



# Sudan Knowledge Centre

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## **Statement on the Conclusion of the Ceasefire Talks on Sudan**

On Friday, 23 August 2024, the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) issued a statement marking the conclusion of the ceasefire talks between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This round of talks is the most recent internationally brokered effort to end the humanitarian crisis in Sudan. ALPS is a coalition founded by the governments of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United States of America, in addition to the African Union and the United Nations. The group targets to engage in political and diplomatic efforts on the crisis in Sudan and intends to develop concrete proposals for action by the parties to the armed conflict in the country aiming at protecting civilians and improving inflow of humanitarian aid.

The ceasefire talks, initially planned to start on 14 August 2024, which were attended by the RSF and boycotted by SAF, have achieved partial success. In reality, SAF refused to attend in-person for direct negotiations and preferred to engage through telecommunication means thus severely limiting progress on the discussion of matters of substance. However, the mediators should be commended for their patience, courage, diplomatic skills and abilities to succeed in navigating through troubled waters. They should be praised for securing promises from SAF and RSF that they guarantee safe and sustained humanitarian access, to reopen and expand critical humanitarian access routes and to enhance the protection of civilians, particularly women and girls. In this context air delivery of relief material is a key option and should have been prioritized, particularly to reach the needy people in isolated enclaves and hard-to-access areas due to the rainy season and militia activities.

It is also noteworthy that a framework for monitoring adherence to the “Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan” of 11 May 2023 and any future agreements has been established. This is a significant step for scrutiny and monitoring adherence of SAF and RSF to their commitments. One of the key provisions of the Jeddah Declaration is operative paragraph 7 which states that: *“In furtherance of the principles and commitments contained herein, we commit to prioritizing discussions to achieve a short-term ceasefire to facilitate the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance and restoration of essential services, and we commit to scheduling subsequent expanded discussions to achieve a permanent cessation of hostilities.”* The attitude of SAF towards the ceasefire talks and adherence to this provision had been characterized by intransigence and evasiveness. It is ironic that persuading SAF to promise to save the lives of millions of their citizens that are trapped in the conflict zones is considered an outstanding achievement for the mediators.

The main concern is SAF's refusal to sit at the negotiation table and agree with RSF on a short-term ceasefire arrangement that puts a halt to hostilities for humanitarian purposes. The short-term ceasefire arrangement could lead to a comprehensive cessation of hostilities agreement, build trust and eventually lay down the foundation for a peace process that ends the fighting and destruction of Sudan. In the absence of a binding ceasefire agreement, the limited success achieved remains uncertain and shaky. Previous experience showed that neither party fully respected its commitments to protect civilians, ease the humanitarian crisis or cease military activities, especially indiscriminate attacks against civilian targets.

The two parties repeatedly violated the Jeddah Declaration and refused to head several binding resolutions adopted by the African Union and the United Nations. These widely supported measures include Communiqué PSC/HoSG/COMM.1218 (2024) adopted by the AU Peace and Security Council at its 1218<sup>th</sup> meeting held at the level of Heads of State on 21 June 2024 as well as resolution 2724(2024) adopted by the UN Security Council on 8 March 2024, and which demands an immediate and urgent cessation of hostilities in Sudan during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. This is why the mediators and ALPS should remain vigilant and continue to intensify their efforts and to explore ways for achieving a binding and closely monitored ceasefire agreement.

The reality on the ground suggests that the outcomes of the promises made by the parties to the armed conflict in Sudan are unpredictable. Military confrontations on the ground continue unabated with frequent intensification of military operations, especially aerial bombardment, shelling by mortars and heavy artillery and besieging of major cities. Armed militiamen and militant groups affiliated with the two parties are actively participating in the confrontations. These groups are accused of committing massive atrocities and human right abuses against combatants and civilians alike, including killing and summary executions, arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment of detainees as well as largescale looting and war booty.

Indiscriminate aerial bombardment remains to be the deadliest and intensively used tactic in the military confrontations between SAF and RSF. Since the outbreak of the fighting on 15 April 2023, barely a week passed by without aerial attacks against civilian areas. SAF heavily depends on bombardments by military jets while RSF uses different types of artillery and mortars with reported use of attack drones and high explosive incendiary projectiles by the two parties. Although SAF purports to be targeting RSF soldiers and military installations by aerial bombardment yet most casualties are among the civilian population. SAF and the air force mainly use unguided barrel bombs filled with shrapnel and TNT explosives. The use of such blind cluster bombs inflicts heavy casualties in targeted civilian areas and causes largescale destruction of properties and displacement of people. In addition to private homes and buildings, the aerial bombardment and shelling by artillery specifically target hospitals, marketplaces, bridges, civilian infrastructure such as electric power stations, petrol and gas reservoirs, water sources, schools, IDPs' dwellings and places of worship in densely populated areas in different parts of Sudan, especially Darfur.

With the limited success of the ceasefire talks between SAF and RSF and in the absence of alternative arrangement for protection of civilians, the world should prepare itself for more violence and deterioration of the humanitarian crisis. Military attacks against civilians are abhorrent crimes in international law amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes under the 4 Geneva Conventions of 1949. By ordaining unwarranted attacks against civilian targets and non-combatants, the parties to the armed conflict in Sudan violate article 3 which

is common to the 4 Geneva Conventions as well as several UN Security Council (UNSC) measures, most recently resolution 2724(2024) of March 2024, which demands an immediate and urgent cessation of hostilities in Sudan during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

SKC renews its previous calls and those of a multitude of civil society groups that all efforts be made in order to end the man-made humanitarian crisis in Sudan. Foremost priority is the delivery of humanitarian assistance and relief to the millions of starving Sudanese in different parts of the country, notably in the IDP camps in Darfur. SKC wishes to reiterate the following recommendations:

1. The warring parties in Sudan respect the country's obligations under international humanitarian law, particularly regarding the protection of civilians and that they cease all military confrontations. SAF puts an immediate end to aerial bombardment of civilian targets and the RSF ends shelling in densely populated areas.
2. The parties must fully respect the provision of paragraph 7 of the Jeddah Declaration and resume ceasefire talks without delay. They should commit themselves to ending the immeasurable suffering of millions of Sudanese that live in precarious humanitarian conditions, lacking lifesaving daily needs and facing fear, agony and starvation.
3. The RSF's positive engagement in the ceasefire talks and its openness for cooperation with the international community are welcome goodwill gestures that need to be followed up by effective and sustained concrete action on the ground. They should reign in militia groups that are specialized in looting in areas under their control.
4. SAF must desist from its defiant and confrontational approach with those who endeavor for peace in Sudan. It must place the interests of millions of innocent Sudanese who suffer the horrors of war and starvation at the top of its agenda and meet its legal and moral obligations to protect civilians all over the country without discrimination on any ground as to ethnicity or regional origin. The religion of Islam abhors war mongering, aggressions and transgressions against non-combatants, notably women and children (Surah Al-Baqarah verse 190).
5. ALPS and the international community at large are encouraged to take robust action to protect civilians in Sudan, notably by imposing no-fly zones. Additional measures are needed to ensure that the parties comply with all previous UNSC resolutions. Concrete measures should be taken to ensure timely delivery of food and relief material, including by air drops, particularly to the needy people in isolated enclaves or areas that are difficult to access to insecurity and the rainy season.
6. The donor community is requested to urgently honour their financial commitments and pledges made in Paris on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024. They are further encouraged to consider providing additional funding for the humanitarian work and to expedite efforts to facilitate the delivery of the necessary humanitarian assistance and relief material to areas affected by famine in Darfur and other parts of the country.

28 August 2024