

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: Sudan: Humanitarian Crisis, HC 1370

Tuesday 16 May 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 16 May 2023.

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Mrs Pauline Latham; Chris Law; Kate Osamor; and Mr Virendra Sharma.

Questions 1 to 34

Witnesses

I: Will Carter; Country Director, Sudan, Norwegian Refugee Council; Basil Daffalla, Director, Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF), Saferworld; Natalia Chan, Senior Conflict and Security Adviser, Saferworld; Kholood Khair, Founding Director, Confluence Advisory; Eddie Rowe, Sudan Country Director, UN World Food Programme.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Will Carter, Basil Daffalla, Natalia Chan, Kholood Khair and Eddie Rowe.

Q1 **Chair:** I would like to start this one-off session of the International Development Select Committee on the humanitarian crisis that, sadly, is engulfing Sudan. This is a very fast-moving situation, so we would be really grateful if witnesses could update us on what is happening on the ground. We are also interested in the circumstances around that and the circumstances for the region. Could I start by asking people to introduce themselves and their organisation, please?

Will Carter: I am Will Carter, country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council for Sudan. We are an international NGO in 35 countries around the world. In Sudan, we have six offices and 250 staff, including 40 international staff.

Basil Daffalla: My name is Basil Daffalla. I am the director of the Conflict Sensitivity Facility, a common good resource for the aid sector, working with donors, UN agencies, and international and national NGOs to support aid to better fit the local context, minimise unintended harm and build positive contributions. The CSF is based in Sudan and managed by a peacebuilding organisation called Saferworld. Joining me today is my colleague Natalia Chan, senior conflict and security adviser with Saferworld.

Chair: Natalia, welcome, and thank you very much for joining us today.

Kholood Khair: My name is Kholood Khair and I run a small boutique think-tank in Khartoum.

Chair: I love the idea of a boutique think tank.

Eddie Rowe: I am the country representative and director of the UN World Food Programme in Sudan, where we have 21 offices and about 1,300 staff, focusing mainly on food security but also on supporting the humanitarian community on common services and logistics support as well as emergency telecoms support.

Q2 **Chair:** As I said, I am aware that this is a very fast-moving topic, so, if there are questions that you do not know the answers to but you could find out for us, we would be very grateful if you would just say that you will write to us. It would be useful for us to have that information.

I am going to start and then ask my colleagues to do other questions. Kholood, in terms of the oversight of it, what steps has the international development community taken in the past 10 years to increase resilience in Sudan to help prevent a crisis like this or put structures in place to support if there was to be a crisis like this?

Kholood Khair: It is fair to say that everyone was caught off guard by the war that started a month ago. That is because, unfortunately, there



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has been too much of a closeness to the main loci of power in Khartoum, particularly on the military front, and not enough engagement with civilians, who have been warning for a long time that this was not only a potential eventuality but also very imminent over the past few months.

We have seen the international community vacate and evacuate their premises and their people very quickly with the start of the conflict, and this leaves a massive gap in terms of the humanitarian response. That is now being met by neighbourhood resistance committees across the country, particularly in Khartoum, and they are doing the lion's share of the humanitarian response with very little support at the moment.

Q3 Chair: I am challenged by your statement that they were caught off guard. It was something that was echoed last week by Martin Griffiths, the head of OCHA. How is that possible? How is it that the people on the ground knew that this was coming but that those in authority or those paid internationally to be aware of these things did not?

Kholood Khair: The short answer is that there is not enough engagement between international community members on the political, diplomatic and humanitarian side and key civilian interlocutors who have a better idea of what is going on on the ground. Because of that, there was too much support of a political process prior to the conflict that did not have a groundswell of political support. Therefore, if more attention had been paid to people who were critical of that support, the signs would have been more present.

You are right: it is not an excuse. We saw troop movements coming into Khartoum in the weeks before the conflict. We saw language that was being used by both generals. It was very bellicose and very indicative of an oncoming confrontation, all of which was ignored and almost sacrificed at the altar of this political process that the international community, as the key driver of that process, had a lot more faith in than people on the ground in Khartoum.

Q4 Chair: These are bold comments that you are making. Will, is that chiming with you? Do you recognise what is being said?

Will Carter: For sure, this was a drastic change. There were signs before. I do not think that anyone quite expected the armed forces to start air-striking their own capital city within a day or two. This was not expected with such speed. We had seen an overall trendline of deterioration in Darfur over the past few years, ever since the peacekeeping mission fell down at the end of 2020. Last year, we saw that expand and larger conflicts happen elsewhere in the country outside Darfur, in Kordofan and Blue Nile.

There were signs of structural changes across the country, of the type and level of violence, and what Kholood has referred to is what happened in the last few days, which certainly was a surprise. There has been some



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recognition that the revolution and what happened after that in 2019 also coincided with a deterioration in security in peripheral areas of Sudan.

We were alarmed when there were, essentially, atrocities happening in Darfur after the peacekeepers had concluded their mission, and, as an NGO, we were a bit surprised that there was not more action. As Kholood says, there was a fairly singular focus on the political process in Khartoum, and a neglect, to be honest, of other areas of the country. We tried to flag that locally within Sudan.

Q5 Chair: Who were you trying to flag that with?

Will Carter: The diplomatic communities there and the United Nations. There was a flux and, after the coup d'état in late 2021, there was a real change of focus, for good and bad. Everything became centred upon the political process. I cannot really comment on the ups and downs of that—we are a humanitarian organisation—but we were worried that there was a real neglect.

The UN special political mission UNITAMS was mandated not only to support the political transition but also to look at civilian protection, support for the peace process and development co-ordination. Our observation was that there was a strong focus on the first of those mandate's pillars, which was the political process—this is for the special political mission and not necessarily for separate UN agencies, funds and programmes—but a real neglect of the civilian protection crisis.

On the trendline, it was clear that things were getting worse. As Kholood said, even we were taken off guard in the last few days. By coincidence, because we had not seen a huge change in direction from the international community inside Sudan, I had just arrived in New York to lobby for better attention from UN Security Council member states on the protection situation in Sudan.

I am sure that there will be further questions, but there was a long-term trendline that looked like it was worsening in Sudan and was not picked up. I agree with Kholood in that, in the last few days, it was a surprise to see the armed forces relentlessly bombing their own capital city for the last 30 days.

