even after families have paid ransoms. Credible reports also reveal that detainees, including media personnel, have been subjected to torture and hunger, with some used as human shields. While the Sudanese Armed Forces reclaimed key areas, such as the National Radio and Television Corporation building in March 2024, the fate of those previously held captive in those buildings remains unknown, leaving families in anguish.

A December 2024 research report by the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) on the Enforced Disappearance of Women and Children in Sudan indicates that women and girls, in particular, are subjected to enforced disappearance for sexual exploitation, including forced prostitution and marriages and forced to perform domestic work. According to the research outcome, children are a particularly targeted group as well, especially in times of conflict, where children are abducted and disappeared for forced recruitment into armed groups or exploited for forced labor. During the research by ACJPS, testimonies from survivors and reports from human rights organizations revealed chilling accounts of RSF-aligned militias forcibly removing individuals from their homes, workplaces, and even displacement camps. These individuals are reportedly often taken to undisclosed locations, with no information provided to their families about their whereabouts or fate.

On 21 January 2025, ACJPS [reported](#) the increase in missing persons in the Darfur region, specifically in Nyala the capital of South Darfur attributed to arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances. ACJPS documented the mysterious disappearance of nine Sudanese citizens, including three displaced persons (IDPs) and two children who went missing during the period between the third week of September 2023 and the second week of January 2025. The whereabouts of all the victims have remained unknown.

Human Rights Watch's comprehensive [report](#), *"The Massalit Will Not Come Home: Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan"*, highlights the devastating scale of violence, including patterns consistent with enforced disappearance. In

these attacks, RSF forces and their Arab militia allies systematically abducted civilians, separated them from their families, and subjected them to extrajudicial killings, rape, and torture. Entire neighborhoods were razed, leaving no trace of those taken. The June 15 massacre exemplifies this pattern, RSF forces targeted a convoy of Massalit civilians fleeing El Geneina, where survivors described the children being forcibly removed from their families and later killed, their bodies have been unaccounted for to date. Such actions reflect deliberate efforts to eliminate individuals and conceal their fate, hallmarks of enforced disappearance. The targeting of Massalit populations in El Geneina and surrounding areas constitutes ethnic cleansing and may rise to the level of [genocide](#).

The violence in El Geneina, ignited by clashes between RSF forces and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), rapidly escalated into a systematic targeting of civilians. Predominantly, the Massalit neighborhoods faced these [attacks](#), with entire communities facing relentless waves of violence. Massalit men, women, and children were summarily executed, tortured, or drowned while fleeing. In one particularly harrowing incident on June 15, 2024, the RSF forces ambushed a convoy of fleeing civilians, killing indiscriminately and leaving a trail of devastation along the road to Chad. By November 2024, the abuses escalated as RSF forces rounded up and executed Massalit men and boys who had sought refuge in the suburb of Ardamata, killing over 1,000 people and forcefully disappearing hundreds.

In April 2024, the RSF launched a coordinated attack on El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, resulting in renewed hostilities with the SAF. This violent attack exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation, trapping hundreds of thousands of civilians without access to essential supplies. The [United Nations](#) reported that the city faced appalling levels of suffering due to the siege imposed by the RSF. Again, enforced disappearance was one of the tactics used by the belligerents against civilians who were fleeing for safety.

The economic and social consequences of these forced disappearances are equally devastating. Many victims are breadwinners, leaving their families destitute and struggling for survival. Women, who frequently assume the role of sole provider, face immense challenges in accessing basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare for their children. In addition, the psychological trauma of losing a loved one to enforced disappearance, compounded by social stigma continues to isolate and marginalize these families.

The conflict also led to a catastrophic [famine](#) in the Zamzam displacement camp to over 400,000 people, exacerbating the impact of enforced disappearances on affected communities. By August 2024, conditions had surpassed famine thresholds, with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) confirming the worst fears of humanitarian agencies. Families searching for loved ones who have been forcibly disappeared face the additional burden of surviving in dire conditions, often without key breadwinners or caregivers who have been abducted. The uncertainty surrounding the fate of the disappeared compounded the suffering, leaving survivors trapped in a cycle of grief, hunger, and despair.

In September 2024, [Redress](#) documented several cases of prominent activists, community leaders, and journalists being disappeared as part of a broader campaign to silence dissent. These patterns highlight the use of enforced disappearances not only as a tool of war but also as a means of eliminating any form of resistance to RSF control in the region.

In January 2025, the United States [declared](#) that the RSF's actions in Darfur amounted to genocide, highlighting systematic attacks on black communities, mass casualties, sexual

violence, and enforced disappearances. These crimes included the abduction of individuals, whose fates remain unknown, contributing to the climate of terror and erasure of entire communities. Critics argued that the declaration came too late, as the conflict had been ongoing for over 20 months, during which countless individuals have been forcibly disappeared, leaving families in anguish over their loved ones' whereabouts. In response, on 7 January 2025, the U.S. administration imposed financial [sanctions](#) on RSF leaders and associated entities, aiming to disrupt their capacity to perpetrate further crimes, including the concealment of detainees and victims of enforced disappearance. Additionally, on 16 January 2025, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan (Burhan), the leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), was [sanctioned](#) by the US Administration under Executive Order (E.O.) 14098, "Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons Destabilizing Sudan and Undermining the Goal of a Democratic Transition.

Addressing the crisis of enforced disappearances in Darfur requires immediate and coordinated action from both domestic and international stakeholders. The international community cannot ignore the scale of the crisis in Darfur. Civil societies have called for urgent intervention, including the deployment of a civilian protection mission under the United Nations and African Union, targeted sanctions against the belligerents, and expanded support for the International Criminal Court's investigations into Darfur, particularly on enforced disappearance as the major human rights violation during the period.

In addition to the above, I recommend the following:

1. Sudanese authorities to uphold its international obligations under relevant regional and international treaties, which it ratified by **immediately carrying out independent, transparent, and effective investigations** with a view to determining the fate and whereabouts of all forcefully disappeared persons.
2. Where victims are in the custody of both the state and the armed groups, we urge for them to be released or charged before the courts of law, and for those who have died, we call for their graves to be shown to families/relatives and bodies released for proper burial.
3. I call on Sudanese authorities to **domesticate** the ICPPED as a fundamental step toward the prevention and the ultimate elimination, of the inadmissible practice of enforced disappearances.
4. Laws that grant immunity to perpetrators should be amended, and detention centres and controlled sections of prisons outside the normal custodial system, where victims are frequently held incommunicado to be closed.
5. I call for regional and international human rights bodies to **collectively and strongly demand Sudan to end all enforced disappearances and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.**
6. Civil society groups must **continue documenting cases** of enforced disappearance to ensure evidence is preserved for future accountability measures.

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