

Sudan's Conflict and Resulting Starvation

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While the world is watching in horror at the genocide being carried out in Gaza, there is another war in Sudan which has been overshadowed by the Israeli war on the Palestinians.

Since the conflict began on April 15, 2023, almost 15,000 people have been killed, and more than 8.2 million have been displaced. In Gaza, about 35,000 have been killed in six months of fighting since October 7, 2023.

The city of El Fasher is now under threat of an imminent attack by the **Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who are battling against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF)**. In the middle of April, the RSF began besieging El Fasher.

El Fasher is the main city in Sudan's western Darfur region, and the last major city still under the control of the SAF.

Displaced people forced to flee surrounding areas surged into the city of El Fasher and are living in schools and areas known as gathering sites.

With all routes into and out of the city closed and unsafe, the fear and dreading is felt by all.

Experts on the conflict see the evidence that the two sides are preparing to fight a close-quarter battle in El Fasher to the death.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has described the crisis as being of epic proportions.

Sudan has been torn apart by years of political instability, and is currently facing a deepening crisis of both the armed conflict and the resulting starvation. Despite numerous attempts by international bodies to broker peace agreements, the situation remains dire for millions of Sudanese citizens.

The Conflict

Sudan's brutal civil war began just over a year ago, after the country's two leading military men who had staged a coup together began an armed battle with each other and their forces. **The SAF and the RSF battle for control and resources, while the civilians pay the heaviest price.**

Areas which have been overrun by the RSF and allied Arab militias have reported widespread looting, ethnic violence against non-Arab groups and sexual attacks.

Ramtane Lamamra, the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan, continued his efforts with both sides in Sudan to de-escalate tensions.

Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for the UN chief, said that Mr. Lamamra called on the RSF and the SAF to refrain from fighting in El Fasher.

Lamamra stressed that an attack on El Fasher would likely have devastating consequences for the civilian population.

El Fasher had not fallen previously because armed groups there have allied with the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), chiefly rebels from the Zaghawa ethnic group, who have vowed to inflict a decisive defeat on the RSF.

Until now El Fasher has been spared the worst of the violence and ethnic killings that have taken place across Darfur, the stronghold of the RSF.

As people wait to see whether the RSF does launch a full-scale attack on the city, their focus is on a battle for survival, because if war explodes in the besieged city, it is expected to be fierce and deadly.

Armed groups continue to engage in sporadic clashes, causing widespread displacement and loss of life. In addition to ethnic and tribal tensions, there are also battles over resources, power, and control. These ongoing hostilities have severely hindered essential services, including access to food and healthcare.

The Starvation Crisis

In El Fasher, lack of food is the most pressing concern, with the Red Cross having stopped its delivery of two meals a day.

Michael Dunford, regional director for Eastern Africa at the UN World Food Programme (WFP), stressed the desperation of civilians caught up in the fighting.

"Our calls for humanitarian access to conflict hotspots in Sudan have never been more critical. WFP urgently requires unrestricted access and security guarantees to deliver assistance to the families struggling for survival amid devastating levels of violence," he said.

"The situation is dire. People are resorting to consuming grass and peanut shells. If assistance does not reach them soon, we risk witnessing widespread starvation and death in Darfur and across other conflict-affected areas in Sudan," he warned.

“All of these deeply worrying developments are happening at a time when the continuing brutal violence across Sudan is pushing the country toward a conflict-induced famine and a further catastrophic loss of life, especially among children,” said **Catherine Russell**, Executive Director of UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

The conflict’s devastating consequences are particularly apparent in the issue of starvation. Sudan’s agricultural sector, once the backbone of the country’s economy, has been significantly impacted. Displaced farmers lack access to their land, disrupting food production. Moreover, the destruction of infrastructure and farms has severely hampered the distribution of food and relief aid.

Compounding the situation, millions of Sudanese are now facing increased food insecurity due to rising prices and hyperinflation. The cost of basic commodities has skyrocketed, making it nearly impossible for vulnerable populations to afford essential food items. Without adequate nutrition, malnutrition rates are alarmingly high, especially among children, leading to stunted growth and long-term health implications.

There is no electricity and the shortage of water is acute, made more so by lack of fuel and increased demand from the influx of displaced people.

Humanitarian Response

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the International medical charity, is on the ground, and for months it has been warning of a malnutrition crisis in the Zamzam camp south of El Fasher, home to many uprooted by previous waves of ethnic violence, that requires a massive increase in the humanitarian response.

The international community has been actively engaged in providing lifesaving assistance to address the hunger crisis in Sudan. Organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF, and various NGOs have been working tirelessly to distribute food aid, nutrition support, and clean water to affected populations. Nonetheless, the sheer scale and complexity of the crisis make it challenging to reach all those in need.

Political Stalemate and Peace Efforts

Despite numerous peace agreements and attempts at reconciliation, achieving a lasting resolution to Sudan’s conflict remains elusive. Tensions prevail between the transitional government, rebel groups, and marginalized communities. The challenges in gaining trust and consensus among all stakeholders have hindered progress significantly.

The signing of the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020 between the Sudanese government and some rebel groups had offered a glimmer of hope. It aims to address some of the root causes of the conflict, such as power-sharing, wealth distribution, and regional autonomy. However, the real test lies in its implementation on the ground.

What’s next?

Sudan continues to battle the twin crises of conflict and starvation, trapping millions in a cycle of suffering and despair.

Immediate action is crucial to alleviate the ongoing humanitarian crisis faced by the Sudanese population. The international community must continue to provide sustained

support, not only through humanitarian aid but also by pushing for lasting peace and sustainable development. Only through collective efforts can Sudan begin to rebuild and ensure a future free from conflict and hunger.

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