Q6 Chair: It is extraordinary. Can I take this moment to say thank you for what you and your organisations are doing? We have the utmost admiration, and I am sorry that you are in this situation. Basil, I wonder if I could ask you the same question. What I am really interested in is this "caught us by surprise". Is it the violence in the cities that has caught people by surprise? My understanding was that, previously, conflict was happening more in the margins.

This Committee went to Bosnia and met some of the mothers from Srebrenica in the context of the genocide that happened there. They said to us, "If you want to see when conflict and atrocities are happening, follow the movement of people". Had you been seeing the movement of



people in the build-up to this, or is it that everyone was genuinely caught by surprise?

Basil Daffalla: We should remember some of the key structural challenges and conflict drivers that were facing Sudan. A core part of that is the centralisation of Sudan in terms of resources, governance, political power and services. In some instances, we in the aid sector reflect that centralisation, but the comments made by Will definitely resonate with me. Over the last few decades, there has been ongoing conflict around the peripheries of Sudan, but there has been a relative calm within Khartoum, which reflects this disconnect between the centre and the periphery.

In terms of us being caught by surprise, it is partly that it has reached the centre, and maybe many actors were not expecting that specifically, as Will has made reference to.

From an international development angle, there have been population movements in this space, with ongoing conflict in many of the regions in the peripheries in Sudan. In the last few years, the bulk of the international focus has been on political discussions in Khartoum, while there has been, in some instances, particularly in some regions in western Sudan, a vacuum left over the last few years by the withdrawal of some entities, and a security vacuum—[*Interruption*].

Q7 **Chair:** We are having a bit of trouble with your audio, Basil. Natalia, is there anything that you want to add on the points that Basil has made?

Natalia Chan: Basil has switched off his video, which might help a bit with the audio. As he said, the nature of the centre and the periphery in Sudan has always been such that these sorts of conflicts usually happened in the margins or in the periphery compared to Khartoum.

Khartoum was always sheltered from these sorts of incidents, so what has happened has really been a shock for everyone, including those based in Khartoum, Sudanese and internationals alike, although, as Kholood says, there were signs that tensions were rising.

In terms of the focus on the political process, there were clear criticisms and concerns raised on the part of Sudanese civil society about the direction that things were heading in. This is, in many ways, a worst-case scenario playing out, but the fear is that it can get worse, especially when you look at the humanitarian needs that have already risen very sharply in country.

Q8 **Kate Osamor:** Will, I just wanted to go back slightly. Thank you for the work that you are doing in the region. You said that you have had to go to the UN—not you personally, or maybe it is you personally—to try to broker peace and to lobby the international community to get involved. Is this something normal for the World Food Programme, or is it that, because of the scale of the crisis, it has forced your hand? Maybe I heard you wrong, and sorry if I did.



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Will Carter: I represent the Norwegian Refugee Council, and my colleague Eddie is from the World Food Programme, so I can speak for both of us. It is not usual. We were alarmed that there was such an oversight of civilian protection issues. The closure of a UN peacekeeping mission and the fairly hasty transfer to an under-resourced UN special political mission, which then almost immediately arrived in a situation of a military coup d'état, really channelled their focus on to one issue.

We had observations that things were getting worse. We are here to help displaced people. Some were displaced by genocide or conflicts in the early 2000s, and some in the last few months or years, but many are still in grave danger, especially in the Darfur region. Those were the observations that we were raising. Okay, we can keep handing out humanitarian relief and assistance, but it happened again and again. After a point, it is behoven upon us to say, "There is not a humanitarian solution to what is happening here. People are still unsafe".

The main tool that was put in place to help deal with this, albeit very under-resourced, was a UN Security Council-mandated special political mission, which, for good or bad, was focused on the central politics and not on monitoring and supporting to the extent that it was needed, or taking the necessary action in these large areas of an expansive country with multiple conflicts ongoing.

It did not feel usual to us to have to make this appeal, but it is not only on the United Nations. There is a collective responsibility here. Kholood mentioned how the engagements and focus were, and we agree that there needed to be greater outreach into areas outside Khartoum in order to see what was perhaps going to bubble up and develop there.

It was not a usual appeal. There is a lot of political and reputational risk in us taking this action, but, when we saw displaced people being attacked repeatedly and no protections offered after a peacekeeping mission finishes, yes, we escalated that in private. The context of many humanitarian organisations, including ours, has not been so welcome in Sudan. We and many other international NGOs were expelled from the country 13 or 14 years ago. We were concerned about what the repercussions would be of raising this, but we felt that it was an ethical viewpoint to escalate in private at the time.

Q9 **Chair:** Will, history will show that you did the right thing. You cannot turn a blind eye to it, and it rather feels as though the international community has made a decision that these conflicts happen on the margins and that that is normal, but it is not.

Kholood Khair: You just made the point that I was going to make.

Chair: You can make it more eloquently than me.

Kholood Khair: Will also underscored the point that the diplomatic community was caught unawares by this, precisely because they did not listen to humanitarian organisations, which are often the same humanitarian organisations that they fund. There just was no feedback



loop there from what is happening on the ground, as experienced and witnessed by these humanitarian organisations, making it up to the ears of embassies in the country, as well as to places like here and Whitehall. That is a grave error. Going forward, in terms of the humanitarian response, but also looking further down the line at the political moves, that needs to be strengthened.

Q10 Chair: The thing about what all of you are saying that challenges me is that the UK Government has the CSSF—the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund—which I believe Saferworld was a beneficiary of. That is specifically to work with civil society to put in those safeguarding pillars to strengthen the work that civil society does in holding those in power to account. It feels as though that investment either has not paid off or has not been listened to. Natalia and Basil, am I right that your organisation gets funding from that fund?

Basil Daffalla: Saferworld and the CSF have received funding from the UK CSSF. Unfortunately, this funding ceased in Sudan coming up to two years ago now. That being said, there was a continuation of different forms of peacebuilding funding on a slightly smaller scale.

You really touched on an important point there in terms of engaging with community initiatives and responses. The UK continues to fund these via Saferworld and other partners, but one thing that we are seeing now in the past month, following the evacuation and displacement of different populations, is these local, community-led responses coming to the fore and really becoming frontline responders, providing basic frontline services, evacuation, field hospitals and different kinds of response.

It is on us as international actors to really support these initiatives and to empower these different types of community-level, locally led responses. It is great that you made reference to the CSSF, because there are examples of how these local community peace initiatives are transpiring and transcending, whether this be locally negotiated ceasefires or the “no to war” campaign, as well as humanitarian responses in terms of collection sites and distribution for donations, and the provision of basic services.

