

# "WE WERE THREATENED WITH RAPE AND VIOLENCE FOR BEING MASALIT"

FROM PERSECUTION IN SUDAN TO PRECARIETY  
AND INSECURITY IN CHADIAN CAMPS

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## Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Sudan has triggered a profound humanitarian crisis since fighting erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and allied militias. Civilians have borne the brunt of indiscriminate violence, including shelling, airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, looting, and destruction of healthcare facilities. They have also faced direct attacks by all parties to the conflict, including killings, torture, forced displacement, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).<sup>1</sup> Darfur remains a hotspot for these violations,<sup>2</sup> particularly Al Geneina in West Darfur, with violence spilling across the border into Eastern Chad.

Within this context, the **Masalit community in Darfur** has been subjected to especially severe persecution,<sup>3</sup> in particular through systematic acts of SGBV. Reports describe the use of mass and gang rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and forced pregnancy as weapons of war to terrorise and forcibly uproot Masalit women and girls.<sup>4</sup>

These attacks have created catastrophic conditions, forcing mass displacement and leaving families – particularly women and girls – struggling to survive in overcrowded, unsanitary camps in Eastern Chad, where safety remains elusive. The proximity of armed groups, inadequate humanitarian aid, and poor living conditions continue to expose displaced women and girls to renewed risks of sexual

1 UN Women Africa, "No excuse: calling for an end to Gender Based Violence in Sudan", *Gender Alert No. 2*, December 2024.

2 Think Global Health, *Bodies into Battlefield: Gender Based Violence in Sudan*, March 2024.

3 Human Rights Council, *Findings of the investigations conducted by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan into violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and related crimes, committed in the Sudan in the context of the conflict that erupted in mid-April 2023*, 23 October 2024.

4 ACJPS, *War Time Sexual Violence, a Tactic in the Sudan Armed Conflict*, December 2024; ACJPS, *Expressing deep concern about the continued use of sexual and gender-based violence in the conflict in Sudan*, September 2025; UN Women Africa, "No excuse: calling for an end to Gender Based Violence in Sudan", op. cit; Amnesty International, *"They Raped All of Us": Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Sudan*, April 2025.

violence, hunger, trafficking, and exploitation. In these supposed spaces of refuge, survivors face ongoing insecurity, a lack of medical and psychosocial support, and limited access to justice.

In response to these urgent realities, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) conducted a documentation mission in August 2024 to N’Djamena and Eastern Chad, including the refugee camps of Metche, Sultan, Aronq and Arcom. The team carried out individual interviews with direct and indirect victims of violence, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), witnesses, and humanitarian workers,<sup>5</sup> as well as group discussions and consultations with various actors, including community leaders, humanitarian service providers, and local authorities, to explore the broader social, political, and human rights context in Sudan and Chad.

Testimonies collected during the mission reveal a coordinated campaign targeting the Masalit community at every stage of displacement: during attacks in Darfur, throughout their flight towards safety, and within refugee camps in Chad. While FIDH and ACJPS recognise that men and boys have also suffered from conflict-related violence and displacement, this brief’s scope is centred specifically on the experiences of **women and girls**, who face particular risks and patterns of SGBV both during flight and within refugee settings.



5 The team carried out 21 semi-structured individual interviews. The methodology prioritised participants’ safety and informed consent, replacing all names with numerical codes to ensure confidentiality.

The mission’s findings underscore the pervasive impunity enjoyed by perpetrators, the structural barriers that prevent accountability, and the humanitarian gaps that leave survivors without adequate protection or support. The violence documented against the Masalit community – particularly widespread SGBV – constitutes clear violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and may amount to international crimes. Both Sudan and Chad have binding obligations under international law to prevent such abuses, protect affected populations, and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

**From Persecution in Sudan to Continued Precarity in Chadian Camps**

*“We need protection – any form of protection. If our country isn’t restored, we just want to return to a safe and stable place.”<sup>6</sup>*

**A. Sexual and Gender-based Violence as a Catalyst for Displacement: Al Geneina, 2023**

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Darfur remains alarmingly prevalent, inflicting devastating physical and psychological harm on victims and survivors. Beyond its individual impact, SGBV has been used to terrorise and force the displacement of local populations, in particular the Masalit community. The majority of women survivors and WHRDs interviewed reported having experienced and/or witnessed extreme sexual violence, killings, and other atrocities, committed mainly by the RSF and its allied militias.

