

## **WPS Shared Commitments Press Stakeout**

**29 January 2024**

### **The situation of women and girls in Sudan**

We, the eleven Security Council signatories of the Statement of Shared Commitments for the principles of Women, Peace, and Security — Ecuador, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own country France — have come together to express our deepest concerns regarding the situation of women and girls in Sudan.

We would like to emphasize four key aspects.

Firstly, we are appalled by the widespread and increasing sexual and gender-based violence in the conflict.

Since the beginning of the conflict in April 2023, different forms of conflict-related sexual violence, including rapes, gang rapes, abductions, sexual slavery and exploitation, trafficking – sometimes used as a tactic of war – have been reported in all conflict affected areas, in particular in Khartoum, Al Jazira, Darfur states and the Kordofan regions. We fear that the reported numbers are below reality.

As the conflict is spreading to areas sheltering numerous displaced persons, we are alarmed that a growing number of civilians are affected by these horrifying acts, especially women and girls.

We strongly condemn all forms of gender-based violence, in particular sexual violence. It blatantly violates international humanitarian law and is a human rights abuse. It can amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Secondly, we reiterate the importance of fighting impunity and holding perpetrators accountable.

The parties to the conflict must cease all acts of gender-based violence and take full responsibility for preventing and responding to this violence in all of its forms. They must issue stronger command orders that prohibit it.

We commend the decision of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Karim Khan to accelerate the investigation of recent allegations of crimes in Darfur, prioritizing crimes against children and crimes of sexual and gender-based violence. We also support the increased engagement of the Court with affected communities and grass root organisations.

We welcome the establishment of the Fact-Finding Mission at the Human Rights Council at its 54<sup>th</sup> Session. We fully support its efforts as well as those of SRSG Pramila Patten and her team of experts to monitor and report these crimes, advocate on behalf of survivors, engage with parties to the conflict, and raise awareness about the situation in Sudan.

Thirdly, we call upon all parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including by refraining from targeting civilian objects, including medical facilities, and by allowing and facilitating rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

We underline the urgent need to provide survivors of sexual violence with sustained access to integrated medical care, including sexual and reproductive health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, reintegration, and community-based prevention – in keeping with a survivor-centred and trauma-informed approach.

It is paramount to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict, in accordance with the commitments parties have made in Jeddah. We welcome the central role of the Personal Envoy for Sudan in this regard. We also welcome the efforts of all stakeholders and neighbouring countries, in particular the African Union and IGAD.

We underline the importance of including the necessary expertise on gender and inclusive mechanisms in these negotiation and mediation efforts.

We are convinced that ensuring the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation and leadership of women is essential for conflict resolution and to restore an inclusive political process towards a democratic transition.

We condemn all threats against women human rights defenders, and urge the removal of any restrictions on civic space and on their right to continue their essential work. It is paramount to support the role and contribution of civil society organisations that advance gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in Sudan.

Lastly, we are determined to maintain a high level of attention on this crisis in the Security Council and we urge all our partners to remain seized of the situation in Sudan.

The Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security met on Friday to discuss the deterioration of the situation of women and girls in the country. We expect today's meeting to offer an opportunity to reflect on these questions, from the perspective of the International Criminal Court.

Thank you.