

Universal Periodic Review of the Sudan

On Procedural Bias and the Selective Handling of Human Rights Violations in Sudan

Submitted by



International Coalition of Human Rights ICHR

Omnium des Libertés ODL

Sudanese women of Peace SWOP

I. Introduction and methodology

1. The International Coalition of Human Rights Organizations (hereinafter “the Coalition”) and ODL submits the present joint contribution to the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review of the Sudan. The Coalition brings together non-governmental organizations working on human rights, the protection of civilians and humanitarian access in the Horn of Africa, several of which have monitored the Sudanese situation continuously since the previous review cycle. The submission pursues three objectives: to recall the commitments accepted by the Sudan during its third review in February 2022; to document the near-total absence of follow-up and implementation since that review; and to alert the Working Group to the procedural bias and the selective handling of human rights violations that currently characterize the international response to the Sudanese crisis, including in the deliberations of the sixty-second session of the Human Rights Council on the draft resolution concerning the humanitarian situation in the city of El Obeid.

2. This submission is based on the official documentation of the universal periodic review — the report of the Working Group (A/HRC/50/16), the addendum containing the views of the Sudan on the recommendations (A/HRC/50/16/Add.1), the compilation of United Nations information (A/HRC/WG.6/39/SDN/2), the summary of stakeholders’ submissions (A/HRC/WG.6/39/SDN/3) and Human Rights Council decision 50/112 of 4 July 2022 — supplemented by verified information from the Coalition’s member organizations and partners operating in and around the Sudan. Allegations that could not be independently verified are expressly presented as such.

3. While the Coalition welcomes all efforts aimed at ensuring justice for victims and protecting civilians, it expresses its strong reservations regarding the selective and reductionist methodology that currently underpins the draft resolution on El Obeid, and wishes to place the following facts before the international community and the Sudanese public.

II. The Sudan under the third cycle of the universal periodic review

4. The Sudan was reviewed under the third cycle of the universal periodic review on 9 February 2022, at the sixteenth meeting of the fortieth session of the Working Group. The delegation of the Sudan was headed by the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice, and the troika facilitating the review was composed of the Gambia, the Marshall Islands and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Forty-five stakeholders contributed written submissions to the review, summarized in document A/HRC/WG.6/39/SDN/3.

5. During the interactive dialogue, ninety-seven delegations made statements and two hundred and eighty-three recommendations were formulated. According to the addendum to the report of the Working Group, the Sudan supported two hundred and forty-four recommendations and noted thirty-nine. The outcome of the review was adopted by the Human Rights Council without a vote on 4 July 2022 (decision 50/112).

6. In its national presentation, the Sudan highlighted the legislative reform programme initiated under the transitional Government: the repeal of the public order and public morals laws; the criminalization of female genital mutilation; the decriminalization of apostasy; the abolition of corporal punishment; the ratification of the Convention against Torture and accession to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the opening of a country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2019; the memorandum of understanding signed with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court; the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS); and the creation of several commissions of inquiry into the killing of protesters, including a special prosecutor for crimes committed in Darfur.

7. Of particular relevance to the present submission, the Sudan supported recommendations to: cooperate fully with United Nations human rights mechanisms, including OHCHR, the Independent Expert and the special procedures (recommendations 137.57–137.60 and 137.65); ensure the protection of civilians in conflict-affected areas such as Darfur and Southern Kordofan (137.127); put an end to indiscriminate attacks against civilians (137.124); ensure the safety of humanitarian workers and facilities (137.117); initiate prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigations into alleged crimes under international law and bring perpetrators to justice (137.131, 137.133 and 137.137); restore civilian rule on the basis of the 2019 Constitutional Document (137.83); implement the Juba Peace Agreement (137.78 and 137.79); and strengthen the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up on human rights recommendations (137.68), while continuing to implement the recommendations arising from the review (137.69).

8. The thirty-nine noted recommendations concerned, inter alia, the abolition of the death penalty or the establishment of a moratorium, the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservations, full cooperation with the International Criminal Court including on outstanding arrest warrants, the issuing of a standing invitation to special procedure mandate holders, and the decriminalization of consensual same-sex relations. The Coalition recalls that noted recommendations remain part of the outcome of the review and that the State under review is encouraged to give them further consideration during the cycle.

9. The Sudan also acknowledged before the Working Group the challenges it faced, including a severe economic crisis, political instability and armed tribal conflicts in several states, and appealed for technical assistance. The Coalition underlines that these

acknowledged difficulties make the subsequent withdrawal of cooperation with international mechanisms all the more difficult to justify.

III. Follow-up to the third cycle: the implementation gap

10. The third review took place in exceptional circumstances: three and a half months before the review, on 25 October 2021, the military had seized power and interrupted the civilian-led transition. Numerous delegations — including those of Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States — condemned the coup and the use of excessive force against peaceful protesters during the interactive dialogue itself. The commitments supported in February 2022 were therefore undertaken by a delegation representing authorities born of an unconstitutional takeover, a fact that gives their subsequent repudiation particular significance.

11. On 15 April 2023, open armed conflict erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces. The remaining reform agenda collapsed: the legislative reform programme presented to the Working Group was suspended, the Constitutional Document was effectively set aside, and the institutions entrusted with the protection of human rights ceased to function in most of the country. The ratifications announced as pending — including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Rome Statute — were never completed.