One survivor recounted that her four assailants had asked her “which tribe [she] belonged to” and that she had lied, telling them she “belonged to the Tamah tribe to protect [herself], as they were targeting the Masalit tribe”. The attackers did not believe her, asserting that she “belonged to the



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6 Testimony 1, August 2024.



Masalit tribe” and raped her one after the other.<sup>7</sup> Another survivor reported that after raping her, an RSF soldier instructed her to leave because “Masalit girls are not wanted in the area by the RSF”.<sup>8</sup> One survivor also described being tortured by RSF members due to her Masalit identity, resulting in the loss of the use of her hands, partial blindness and a miscarriage.<sup>9</sup>

For many Masalit women, the intensity of these attacks, including SGBV, was the final catalyst for fleeing Al Geneina and other parts of Darfur. The violence triggered both internal displacement within Sudan and mass exodus to Eastern Chad.<sup>10</sup>

Perpetrators reportedly entered homes, threatening residents at gunpoint, demanding to know their tribal affiliation, and raping women and girls. Most survivors described being threatened with a weapon, usually an axe or a gun, before being assaulted and raped repeatedly, often by multiple assailants in succession. One woman described being “hit very hard in the head” with an axe and “immediately losing consciousness”. She added that she was then “dragged to the neighbours’ house opposite where [she] was raped many times by the four men”.<sup>11</sup> Another survivor recounted a similar attack: she was “hit with an axe on the neck”, lost consciousness and was then “raped by four individuals, one of whom had a weapon, and the other an axe”. Her children witnessed the assault, powerless, and helped her once it was over as she was still “unconscious, bleeding and having difficulty moving”.<sup>12</sup> Several survivors shared similar accounts of armed men in RSF uniforms breaking into their homes, overpowering them and raping them in turn.<sup>13</sup>

Other survivors reported that armed men used threats against family members to force them to comply. In one case, a woman said the attackers offered to spare her brothers’ lives if she submitted to rape; when her mother screamed for help, they shot her multiple times in front of her.<sup>14</sup> Another survivor stated: “The RSF broke into our house, threatened to rape the women, and shot and killed my brother.” She added that, during the same attack, the perpetrators also carried out kidnappings, rape, sexual assault and destruction of property.<sup>15</sup>

Perpetrators were typically described as young men dressed in RSF uniforms. Some were recognised by victims, but most were not, as many wore masks, balaclavas, or traditional Chadian attire, locally referred to as “*Konfli*” or “*Kabtani*”, further complicating identification and accountability efforts.<sup>16</sup> It was also reported that many attackers spoke with a foreign accent, suggesting the participation of foreign fighters in the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Numerous testimonies also mentioned mass rapes of women and girls by RSF forces and allied militias. Survivors reported that groups of armed men carried out coordinated attacks in which dozens of women and girls, mainly from the Masalit tribe, were raped. In one attack, over 50 girls were allegedly raped by Colombian militias who have joined the RSF.<sup>18</sup> Another survivor recounted that during an attack in the Jabal neighbourhood, two women and three girls were forcibly taken away and gang-raped.<sup>19</sup> Several testimonies also described a pattern of abduction: “When Masalit or black women went to collect food or firewood, they were abducted and held for about three days. During this period, women and girls aged 16, 17 and 35 were mass raped by the RSF and allied militias. Any woman who tried to flee would face sniper fire from the RSF snipers.”<sup>20</sup>

In another case, the female relatives of a prominent community member were subjected to severe psychological abuse and degrading treatment after he was killed by RSF and allied militias, reportedly



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“as punishment for being Masalit”. His body was deliberately left unburied for an extended period, with perpetrators guarding it to prevent a dignified burial. During this time, his female relatives were constantly threatened with rape and other forms of SGBV. Fearing for their safety, several of them were forced to “go into exile in order to avoid sexual and gender-based violence”, ultimately fleeing to Eastern Chad.<sup>21</sup> Their experiences, echoing many others, underscore how SGBV and its persistent threat are used to terrorise and displace Masalit women.

