

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2023

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power,

We write with deep concern regarding the horrific violence in Sudan, and its impact on the rapidly declining humanitarian situation on the ground. Now in its third week, the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has left hundreds dead, thousands more injured, and has forced hundreds of thousands of individuals to flee to neighboring regions and countries.

As the violence has severely disrupted humanitarian assistance on the ground – including by forcing some organizations to withdraw or suspend their efforts – we urge that you offer all available support to resume aid operations, take steps to reposition aid resources to reflect the current security environment, leverage local organizations as part of an ongoing response strategy, and continue efforts to marshal an international response.

Direct negotiations facilitated by the United States are critical to the reestablishment of a robust international aid response, and we urge that assurances for immediate and safe aid operations be made a primary focus of those negotiations.

We are deeply grateful for the U.S. Government’s efforts in evacuating U.S. Embassy personnel, and American citizens from Sudan. However, the recent conflict has hit areas like Khartoum and Darfur particularly hard, and it tragically exacerbates the existing crisis and humanitarian need across the country. According to the United Nations (UN), even prior to the recent outbreak in violence nearly 16 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance – a figure that represents close to a third of the total population in Sudan.¹ Even prior to the start of the conflict, the crisis was already acute – more than 4 million children and pregnant and lactating women are counted as being “severely malnourished.”²

As the violence has escalated, its impact has been far reaching across all sectors of society. Damage to critical civilian infrastructure, including transportation and communication infrastructure, has limited the ability of people and basic goods to move throughout the country; damage to hospitals, depleted resources, and broken medical supply chains have largely

¹ *Background to a crisis: In Sudan, the stakes are high for the whole of Africa.* 1 May, 2023. Accessed 5 May, 2023. <https://sudan.un.org/en/229663-background-crisis-sudan-stakes-are-high-whole-africa>

² *Ibid*

degraded the nation's health care capacity; and continued conflict has left significant portions of the population sheltering in their homes, with dwindling or exhausted supplies of food, water, and medicine. As the UN's top humanitarian affairs official said this week, "the humanitarian situation is reaching [a] breaking point."³

Unfortunately, this conflict has also deteriorated the flow and delivery of humanitarian assistance into Sudan, and aid groups' ability to operate on the ground. The men and women who work for the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as those employed by international relief organizations, have committed themselves to careers seeking to alleviate suffering around the world, oftentimes carrying out this mission in harm's way. Tragically, in the first two weeks of fighting at least five international aid workers had been killed, and there have been broader threats targeting aid personnel and supplies.

To be clear, the blame for the disruptions to aid and casualties lie with the warring parties. Reported gross violations of international humanitarian law have greatly impacted the safety of aid personnel, and directly contribute to the suffering of the Sudanese people. We echo international calls for the parties to the conflict to ensure safe access and movement for humanitarian workers and medical personnel, and to allow for steady streams of aid into and throughout the country.

In response to the dire humanitarian need, the reestablishment of these aid flows is critical. We understand that organizations are looking at how to best reposition and recalibrate support in light of the serious security risks. We appreciate the direct efforts that the U.S. Government has initiated to support humanitarian assistance, including USAID's activation of a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) on April 23, and we urge you to take steps to safely reposition and pre-position resources so that they can best be utilized on the ground as soon as possible.

Additionally, as aid organizations work to reestablish operations, it is vital that the U.S. State Department and USAID provide all available support to facilitate ongoing aid operations on the ground, and support a resumption of efforts – whether in Sudan or in neighboring countries – that have been suspended due to the violence. In response to the significant need, and in part to fill in as international organizations have been forced to suspend their operations, a range of local and national Sudanese organizations have stepped forward to provide capacity. We encourage you to use flexibility in supporting these local efforts, in order to best leverage them alongside international efforts.

In an alarming estimate earlier this week, the UN projected that the ongoing conflict may drive more than 860,000 individuals to flee from Sudan into neighboring countries.⁴ We have already seen significant levels of migration out of Sudan over the past three weeks, which at many points has overwhelmed border capacity, thereby creating additional humanitarian concerns at these

³ *UN relief chief: The humanitarian crisis in Sudan is reaching breaking point.* 30 April, 2023. Accessed 5 May, 2023. <https://www.unocha.org/story/un-relief-chief-humanitarian-crisis-sudan-reaching-breaking-point>

⁴ *UNHCR: Sudan refugee response will need \$445 million for rising numbers fleeing Sudan.* 4 May, 2023. Accessed 5 May, 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/unhcr-sudan-refugee-response-will-need-445-million-rising-numbers-fleeing-sudan>

crossings. We welcome U.S. efforts to engage these neighboring countries and the UN to increase border capacity, ensure UN and international non-governmental organizations (INGO) access to these border crossings, provide additional aid along these routes, and scale up planning efforts to account for significant anticipated volume.

It is critical that negotiations involving a ceasefire between the warring parties prioritize the immediate creation of safe and durable humanitarian access to those in need. Additionally, we urge the deployment of an appointed special envoy or other senior diplomat to the region to engage directly with neighboring countries to ensure the free movement of individuals seeking safety out of Sudan, and that UN and INGOs are able to provide needed assistance in these border efforts.

It is vital that the U.S. continue its diplomatic engagement to push for a durable cessation of violence, in partnership with the African Union, and other regional and international partners. This cessation ultimately is the only path towards ensuring that urgent humanitarian needs on the ground are met. It must, however, also be accompanied by a concerted international effort, which fully resources the work done by aid organizations.

We have listened to concerns about what this ongoing violence means for individuals' loved ones in Sudan, and for the country's future. We support and encourage all efforts by the U.S. Government to be a forward-leaning and strong partner in the international aid response to this crisis in Sudan. Finally, we request regular updates and briefings from the State Department and USAID on the delivery of humanitarian aid for civilians in Sudan, and from the State Department on the evacuation of American citizens.

Sincerely,



MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator



TIM KAINE
United States Senator



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN
United States Senator



CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator



JEANNE SHAHEEN
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