We have an opportunity here to really reflect, as the international aid community, on how we can complement and contribute to these local, community-led initiatives. Over the last few years, particularly around the revolution, it transpired that there was this revitalisation of Sudanese civic actors and organisations, and there is still the opportunity for the aid sector to adapt to, contribute to and build on these initiatives and the momentum.

Chair: Let me pause you there, Basil. It would be very useful if the FCDO reflected on or maybe did an impact assessment on the consequences of cutting funding to you two years ago, and whether they would have been less caught by surprise if civil society had the voice and the attention of the international community, which seems so sadly lacking.



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Q11 Chris Law: I am glad that Sarah just made that point, because I am looking at the numbers. We have been hearing that people have been caught by surprise, and that there is a bit of a shock at the scale at the last minute. There was work under way, supported by the UK Government, through the international development community, and it was quite well funded. In 2021-22, it was £223 million. The following year, it was cut by 97.5%, which is enormous.

Kholood, is there a direct correlation between this enormous cut and the lack of communication and understanding coming more from the margins towards the embassies and diplomats? If so, how direct has it been?

Kholood Khair: The answer is a resounding yes. As Basil and Natalia have said, if there had been greater investment in reaching those voices and making them heard, perhaps they would have made it to the deliberation table at least.

There is another point to underscore here, which is that the embassy itself has been defunded somewhat. There is no defence attaché at the embassy. They are based in Cairo. Because of that, all of the military side of things was mostly missed by the UK Government, which had to rely on defence attachés from other embassies, who, of course, are not always going to share 100% of what they have found.

The other issue is that the merger seems to have brought a bit of havoc to the structure within the embassy. It was not a seamless transition, and that also impacted the extent to which the embassy was able to collate information and feed it in.

One thing that I would like to underscore relates to the senior leadership of the embassy. The ambassador, the deputy ambassador and the overseas security manager were away at the time that the fighting broke out. All of them clearly believed that it was perfectly fine to take leave at that time and that things were going to go according to plan. Obviously, they were not. There were political decisions made by the senior leadership of the embassy that did not take into account the ways in which things were progressing.

Similarly, the US ambassador was out of the country, so it is not unique to the UK, but funding played a role in ultimately getting to that position where the senior leadership of the embassy was just not informed of or unwilling to engage with what was going on on the ground.

Chair: We had invited the Foreign Affairs Select Committee to join us on this session. Unfortunately, they were unavailable, but we will pass those comments directly on to them, because I am quite sure that it will be of interest.

Q12 Chris Law: What you have just told us here is quite shocking. We have been talking about these cuts since they came in, and about the merger and the consequences. What I am hearing here is that these are real-time consequences on the ground. Is that right?



Kholood Khair: Yes, absolutely, and that will continue to be the case. The difficulty now is how the UK will mount a response to this on both the humanitarian and the diplomatic front, if, frankly, they do not have the staff, the capacity and the political will to do so.

Q13 **Chris Law:** Basil, I have a question for you, which goes back a little bit before the cuts. Can you tell me about what the UK Government and the international development community did with peacebuilding and stabilising measures such as intercommunal dialogue to prevent conflicts? Has the UK stepping away made a huge impact on where we are today?

Basil Daffalla: Pre 2019, we need to acknowledge that the aid sector in Sudan had been honed, operated and developed on a light scale since the mid-1980s. During that period, a system has been honed and developed that has made it quite restricted for some aid actors to operate in terms of processes and systems. A lot of peacebuilding funding previously was linked to humanitarian funding specifically. Post 2019, there was a shift and an opportunity to really expand on local, community-led peacebuilding.

Linking this to the springboard that the 2019 revolution provided, more could have been done across the board by the international community to really engage with these local community actors particularly in the peripheries and across some states. It was potentially a top-down approach and one that relied very much on international actors for the most part, without really contextualising it, not only at the Sudan level but also at the local level in terms of understanding the local context and designing and supporting local initiatives that are organic and have springboarded and engaged more with the local populations.

Q14 **Chris Law:** Natalia, I know that you want to come in, but I might just add a question. Why did these measures fail to prevent the crisis?

Natalia Chan: On the first point about the impact of the cuts, it is important to also note that, even though the CSSF was cut, FCDO staff in country did make the effort to try to continue a peacebuilding portfolio. There was funding going towards peacebuilding work in Sudan—for example, in Darfur, in community-led peace processes. It needs to be recognised that there was that continued recognition of the need for those kinds of local peace initiatives.

That has only become even more evident as this conflict has unfolded. Some of the peace initiatives that have kicked in at local level have had important impacts such as discouraging groups from mobilising to join the fighting, or being able to mediate temporary truces between parties. It is important that that peacebuilding piece of the puzzle is not forgotten. Especially as the scale of the humanitarian needs will rise, there is going to be increasing pressure for funding to go towards the humanitarian response.

This is also a really important opportunity to look at how the aid system works in Sudan and to think about more integrated approaches to the



response as well. We talk about this humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Now is the chance to really put that into practice and to think about how aid actors can work across silos to address some of the multifaceted needs that are coming up.

Q15 Chair: Would you not have expected to have had that plan in place before, rather than trying to now do it on the hoof, when we have been investing in this sort of work for a long time?

Natalia Chan: Part of that is linked to the global aid system and how it functions. It has historically been very siloed in approach, and there has not necessarily been a lot of working across different technical expertise. There has been some increasing movement towards doing more of that, but there is still a long way to go.

Will Carter: Thank you for your questions, Sarah and Chris, on the impacts of cuts. The UK is still blessed with talented civil servants. In terms of the humanitarian advisers at the embassy, they are engaged on this topic. They had planned in their business case, which was supposed to be funded as of last year, for a change at least to provide more funding of what was left into humanitarian protection activities to help survivors—women, girls and displaced people who have survived the conflict.

They did try to put that in, and then, with the pauses or lack of clarity and not signing off on the business case, it was rolled over and was then much smaller. They were beginning to look at investment in certain mechanisms that would have not just provided an early warning but also begun to place certain services and capacities on the ground. They were engaged on that topic, but the funding never came through.

NRC is still part of an NGO consortium that the UK is, hopefully, going to fund. It would have been better if it was funded last year to the full amount and not to the 15% that it has given now, in order to provide basic protection services. There was a huge funding drop, but I did see some adaptive management from your staff at the embassy, and we are appreciative of that.

The UK should have been an aid and humanitarian superpower. A lot of donors look to the UK as being supposed to be a key humanitarian donor in Sudan. When the UK's overall aid budgets were dropped, it had a massive impact in neglected countries such as Sudan.