## B. Sexual and Gender-based Violence on the Move: Attacks in Transit

SGBV has emerged as both a key driver and a continuing feature of forced displacement from Darfur. Even in flight, Sudanese women and girls remain at risk, as the journey itself often exposes them to SGBV. Many civilians attempting to escape have been killed, tortured, or severely injured. One woman recounted witnessing the killing of her three children, uncle, and nephew during their flight, describing roads littered with the bodies of people who were killed while trying to escape.<sup>22</sup> Survivors also reported being ambushed by militias who looted their belongings, beat them, and raped them in remote areas. One refugee testified that she and her companions were tortured by armed men at roadblocks as they fled,<sup>23</sup> while another recounted being shot in the arm and slashed in the stomach by a bayonet, an attack that almost killed her.<sup>24</sup> As one refugee put it: “During the escape from Darfur to Chad, women are often raped and the Central Reserve Police, which is supposed to protect civilians, no longer has capacity or interest in Darfur.”<sup>25</sup> The absence of effective protection has left women even more exposed to SGBV.

7 Testimony 5, August 2024.

8 Testimony 15, August 2024.

9 Testimony 12, August 2024.

10 Testimony 20, August 2024.

11 Testimony 10, August 2024.

12 Testimony 5, August 2024.

13 Testimonies 11 and 15, August 2024.

14 Testimony 16, August 2024.

15 Testimony 20, August 2024.

16 Testimony 9, August 2024.

17 Testimony 14, August 2024.

18 Testimony 9, August 2024; Judith Renoult, *Colombian mercenaries join Rapid Support Forces fighting in Sudan*, *Le Monde*, September 2025.

19 Testimony 9, August 2024.

20 Testimony 9, August 2024.

21 Testimony 18, August 2024.

22 Testimony 9, August 2024.

23 Testimony 20, August 2024.

24 Testimony 13, August 2024.

25 Testimony 9, August 2024.





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### C. Sexual and Gender-based Violence as a Persistent Reality in Refugee Camps

For Sudanese women and girls who have sought refuge in Chad, safety remains elusive. Findings reveal that SGBV persists even within refugee camps, reflecting a continuity of abuses committed in Darfur, while also taking new forms in the context of displacement.<sup>26</sup>

Survivors have repeatedly denounced the presence of RSF and allied militias within and around refugee camps, facilitated by the “porous border between Sudan and Chad”.<sup>27</sup> Their continued presence has created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, with many women reporting encounters with groups of perpetrators moving freely in places such as Adré City, particularly on market days, with no intervention from Chadian authorities.<sup>28</sup> In camps like Metche, women described feeling unsafe due to the infiltration of RSF, forcing some to relocate to other camps where conditions are only marginally better.<sup>29</sup> Survivors reported that RSF and allied militias often blend in among refugees, carrying out surveillance to deter human rights advocacy and maintain control over displaced communities, exploiting women’s vulnerability.

Women and girls, who frequently bear primary responsibility for securing food and basic resources for their families, face an especially precarious situation. The inability of humanitarian aid to meet essential needs, combined with the lack of access to education, employment, and other livelihood opportunities, has forced many to resort to survival strategies that expose them to exploitation and abuse.<sup>30</sup> The absence of sustainable income-generating options drives many women and girls into exploitative labour arrangements and coercive relationships, significantly heightening their vulnerability to SGBV. This has resulted in documented cases of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, including of minors; WHRDs reported instances of girls as young as 14 years old engaging in prostitution to survive.<sup>31</sup> The FIDH-ACJPS documentation mission also identified

two local “entertainment” venues where Sudanese girls who appeared to be minors were allegedly present against their will and made available to men through arrangements with third parties. At the time of the mission, two cases of rape linked to these venues had been reported, but had still not been investigated by authorities.

Women who reported incidents of sexual violence to police in refugee camps in Eastern Chad, described inadequate responses and a lack of meaningful follow-up. Survivors noted that these experiences mirrored those in Darfur, where the legal system had effectively collapsed or been severely weakened under RSF control, losing both the capacity and willingness to investigate SGBV, arrest perpetrators and deliver justice. As a result, many victims and survivors of SGBV no longer saw reporting to authorities in either Sudan or Eastern Chad as a viable option. Importantly, an overwhelming majority of survivors indicated that the FIDH-ACJPS documentation mission represented the first opportunity they had to share their experiences for advocacy purposes and to seek justice for SGBV in the context of the conflict. This highlights the systemic inadequacy of local authorities in addressing these violations, leaving survivors without protection, recourse, or legal remedies in both Sudan and Chad.

