



Sudan Knowledge Centre

"Oh Burhan ... Oh Burhan ... we are the women of Sudan ... we are tired ... Oh Burhan ... we have no homes ... we are on the streets ... Oh Burhan ... we are devastated... no war ... Oh Burhan ... no war."

Plea from crying Sudanese women in Goz Hindi village, Merowe Locality.

The above heart-breaking plea of a group of crying Sudanese women directly addressed to General Al-Burhan on 29 August 2024, when he visited Merowe Locality, Northern State, 330km north of Khartoum. The tears and voices of these innocent mothers have loudly articulated a humane and moral message. This earnest and courageous cry, which General Al-Burhan chose to ignore, speaks for millions of Sudanese civilians that have seen their lives shattered by the ongoing military confrontations between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Now they forcefully call for an immediate end to the war and large-scale world efforts to address the growing catastrophic humanitarian crisis, which is a fratricidal enterprise designed and executed by Sudanese hands.

After 16 months of fierce fighting between SAF and the RSF, Sudan is on the verge of disintegration. Countless homes, means of production, assets and properties are being looted or burned to the ground. Public services and infrastructure, including hospitals, food stores, water sources, marketplaces, schools, bridges, etc. are indiscriminately destroyed by military operations, especially aerial bombardment by SAF's military and shelling by heavy artillery by both parties to the armed conflict. The state apparatus has all but collapsed thus severely affecting health, educational and other essential public service sectors in the capital Khartoum and in the states that are hard hit by military activities. About 70% of the country's hospitals and medical centres are out of service. The law enforcement and correctional systems barely exist as the national police force has no presence in most parts of the country. The main prisons were emptied from all common law offenders, including convicted criminals. Another disturbing feature of the armed conflict in Sudan is that more than 80% of elementary and secondary schools are closed for the second successive year and the same situation is faced by universities and higher education institutions.

The National Treasury is bankrupt with the loss of important sources of revenues and external development aid funding. The result is that thousands of government employees, including army soldiers, did not receive their salaries for several months. The agricultural sector is deteriorating rapidly, and two growth and harvest seasons have largely failed in the country's main production regions. The decline in agricultural produce deprived millions of Sudanese of local sources of staple food and stripped the national treasury of important sources of income from taxes and alms money. The economy is shrinking with many production and export sectors out of service, which in return reduced the exports earnings in terms of customs and

excise duties from export/import proceeds etc. The economic hardships are insurmountable and hikes in the price of consumer-goods is unprecedented with millions of Sudanese no longer able to access food and other essential daily needs.

The result of this chaotic situation is that Sudan is currently home to more than 10 million internally displaced persons and it is the place of origin of more than two million refugees that crossed the country's international borders into neighbouring Egypt, Chad, Ethiopia etc. At least 26 million Sudanese are facing acute hunger while several thousands have died of famine. One of the reasons for the crisis is the unwillingness of SAF to deliver affordable food to its starving citizens or to allow relief agencies unhindered access to the needy people. Another reason is that the donor community is yet to show stronger leadership and political will in meeting their financial pledges. By late August 2024, the Sudan Humanitarian Appeal had collected US\$874 million out of the required amount of US\$2.7 billion, which represents 32% of the needed funding. Under the circumstances, it is projected that up to 2.5 million Sudanese could starve to death this year. This nightmare can only be avoided if relief efforts are expedited and expanded, and substantial funding and diplomatic backing is provided by the donor community.

One of the largely neglected repercussions of the ongoing armed conflict is the deep divide and polarization of Sudanese society along ethnic and regional lines. Hate speech and ethnic hatred are growing and gaining ground, which negatively affects the national fabric and social cohesion in a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Several incidents of mass displacement, targeted killings, extrajudicial executions and the desecration of dead bodies on ethnic and regional grounds were reported during this troubled period.

With this gloomy picture in focus, news surfaced that General Al-Burhan decided to form a "Transitional Government" to be seated in Port Sudan, which is the current administrative capital city of Sudan. It is believed that quarrels over quota distribution among political groups supporters of SAF's heavy-handed approach to the ongoing internal war, particularly some former insurgent groups signatories to the Juba Agreement on Peace in Sudan, is delaying the government formation process. Judging by the limited success of previous attempts to end the conflict and SAF's rejection of negotiation with RSF as demonstrated by SAF boycott of the Ceasefire Talks in Switzerland (August 2024), it can therefore be safely deduced that the intended government is to assume the functions of wartime government. Such a decision points to SAF's plans to further control what is left of Sudan's economy and ensures that all the remaining resources would be dedicated to the war machine and fighting efforts.

On the other hand, the RSF declared that it will also form a government in Khartoum if SAF goes ahead with its plans. A few hours after General Al-Burhan informed journalists in Port Sudan that he is in the process of forming a transitional technocrat government, a senior RSF advisor declared RSF's intention to form its own government. He went further and threatened that RSF will form a government in Khartoum in case SAF continued to refuse to sit at the negotiation table and work out a political settlement to the conflict. The RSF stated that the objective of their government is to protect civilians in areas under their control and to challenge the legitimacy of SAF to form a government. Such a scenario threatens to ignite the situation and could spell the beginning of the end of a unified Sudan.

The formation of two rival governments, one in Port Sudan and the other in Khartoum, at this juncture in Sudan's history is another blow to a divided nation. Such a decision will be a sad

replication of the Libyan and Yemeni experiences and deepen the widening dichotomy that exists in the country along ethnic and regional lines. The formation of a transitional government will severely affect Sudan's external relations and carries with it serious regional and international political and economic implications.

Conclusion

1. The top priority for the people of Sudan is peace and security, an immediate cessation of hostilities together with an end to armed attacks against civilians and a sustained and measurable ease of the humanitarian hardships through large-scale, resourceful and timely national and international relief efforts. It is the legal and moral responsibility of SAF and RSF to play a leading role in this respect, notably by facilitating unhindered access to the needy populations, and by releasing the stockpiles of relief material currently stored under their control, notably in Sudan's seaports.
2. The continuation of the military confrontations and the massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law associated with the conflict in addition to the deterioration of the overall situation in the country threaten Sudan's unity and territorial integrity. This threat also poses dangerous and serious challenges to regional and international peace and security.
3. In the last five years the Sudanese people made it clear that while they are yearning for peace and human dignity, they are cherishing democratic governance and civilian rule. However, since the military *coup d'état* on 25th October 2021, the country ended up facing the horrors of internal war and the tyranny of military rule.
4. The formation of a wartime government is an unwelcome step as it implies continuation of the *status quo* and thwarts any possibility of a negotiated settlement of the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Moreover, it will fuel the fighting and deepen the humanitarian crisis, complicate future solutions of the political conflict and consequently jeopardizes efforts for a return to democratic governance and civilian rule.
5. The international and regional communities are unlikely to recognize or support unwarranted decisions about the formation of a wartime government in Sudan. Normalization of the relationships between Sudan and the African Union as well as the relief of Sudan's crippling external debts are contingent upon the return to democratic governance and civilian rule.
6. The formation of two rival governments in Sudan will aggravate the country's political, diplomatic and economic isolation even if democratic rule is restored by one party or the other. Such a move is likely to prevent Sudan's National Treasury and banking system from receiving financial inflows and development assistance from the World Bank and its family of financial institutions, and from bilateral development partners for many years to come.

02 September 2024