To Chris's point, there was some investment, but it perhaps was not necessarily on the issues that were emerging. There was about to be investment in some of those to a small extent, but there were delays and, in the end, they were not being contracted, so we could not put these things in place before it reached what we have today.

Q16 Chris Law: I have been hearing reports that mass atrocities are potentially taking place in Sudan. Are you concerned that there are mass atrocities, or are these reports still speculative? Are you concerned that



they are likely to happen in the future?

Kholood Khair: Yes, I am quite sure that mass atrocities have already happened. One tragic advantage of this war is that it is on social media, and so we get real-time documentation of a lot of the atrocities that have been committed. We have seen the Sudan armed forces bomb hospitals, because the paramilitary forces have taken them over. Of course, that infrastructure is key.

Recently, the largest orthopaedic surgery hospital was bombed and, seemingly, no other option was found. It was very easy for the Sudan armed forces to make that decision to bomb hospitals. We have seen churches and mosques sacked, and the same houses being taken over. There is very little respect for international humanitarian law.

Frankly, the mediation talks that we have seen recently have, effectively, rubberstamped the two sides as legitimate combatants rather than enforcing some kind of mechanism by which they must adhere to international humanitarian law. Not only have we seen atrocities take place, but we will probably see many more.

Basil Daffalla: I am unable to answer that question but would be happy to write to the Committee later.

Q17 **Mrs Latham:** I wonder if the three gentlemen who are in country could elaborate and update us on the current humanitarian situation in Sudan and neighbouring countries.

Eddie Rowe: As you know, the World Food Programme was providing lifesaving assistance even before the conflict. We had just completed our annual comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis, which projected about 16.1 million people who would find it very difficult to have a meal a day. That is in consonance with the hunger season here.

Immediately after the conflict, one of the principal effects was the massive displacements of residents, not necessarily predominantly in Khartoum, but also, if we look at the Darfurs, we recognise that close to a million are already displaced, either within or out of Sudan.

We are fortunate that there are what one would call relatively safe states, predominantly in the east of the country, where most of these newly displaced were able to seek safe havens. We have been able to immediately resume food assistance to these displaced, but we should recognise that, even before the conflict, we had about 1.1 million refugees in Sudan, and about 3.7 million displaced people in camps. Quite apart from that particular caseload, we are looking at another 1 million newly displaced, about 70% of whom are in the eastern region, but we have been able to ramp up some lifesaving assistance.

In fact, as I speak today, we have been able to reach just under 200,000 people—a combination of refugees and pre-existing and newly displaced IDPs, and those within selected host communities. We will continue to



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look at windows of opportunity. Access would be our biggest challenge, but we are hopeful that, even as we struggle to reach some of these critical locations, like the Darfurs, we were fortunate in the sense that we usually pre-position food, simply because of access constraints during the rainy season. There are certain locations in the Darfurs where, together with a few of our partners who are still on the ground, we are looking at providing much-needed lifesaving assistance in some of these locations.

Will Carter: To build on what my colleague Eddie has said, there has been a massive increase in suffering in the country. To take a step back, five weeks ago, just before this all happened, Sudan was already one of the largest and most neglected humanitarian crises in the world. Some 16 million to 17 million people in Sudan—that is one in three—were deemed to need humanitarian assistance in the country.

The two main drivers were longer-term conflicts and a food insecurity situation. That was the starting point before we saw an armed force begin to bomb its own capital city and heavy urban warfare in Khartoum and other states. Before, we also saw very disturbing levels of internecine conflict around Darfur.

Right now, we already see, even with a very limited capacity to count, register or assist, 1 million people displaced. This is likely to be an underestimate and there are no signs that the conflict will abate. With a capital city of 7 million people that has been bombed relentlessly for the last 31 days or so, I am sure that they will be into the millions, and maybe that one-in-three number will be one in two or two in three before the year is out. There is a very high level of humanitarian need in the country.

We are worried particularly about the situation in Darfur. As Eddie said, there are states where we can scale up, but, at the moment, there is very limited operational capacity to help the people of Darfur, and we are very worried about their safety and about them getting even basic assistance.

The other knock-on effect of this conflict playing out in the capital city, already with it being a military junta that controls the country, is that many state institutions and other critical services and utilities, such as the health sector, banking provisions and telecommunications, have gone down. Aside from the immediate impacts of conflict such as people being displaced or trapped, we are faced with probably huge issues around access to and availability of food, the provision of healthcare across the country, and basic services and utilities not being provided. It will quickly go into a failed state scenario if it is not resolved, and it does not look like either of the main belligerents are agreeing to step down at the moment.

We are already seeing a huge increase in very acute needs. In terms of elsewhere in the region, as Eddie said, at least 200,000 people have gone to many bordering countries, many of which also have their own humanitarian issues and frailties as well. I should say that Sudan was the second largest host of refugees on the continent, with over 1.1 million



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refugees from South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. These are all people who sought safety in Sudan, and we are now seeing them having to face the awful dilemma of returning to the places that they have fled from or staying with very limited assistance or protections inside Sudan.

Just from a refugee aspect, there are already large numbers. We will then have to see what the stability of surrounding countries is. South Sudan was economically dependent on transporting its oil through Sudan as a means of shoring up its national economy, and many parts of the northern half of South Sudan were dependent upon food that came through Sudan. We are likely to see region-wide implications from what is unravelling right now.

Basil Daffalla: Just to build on Will's point, although Khartoum is a hotspot for the conflict and there is substantial displacement from Khartoum, we should not let this shift our focus purely to Khartoum. Will made reference to Darfur, especially with the ongoing fighting in West Darfur. We are seeing substantial displacement to other areas of Sudan and to neighbouring countries, based on geographic proximity, financial capacity or familial ties.

Just to build on this, it requires a shift in the approach of the aid sector. In the centre and in the north of Sudan, the bulk of the displacement is to urban centres, with people residing with extended family or friends, or in private rented accommodation. As time goes by and as this crisis continues, capacity will dwindle and we will see need potentially increase in different locations, with potentially an invisible urban population, which is currently hosting the bulk of displacement from Khartoum specifically.

On the point made about institutions, and state institutions especially, it is really valid in terms of the impact as well as the capacity to respond. I want to echo the point that communities are acting as first responders through different entities such as local committees, unions, voluntary groups and civil society organisations. They are filling a gap currently left by the aid sector and by some institutions.