### D. Impact of Sexual and Gender-based Violence on Survivors

*“I hope my message reaches the responsible authorities. I need support: psychological support, support for my family and all the refugees in the camps. We hope aid will come and people will care about us as refugees, understand our situation, and try to help us. We also pray that God will bring peace and security to our country so that we can return.”*

SGBV has devastating consequences for victims and survivors. Rape frequently results in unwanted pregnancies; one interviewee reported that five women became pregnant following the mass rapes she witnessed.<sup>32</sup> In some cases, perpetrators even followed survivors to pressure them into marriage, claiming that the unborn child entitled them to “family rights”.<sup>33</sup> Survivors have also contracted sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with one woman reporting a “very hard-to-treat, resistant sexually transmitted infection” that still causes her severe pain and has never fully healed despite treatment.<sup>34</sup>

The dire healthcare situation in Chad’s refugee camps and in Sudan’s settlements for internally displaced persons further aggravates these consequences. The acute shortage of medical supplies, trained personnel, and accessible healthcare infrastructure leaves affected populations without essential medical care. A representative of the “For You Initiative”<sup>35</sup> in the Adré refugee camp highlighted critical barriers to access to sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) for women and girls, especially SGBV survivors, including rape kits and STI treatment. The lack of specialised medical personnel and the scarcity of essential medicines, including pain relief and antibiotics, often result in prolonged illness and untreated infections, further compounding health risks. The absence of adequate healthcare infrastructure also means that maternal healthcare is virtually non-existent, increasing the risks of pregnancy complications, miscarriages, and unsafe childbirth.

Beyond physical health, SGBV survivors also endure profound psychological and social consequences. Many experience long-term trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with little to no access to mental health support. The stigma surrounding SGBV, combined with the absence of confidential and survivor-centred services, deters many from seeking help, leaving them isolated and without necessary care. Many women and girls also face secondary victimisation, including rejection by their families or forced marriages as a form of “protection” after an assault.

26 See also, UNHCR, *Heightened risks, violations and sexual violence reported by civilians fleeing Sudan*, June 2023.

27 Testimony 18, August 2024.

28 Testimony 17, August 2024.

29 Testimony 18, August 2024.

30 Testimony 7, August 2024.

31 Testimony 21, August 2024.

32 Testimony 9, August 2024.

33 Testimony 9, August 2024.

34 Testimony 15, August 2024.

35 The “For You Initiative” was launched by a group of Sudanese refugees who were forced to leave Darfur as a result of conflict.

E. Risks and Obstacles Faced by Women Human Rights Defenders

The FIDH-ACJPS documentation mission observed the presence of highly dedicated WHRDs, committed to documenting SGBV and addressing the medico-legal, psychosocial, and economic needs of SGBV survivors. However, their efforts are severely constrained by the conditions in both Sudan and Chad.

In Sudan, WHRDs face severe risks in the context of the ongoing conflict. Those from Al Geneina reported exposure to physical threats, including violence, abduction, detention, and constant surveillance by the RSF. A 21-year-old woman working with an organisation protecting women from sexual violence was reportedly raped after threatening to report human rights violations committed by the RSF.<sup>36</sup> WHRDs also face digital security threats, as the RSF operates information centres equipped with computers and Starlink internet, to which WHRDs often need access to conduct their activities. These facilities are allegedly leveraged for cyber surveillance, monitoring reports, online communications, and virtual meetings related to human rights activities. Additionally, WHRDs reported frequent seizures of cameras and other documentation equipment by the RSF, further impeding their ability to document SGBV.<sup>37</sup>

In Chad, the absence of a legal or policy framework that recognises and supports WHRDs’ work significantly limits their ability to develop and implement local community-based initiatives that could help mitigate the impact of SGBV on women and children from Sudan and advocate for justice and accountability for conflict-related SGBV. Restricted civic space and the inability to establish locally driven initiatives isolate refugee populations, depriving them of avenues to advocate for improved living conditions, access to healthcare, legal support, and protection against sexual violence. Urgent intervention is needed, not only through medical and trauma-informed services, but also through long-term investments in economic empowerment programmes and legal recognition of WHRD-led initiatives.