I really want to emphasise this point right now, because, as we focus on displacement numbers and a response, we have to navigate some immense challenges and risks that come with operating in the environment in Sudan. There is pressure to respond with some extreme urgency, but we need to acknowledge that any decisions taken now will have long-term implications for the future of Sudan, whether in terms of the aid sector and international development or more broadly.

Q18 **Mr Sharma:** What specific challenges do women and girls face?

Will Carter: There are long-term or chronic issues, and then there are issues generated by the humanitarian situation in the country. I can caveat this by saying that we are not a specialist in issues of gender-based violence, but we can make some general observations of what is seen.



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Many conflicts, but especially urban ones, create a lot of opportunity for sexual violence and, unfortunately, a lot of risks as well. There is very limited capacity to monitor or even support survivors right now in Khartoum, and the displacement context generates these risks as well. At the moment, there is a large urban displacement within the country.

This is armed conflict and there are huge risks around the issues of sexual violence and gender-based violence within this, which are likely to worsen. In terms of access to healthcare, there are different needs between genders, with an overall limitation in terms of maternal resources and capacities. This is also likely to have a lot of impact on women and girls and on children. We have not yet begun to see the tip of the iceberg in terms of what this will mean for everyone at large, but especially women and girls.

In terms of children, this is a very young country, as many countries on the continent are. Colleagues at UNICEF mentioned that almost 500,000 children have been forced to flee their homes, and this is a hugely traumatic period for them. Many have gone from what was a fairly stable urban situation, where conflict was not part of life, and now they have had air strikes, no food or connectivity, separated families and awful choices on whether to move or to stay, and which family members stay or go. There is then the huge uncertainty of where they are and where they are going. Aside from the survival needs, it is no doubt a hugely traumatic experience for many children.

I spoke briefly about the number of refugees that Sudan was generously hosting. A majority—at least 75%—of them in the first place were women and children. These are people who sought safety, mostly women and children, without a breadwinner necessarily, having to flee for their lives. Again it is a huge risk to them, and they no doubt have huge anxieties.

Kholood Khair: It is important to remember that, for all the people who are leaving Khartoum, there is a much larger proportion of people who are staying, mostly because they lack the financial means to leave or because, as women tend to be globally, they are caregivers to elderly people or young children and have stayed behind with them. That opens up a lot of vulnerability to sexual assault in their homes—and we have seen reports of this—committed mostly by the paramilitary forces that have been invading people's homes.

The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa—the SIHA network—which is a regional women's organisation, has been tracking the rates of sexual assault. Hadhreen, which is a community-based organisation, has been doing the same. UNFPA has also announced that it is giving out rape kits, which means that we now have very well-documented cases of sexual assault. As the rule of law continues to disintegrate, and as the siege that is taking over in Khartoum continues, we will probably see more and more of that, so it does require special attention.



Q19 **Mr Sharma:** How is your organisation helping to provide humanitarian assistance?

Eddie Rowe: The very week this conflict broke out, if you recall, we had a tragic incident in which we lost three of our staff who were providing food assistance to ensure that communities received food before the Eid holidays.

We had to suspend operations on the 16th, which was just a day after the conflict broke out on the 15th, but, with the massive scale of displacement, we had to resume our assistance, focusing on areas where there is a congregation of displaced people, but more so some of the pre-existing food-insecure communities. For example, we are now providing food assistance in five states, targeting about 400,000 people, including newly displaced refugees and some host communities.

As I mentioned, Darfur is a major challenge for us, but, luckily, in some of the states in Darfur, for example, we just completed food distribution in North Darfur, in Al Fashir, where we were able to reach about 135,000 internally displaced people who are living in camps. We are also planning to do the same in five other localities, where we had pre-positioned food in advance of the rainy season.

We estimate that, within the next two to three weeks, given the context and as we negotiate access, we should be able to reach about a million people, and we continue to negotiate access through the local players in some of these hotspot locations.

We talked about the movement of Sudanese out of Sudan. For example, in Chad, our office is now providing much-needed lifesaving assistance to the number of Sudanese who manage to cross over, and the same is being done for those who moved into Egypt as well as into South Sudan.

Our biggest challenge is twofold. We have the security challenge, but, as we all know, there are a number of locations that we cannot access during this time of the year and, as such, we would usually pre-position food to ensure that, when the rains start, even if we cannot access these locations, our partners who are based in some of these locations are able to provide assistance during this hunger period, which is from June until October.

Our focus now is to see how best we can come up with strategies that enable us to have access. We are mindful of the dynamics in certain locations, but also look at taking advantage of any window of opportunity. At the moment, we have stocks that will last for up to at least three months and cover over 2 million people. Access is the major constraint that we are negotiating.

Q20 **Chair:** You mentioned that people were fleeing to different countries, so is that having a knock-on humanitarian effect in other parts of the world?

Eddie Rowe: Yes, most definitely. For example, my colleague Will mentioned the fact that, economically, South Sudan relies heavily on Sudan for passage of its oil. More importantly, we should recognise that



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the largest sorghum-producing country in Africa is Sudan. Every year, we procure 150,000 metric tonnes of sorghum for South Sudan, which also uses it as its staple food.

Now that we have this conflict, South Sudan will be deprived of sorghum, simply because we are looking at a situation now where farmers will not be able to produce sorghum and, therefore, South Sudan will not be able to procure it to feed its people as well as the displaced Sudanese who are now moving into South Sudan. We have a knock-on effect.

In terms of Ethiopia, one of its principal routes for its import of wheat is from Port Sudan via Gallabat. We know that, since last year, that has not happened, simply because of the conflict in the border areas, but there is definitely a major impact on surrounding countries.

Will Carter: There are a number of agencies and NGOs that did not leave. We have had to relocate out of Khartoum. There have been some huge operational challenges—not just the security environment in parts, but the closure of banking services has meant that we have been unable to have cash to operate, to purchase supplies or to pay staff, so it has been fairly tough going.

As my colleague Basil from the Conflict Sensitivity Facility mentioned, local communities are leading the response in the absence, which needs to be supported as we go forward. It is also not sufficient by itself, and we need a larger-scale aid operation to fill in those gaps and to help supplement them.

Our organisation has struggled. We still have 10 international staff in White Nile, where the largest amount of internal displacement is currently being reported by the International Organization for Migration, and in Gedaref, in eastern Sudan. So far, we have conducted assessments and have provided, to be honest, a very small amount of support for communal kitchens in some of the highest areas of displacement, but we are mobilising now to scale up assistance initially to 300,000 people who have fled Khartoum, with cash, shelter and psychosocial support for children as our main areas of intervention.

It is important to say that there are five or six emergency response organisations still very much present, and we are also about to scale up. What you hear from Eddie and myself is part of this, but I wanted to emphasise what my colleague Basil said, which is that it has been a difficult starting point. Communities need to be supported. They have already started on things, and the aid response needs to come in. We hope to support that as well as complementing the larger-scale aid response.

Basil Daffalla: Thank you, Will and Eddie, for making reference to the updates. In addition to the fantastic job that aid actors are doing under difficult circumstances, I just really want to take the opportunity once again—I know I have mentioned this already—to emphasise the unprecedented, fantastic job that local communities and local responders



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are doing across the board in Sudan in terms of the gaps left around institutions and first aid first responders.

Local communities and groups are providing healthcare, shelter assistance and basic needs assistance across the board, and that really needs to be an integral part of any conversations that we are having and decisions that we are taking in terms of aid policy towards Sudan and how we can complement this, but also making reference to the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus that Natalia made reference to earlier. These organisations and groups have lived experience of applying different solutions to crises, particularly multifaceted crises across humanitarian needs, collapsing public services, economic deterioration and increased pressure on resilience and other coping strategies.

We need keep that in mind, be nimble and adjust our own systems. We need to shift from that siloed approach that Natalia made reference to, deepen our understanding and understand how we can complement and build on this. We feel like the conversations and the decisions we are now making in terms of policy in Sudan are an opportunity to shift and build on this.

Q21 Mr Sharma: How can the UK work with the international community, political and military factions in Sudan and the Sudanese people to help overcome those barriers to providing humanitarian assistance? That is quite a long question.

Kholood Khair: It is a very big question, but it is also an important one. Recognising what Basil and Will have put on the table, which is that most of the humanitarian support is being done by local communities, the agreement that was signed in Jeddah should have put in place some extra support in areas such as visas, for international organisations to be able to bring in external actors to help get supplies in country and not just to Port Sudan, which is on the coast. It should also have laid the framework for the how of these humanitarian corridors, effectively. It has not done that. Effectively, we have not gone anywhere very far.

The UK Government have a role to play both in the Quad and in the Troika, which are two political bodies that have long sponsored democratic transformation, et cetera, in Sudan. The UK has a role, as a member of those groups, to push for a different way of doing humanitarian aid, frankly. The same rules and the same orthodoxies that we saw before simply will not apply, both on the humanitarian front and the diplomatic front.

There is a concern right now that the United States, both in the Jeddah talks and in general, has not been pursuing the right policy approach to what is going on in Sudan. It has favoured the generals far too much. It has allowed regional actors with whom it is allied to dictate the terms of engagement on Sudan. The UK needs to mitigate that massively.



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Standing shoulder to shoulder with the Americans does not imply blindly following poor policy approaches.

The UK has a big role to play because potentially, as Natalia mentioned earlier, the embassy is quite well staffed, far more so than the US and other embassies. There is a wide group of people who could be brought to bear on this kind of thinking, and that is necessary.

Eddie Rowe: From my engagement, the role of FCDO since the coup of 2021 should be recognised. In fact, they were the pioneers of the Friends of Sudan. I recall the director of FCDO rallying other donors and partners to constitute the Friends of Sudan in order to look into not just the political situation but the whole spectrum of problems in Sudan.

It is sad that we have had to deal with this situation. After the engagement of the Friends of Sudan and the trilateral mechanism, the expectation was that there would be a breakthrough. When my colleagues talk about the surprise, it is not that everybody thought things would work out well; we were expecting a breakthrough through this framework agreement, which might have then led to further engagement in finding a lasting solution in Sudan, both politically as well as economically.

From my interaction with FCDO, I was very much aware of the role FCDO was playing specifically with Friends of Sudan in rallying other partners to find viable options for a lasting solution in Sudan.

Q22 **Chair:** Kholood, I have one additional question that follows on from what you said. There was an excellent article in the *New Humanitarian* this morning. It was basically implying that there was not enough trust in the international community to give the resources to the organisations on the ground. Is that something that you recognise?

Has the same thing been happening? Have people on the ground been trying to tell the international community—you referenced this earlier—about what was happening and about the possible solutions? Has that gone up the chain as much as the resources have come down the chain?

Kholood Khair: No, not at all. The resistance committees that are now at the forefront of the humanitarian response are political bodies. They have taken on this humanitarian role because they are very close to communities, because they have the trust of the local communities and because they are able to recognise where the safe routes are far better than any other actor, humanitarian or otherwise.

They have fallen into this role, but they are legitimate political bodies that have been ignored, frankly, in all the political processes that have taken place since the fall of Omar al-Bashir in 2019. There needs to be a recognition of the role they can play without trying to make them into NGOs. That would effectively render them useless. They are not there to be implementing partners for humanitarian agencies.



The equation should be flipped on its head. The resistance committees should be leading. Their way of working and their methodologies should lead the humanitarian response, and the international NGOs and the UN should follow, not the other way around. We need to flip that formula on its head.

On the political side, where the conversations are currently around the ceasefire and then later on the political conversation, those resistance committees, as well as other actors such as unions, political parties and social groups, need to be engaged as early as possible. It is an absolute shambles that they were not engaged prior to this on the talks about humanitarian co-ordination during the Jeddah talks because they are the ones who are at the forefront of this.

Currently, the international community, particularly led by Saudi Arabia and the United States, seems to render them a sort of side show to the main act, which is the generals. That is exactly the dynamic that led us to where we are, and we should not be reproducing that kind of engagement.

Q23 Chair: I have to ask the question that is screaming to me. This all feels very colonial.

Kholood Khair: That is because it is. There is mistrust. You mentioned the article in the *New Humanitarian*. There is mistrust, and there is also a lack of understanding about how these communities and resistance committees work.

State-based organisations, whether they are bilaterals or multilaterals, do not understand amorphous social and political groupings like the resistance committees. That does not mean they should not make the effort to do so. Frankly, they have had four years to learn how to engage with these groups to the best of their abilities, respecting the ways that these groups have worked. That has not happened.

Frankly, the international community is playing catch-up now. This is the absolute worst time to be learning on the job and trying to cobble something together to engage with them properly, but it has to be done.