Even the WHRDs who supported the FIDH-ACJPS documentation mission in Adré expressed deep concern for their safety. They reported being under constant surveillance from the RSF and allied militias in Chad due to the porous border with Sudan. In addition, they face scrutiny from the Chadian security sector, given the lack of formal recognition, and in some cases the criminalisation, of their work defending the rights of others. While they were highly motivated to engage with the FIDH-ACJPS team and share their experiences, they requested anonymity and preferred to avoid being seen publicly with members of the documentation mission.<sup>38</sup>

The FIDH-ACJPS documentation mission directly experienced these constraints on civic space when the Commissioner of Adré seized team members’ passports, expelled them from the region, and prohibited engagement with WHRDs and SGBV survivors from Sudan in camps around Adré. It was only after intervention by the Commissioner of Metche, under whose jurisdiction Adré falls, that the mission was allowed to return and resume interviews. These intimidation tactics reinforce fear and anxiety among survivors and WHRDs, severely restricting self-organisation.



FIDH/Arnold Tsunga

Conclusion

The testimonies collected in this brief highlight the profound and ongoing crisis facing the Masalit community in Sudan and Eastern Chad. The documented journey illustrates the lived realities of survivors who continue to face threats, trauma, and insufficient support. Women and girls remain caught between competing dangers: ongoing violence in Sudan, pervasive exploitation during displacement, and compounded vulnerabilities in refugee camps. The voices of survivors documented throughout this brief – from those describing attacks in their homes to those calling for basic protection and support – demand both immediate humanitarian response and meaningful engagement with justice mechanisms. Comprehensive, survivor-centred protection and response services in Sudan and Chad must be provided and living conditions in refugee camps must be improved.

These findings align with those of other international investigative mechanisms. The UN Fact-Finding Mission (UN FFM) on Sudan, in its 2024 report,<sup>39</sup> concluded that the RSF and allied militias committed widespread SGBV amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, including rape, sexual slavery and abduction. The report also documented systematic attacks on ethnic and gender grounds, particularly against the Masalit community in El Geneina, through killings, torture, and sexual violence, amounting to persecution. Similarly, the ACHPR Fact-Finding Mission (ACHPR FFM), in its 2025 report, found that SGBV in Sudan is both widespread and systematic, perpetrated primarily by the RSF.<sup>40</sup> Testimonies revealed that victims ranging from 13 to 60 years old were subjected to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, exploitation, and forced marriage. The African FFM further noted that survivors suffer severe physical and psychological trauma, compounded by stigma and social exclusion.

These grave violations demand more than documentation; they require decisive action rooted in law and accountability. Sudan, Chad, and armed groups operating within Sudan are bound by national, regional, and international legal frameworks to prevent SGBV, protect survivors, and prosecute those responsible. Pursuing accountability through complementary avenues<sup>41</sup> – including transitional justice mechanisms, national courts, the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the International Criminal Court, and universal jurisdiction – is essential to ensuring that survivors’ experiences lead to tangible consequences and meaningful reparations. Without coordinated efforts across these multiple levels, impunity will continue to fuel further violence and deny survivors the recognition and justice to which they are entitled under the law.

36 Testimony 9, August 2024.  
37 Testimony 19, August 2024.  
38 A risk analysis was conducted and discussed individually with each WHRD prior to the documentation mission to identify specific risks and agree on appropriate mitigation measures.

39 Human Rights Council, *Findings of the investigations conducted by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan into violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and related crimes, committed in the Sudan in the context of the conflict that erupted in mid-April 2023*, 23 October 2024, *op. cit.*  
40 The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC) – Department of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS), *Report of the Virtual Joint Fact-Finding Mission on the Human Rights Situation in the Sudan*, October 2025.  
41 FIDH, *“We demand justice, we deserve justice”: Accountability processes for victims of Sudan*, May 2025.





## Report partner

The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO) working to monitor and promote respect for human rights and legal reform in Sudan. It was established in 2009 to address a gap in, and rejuvenate, the human rights movement in Sudan, in the wake of forced closures and expulsions of NGOs.

ACJPS is dedicated to creating a Sudan committed to all human rights, the rule of law and peace, where the rights and freedoms of the individual are respected and all persons and groups are guaranteed their rights to non-discrimination, equality, and justice.

The organisation runs three mutually reinforcing programmes to improve the human rights situation in Sudan:

1. Human rights monitoring programme to document human rights violations and identify individuals at risk or situations of concern, operating as an early warning mechanism;
2. Legal programme to conduct legal research, protect individuals at risk and pursue strategic litigation to obtain effective remedies for victims of human rights violations and legal reform;
3. Advocacy programme to publish and disseminate evidence-based advocacy materials and influence domestic, regional and international policymakers to improve the human rights situation in Sudan.

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## “We Were Threatened with Rape and Violence for Being Masalit”:

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