Q24 Kate Osamor: Eddie, I wanted to direct my question to you. You spoke about the impact the displacement crisis is having on neighbouring countries, and you referred quite eloquently to South Sudan and the possible impact on food insecurity. Would you be able to speak about the other neighbouring countries? I am thinking about Ethiopia, Chad, Eritrea, Central African Republic and Libya. Are you particularly worried about any of those countries, their current situation and how this displacement could impact on their stability?

Eddie Rowe: Most definitely, yes. We are seeing this play out in the countries you have just highlighted, but we should look at these countries in isolation.



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Even though there is a common impact of having to accommodate and provide basic services, there has, for example, been a longstanding relationship between the Sudanese and the Egyptians. In fact, quite a number of Sudanese people have relatives who live in Egypt. If I am not mistaken, before the conflict there were already 5 million Sudanese living in Egypt.

While the situation will not be as drastic in Egypt, places like Chad and South Sudan will certainly feel the brunt. In fact, in the next couple of days UNHCR will be launching a regional appeal that is not just focused on the Sudan conflict. We know that Chad itself is hosting a number of refugees. South Sudan is hosting Sudanese people, who are also refugees in South Sudan. We know, for example, that in South Sudan there is major food insecurity for more than half of the population of South Sudan. Having newly displaced Sudanese in South Sudan would compound the food security situation in that country.

There will not be so much of an impact in Ethiopia because of course there were already some restrictions on border movement between Sudan and Ethiopia.

Q25 **Kate Osamor:** In your view, Eddie, what capacity and resources do the receiving countries in the region have to host refugees and to look after those who are returning?

Eddie Rowe: That is a good question. We know that since the start of the year South Sudan has been struggling with their humanitarian response plan, which is underfunded. The food security and livelihood cluster is also underfunded. With this crisis, South Sudan and Chad will certainly face an acute shortage of resources to meet not just food needs but also medical supplies and nutritional support.

We know there are going to be broader regional implications on resources specific to the fact that there are so many other crises across the globe. This just adds to the compounding situation. They are definitely struggling in terms of the resources to meet the increased needs that are unfolding.

Q26 **Kate Osamor:** Will, we do not have a lot of time, but, if you would like to say a couple of words, we would appreciate it.

Will Carter: I agree with my colleague Eddie. To answer your question, there are very limited resources and very scant hosting capacities. These are not easy parts of South Sudan and Chad to enter into. In fact, in South Sudan there was already an ongoing internal conflict in the areas that people have been forced to return to. There is not just a low hosting capacity but a risky journey as well. The responses are underfunded.

Natalia Chan: As my colleague Eddie has reminded us, each of these countries has their own problems and their own humanitarian responses. There are also different conflict dynamics and tensions along the border with Sudan and Ethiopia, for example. Therefore, there is even more



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reason for that aid response to be conflict-sensitive in how it takes these different dynamics into account. The same response cannot be rolled out in each context because each context is quite different.

Similarly, Sudan itself is very different. Darfur is very different from the east. Therefore, how the response is scaled up to respond to the heightened needs needs to be strongly taken into account.

Kholood Khair: I would just like to clarify something briefly. Eddie said that it might be slightly easier for Egypt as it is such a close neighbour to Sudan. That is categorically not the case. We have seen some of the worst suffering in the people who have been trying to cross from Sudan into Egypt. The process should be visa-free or at least not very complex. Instead, it has been made much more difficult by the Egyptian authorities and the Sudanese authorities on the Sudanese side.

We have seen people die of starvation, thirst and lack of shelter. UNHCR has been very slow to engage on that border. That area absolutely needs a lot more focus.

Q27 **Kate Osamor:** I want to move on and ask one more question. This is to Will, Eddie and Kholood. Did you observe any early indications yourselves that a conflict would flare up? Did you report your concerns to partner Governments or to organisations in the international community? What response did you receive?

Kholood Khair: It is not an exaggeration to say that 46 million people saw this coming. I personally wrote two different analytical pieces on this. One of those was just after the coup. I said that the coup that was undertaken by both generals that are currently in conflict could not possibly serve them both and therefore confrontation would be coming.

We saw tensions spring up in June 2021 around the sale of drones, I believe, to one side over the other. Later on, since 5 December, the day of the signing of the framework agreement, we saw the tensions ratchet up and not simmer back down. Since December we have seen consistently high troop numbers coming into Khartoum. We have seen consistent rhetoric.

I wrote something again in March saying that this was something that would boil over very quickly. That made it to the attention of decision-makers, et cetera, but, as I said earlier and as has been corroborated by colleagues, the laser focus on the success of the framework agreement, despite the fact that it lacked broad support and that it was frankly unworkable, meant that the international community strode ahead on the belief that it would, despite all the odds, work out.

Q28 **Kate Osamor:** You never got a direct response to your calls of concern.

Kholood Khair: They were taken seriously because the evidence was there. It is quite a curious thing. The international community thought that it was being pragmatic in the way it engaged with the generals. It



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thought that side-lining the civilians was a price they were willing to pay to stabilise the relationship between the two generals.

There was an idealism inherent in that approach. The international community believed that these generals could be reformers; it believed they could be the kind of people who could shepherd in civilian and democratic Government, even though that was absolutely inimical to their interests. That is exactly the point that so many of us have made, but, again, it was not taken seriously.

Q29 Chris Law: I have a couple of questions to Basil and Will. First, what impact have the long-term challenges in Sudan, such as poverty, hunger and increasingly climate change, had on the severity of the current humanitarian crisis?

Basil Daffalla: We should not look at these as separate challenges that are in silos. They very much overlap. In the humanitarian sector, we have a tendency to be quite reactionary sometimes. If we look at a map in terms of cycles of displacement and the response in Sudan, the needs might differ, but the locations have been quite similar.

We need to look at these holistically and in terms of having locally led nexus-type responses. Many of these communities are the ones experiencing this. We need to look at changing some of the orthodoxies and processes we have in the aid system with regards to that. Those are all key factors and key points that we need to remember, but we should look at them separately in terms of the wider contextual dynamics and the wider needs.

Looking back at the Sudan response for the last few decades, there has been very little learning and reflection in terms of what lessons are, what responses have worked and how we can build and learn from this. We need to emphasise that point more.

Will Carter: The long-term situations of abject poverty in the country were extreme. Everyone is much more vulnerable. There was also macroeconomic mismanagement of the country, which saw the second-highest global inflation rate in the world, second only to Venezuela. At its peak, it was probably 10 times more than Zimbabwe. There was huge vulnerability in the population writ large.

In terms of climate and environmental drivers of conflicts—to an extent, I should say that we are not experts—especially for Darfur, with fewer land and livelihood resources there, there was increased competition between some of the main ethnic groups and constituencies there. Those were not necessarily the trigger of conflict but have contributed to a structural change. People are more vulnerable economically and in that climatic sense. Those are two parts of the overall march towards violence.

Just briefly on Kate's point, did we observe any early indications? Yes, after the coup we had a scenario-building workshop where we invited



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donor Governments, UN agencies and NGOs. This was clearly a scenario that was on the table as of March 2022. It was the worst-case scenario. It was the third of four scenarios that we modelled. We invested in emergency response and better operational security. It was difficult to get traction from the broader community on some of these topics.

Virendra, I did not answer your question earlier. What can the UK do now? There is a diplomatic leadership role to be played in influencing some of the regional sponsors of both belligerents, at least for humanitarian access but ideally also for some of the commitments to the Geneva Convention and the protection of civilians made in Jeddah last week.

Q30 **Chair:** Kholood, you were nodding a lot. Do you want to come in?

Kholood Khair: Will's last point is key. The UK has a position where it can, if it chooses to—and that is a big caveat—put pressure on regional actors that we know are supporting the two generals and effectively are therefore allowing this to become a much more protracted issue and a protracted conflict.

Right now we have two groups fighting it out in a civilian setting. That was the worst-case scenario until 15 April. The new worst-case scenario is an all-out civil war where civilians are being pulled, either forcibly or otherwise, into taking a side and becoming part of the conflict. We already see that in Darfur, mostly because of the breakdown of the rule of law. We could very well see that in Khartoum. All of the humanitarian indicators we have been speaking about will be much worse if that is the case.

Q31 **Chris Law:** If I can come back to you, Will, earlier on in this discussion we talked about the 97.5% cuts from the UK Government to Sudan. I wanted to ask what impact the reduction in UK aid has had since 2021. What impact has that had on efforts to promote sustainable development in the region?

Will Carter: As I say, the UK was one of the major humanitarian donors to Sudan. When the global policy changed or funding level changed, there was a very large fallout. I am sure hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people are worse off or without humanitarian assistance because of that.

Humanitarian advisers could not make investments they wanted to at the time, as they saw the situation changing. It was not just that fewer people assisted; the response was less strategic and agile than was needed.

In terms of looking back and looking forward as to what can be invested in, right now we are going towards the nadir. We think the conflict will get worse. We certainly should not have decades of unsustainable humanitarian assistance. The former executive director of the World Food Programme came to Sudan just before the civil war and said, "Sudan



should not have to receive millions of tonnes of food assistance. It should be producing and exporting food and supplying its own food assistance”.

When the dust has settled, there needs to be a different outlook on this. The UK is one of a few thought leaders in the humanitarian donor community, and we have a key technical leadership role to play in how this is envisaged.

Q32 Chair: Will, let me pause you there. I want to bring back Kholood and Natalia on the point Will has just made. The UK does have a very special role because we are the penholder in the UN Security Council. Could I ask both of you to make your closing plea to the UK Government? What should they be doing now, both immediately but also from a humanitarian and stabilisation viewpoint, to try to restore peace in Sudan?

Natalia Chan: Speaking more from the aid sector perspective, the UK has a lot of experience from its decades of aid response in Sudan. It has played and can play a very influential role in the aid sector. Even if, with the funding commitments, there is less funding available, it is also very influential when it comes to the pooled funds.

We need to consider the things we have been talking about here: reforming our aid approach, taking a bottom-up approach and utilising flexible funding that favours and empowers a locally led response that is really tailored to the context of Sudan. Those are things the UK should really be pushing for.

Just finally, this peace settlement approach is something that the international community consistently comes back to; it is not just the UK. In Sudan and South Sudan, we have seen successive attempts to roll out this peace agreement or peace settlement approach. It has not been working. It is a lot beyond the time we have left to discuss it, but we really need to think about what the alternative approach to that is. We need to think about something that puts citizens at the forefront, is more inclusive and so on. Those are things that we should be thinking about further as well.

Q33 Chair: I completely agree. Kholood, you get the last word.

Kholood Khair: I am not sure how meaningful this is now, but the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission, UNITAMS, is up for mandate review this June. Will made the point earlier that part of its mandate is to do with the protection of civilians. That needs to be looked at much more.

There is no political transition right now. There has not been since the coup. UNITAMS has been very late in recognising that. It needs to shift now and do whatever work it can—frankly, there is a large trust deficit between the people of Sudan and this UN mission—on the protection of civilians. That is key.



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As penholder, the UK needs to ensure that is something that is prioritised during mandate renewal discussions and that it makes it into the mandate itself. I realise that is difficult, particularly with the presence of Russia and China on the Security Council, but the UK must engage the A3+1, the African countries and the Caribbean countries to push for this. We have seen that, when the African countries lead on this or when they support this kind of change, Russia and China are less likely to veto it.

More importantly—this brings me to a broader point—the UK cannot work alone on this. It has to create critical mass within the international community to take some of these discussions forward. We have seen a lot of hobnobbing with the generals. We have seen lots of gentle handholding.

Eddie's colleague, the former chief of the WFP, was in Khartoum not so long ago, as Will said, talking about how Sudan should be the breadbasket of the world. He was also having dinner with the generals very publicly, and he received the highest civilian award, the Order of the Two Niles, from them. That is not the kind of engagement—

Q34 **Chair:** They are not here to be able to give their side of the story. There might be a very different reasoning behind that, but I take your point.

Kholood Khair: There needs to be a shift in the engagement. The sort of engagement we have seen with the generals cannot stand anymore. They have proven beyond all doubt that they cannot lead the country towards where we want it to go, with civilian democratic change, and therefore the civilians should be, as they have been in Libya, the main act in the peace talks and the mediation, not the side act.

The generals should take a back seat because, frankly, they have shown that they cannot be trusted to shepherd Sudan in a peaceful direction. The UK could make a very strong case that the kind of approach we have seen the UN take in Libya should be the way UNITAMS leads that negotiation.

Chair: Thank you very much. We will share those points with the Foreign Affairs Committee as well. I need all of you to know that we wrestled with having this session because a lot of you are in the region, you have family, friends and colleagues there, and this is very much a live issue.

We are incredibly grateful that you have made the time to speak to us. The evidence you have given us is very powerful, and we will do all we can to amplify it, to try to create lasting peace in the region and allow a country that should flourish to flourish. Thank you so much for your time.