12. As regards institutional follow-up, the Coalition notes with concern that the Sudan has submitted no voluntary mid-term report on the implementation of the supported recommendations, and that the national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up — whose strengthening the Sudan accepted under recommendation 137.68 — is no longer functioning. No inclusive national process for the preparation of the fourth review, involving civil society, has been announced.

13. Cooperation with international mechanisms has been reversed rather than consolidated. At the request of the Sudanese authorities, the Security Council terminated the mandate of UNITAMS in December 2023. The Fact-Finding Mission established by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 54/2 of 11 October 2023 has been unable to deploy to Sudanese territory, while OHCHR and the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan face restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities based in Port Sudan. Such restrictions are incompatible with recommendations 137.57 to 137.60 and 137.65, which the Sudan supported.

14. The reporting obligations of the Sudan under the international human rights treaties have fallen into similar abeyance: initial and periodic reports due since 2022 have not been submitted, and the country office of OHCHR, whose opening in 2019 was presented to the Working Group as a landmark achievement, operates under constraints that prevent it from covering the territory comprehensively. The architecture of cooperation patiently built between 2019 and 2022 has thus been largely dismantled in less than four years.

15. The investigative commitments have met the same fate. The commissions of inquiry announced to the Working Group in 2022 — into the killings of protesters, the events of El Geneina and the Krinding and Kalma camps — have produced no public conclusions since the outbreak of the war, and the memorandum of understanding with the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has remained a dead letter, in contradiction with supported recommendations 137.51, 137.134 and 137.139.

16. The protection commitments have likewise remained without effect. In Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, civilians continue to suffer indiscriminate attacks, sieges and assaults on camps for internally displaced persons, in contradiction with recommendations 137.117, 137.124 and 137.127. The world's largest displacement crisis has unfolded — with more than ten million persons forced to flee their homes and famine conditions confirmed in displacement camps in North Darfur — while the recommendation on preventing further displacement (137.282) remained unimplemented.

17. The Coalition stresses that this implementation gap cannot be attributed to capacity constraints alone. It reflects a deliberate choice by the de facto authorities to insulate themselves from international scrutiny while continuing to enjoy the procedural prerogatives of a State under review. The credibility of the universal periodic review as a mechanism of measurable progress is directly at stake in the fourth cycle.

IV. Root causes of the crisis: ideological capture of the military establishment

18. The Coalition affirms that the root cause and principal driver of the current crisis in the Sudan is not merely a conventional military confrontation between two parties. It is the direct consequence of political and ideological agendas advanced by the Islamic Movement through its affiliated armed formations, including the Al-Baraa ibn Malik Brigade, which has effectively assumed control over military and political decision-making within the leadership of the Sudanese Armed Forces.

19. According to the Coalition's assessment, this dominant faction has deliberately prolonged the conflict in order to preserve its grip on power. It has consistently rejected regional, international and United States-led ceasefire initiatives and peace negotiation platforms by imposing unattainable preconditions, thereby contributing to what has become the world's largest displacement and humanitarian crisis, with famine conditions declared in several areas and the near-total collapse of health and education services.

20. The same networks had already obstructed the transition between 2019 and 2021, and their return to the centre of military decision-making since the outbreak of the war has narrowed the space for any negotiated settlement. The Coalition's assessment is that no durable ceasefire can be expected as long as these formations retain a de facto veto over the decisions of the military leadership.

21. This ideological capture also explains the regression observed on several achievements presented to the Working Group in 2022. In areas under the control of the de facto authorities, the space accorded to civil society has been progressively rolled back, the legal status of women has again been called into question, and the guarantees of freedom of religion or belief consolidated under the transition have been weakened by the return to influence of the networks of the former regime.

V. Geographical selectivity in the documentation of violations

22. The Coalition emphasizes that limiting the documentation and condemnation of violations to a single geographical area, namely the city of El Obeid, represents a fundamental failure to uphold the principles of impartial justice and of the universal periodic review itself, which requires the human rights situation to be assessed on the entire territory of the State under review.

23. The draft resolution completely overlooks the grave and ongoing atrocities committed across other regions and states of the Sudan, including Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile. Most recently, the deadly events that occurred in Kulbus, West Darfur, on 29 June 2026 resulted in numerous civilian casualties, including children. The siege of El Fasher and the repeated attacks against displacement camps in North Darfur have similarly remained outside the scope of the Council's attention.

24. The Coalition further notes with concern that the draft resolution appears to rely primarily on reports produced by international mechanisms that have been unable to gain effective access to affected areas due to restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities based in Port Sudan. A documentation architecture that depends on access denied by one party structurally under-records the violations attributable to that party and thereby rewards obstruction.

25. Geographical selectivity is not a neutral drafting choice: it distributes protection and accountability unevenly among victims of the same conflict and creates de facto zones of impunity. It is inconsistent with the spirit of recommendation 137.127, supported by the Sudan, on the protection of civilians in all conflict-affected areas, and with the universality principle on which the review is founded.

26. The Coalition therefore calls on the drafters of the resolution and, prospectively, on the Working Group of the universal periodic review, to ensure that the situation in all states of the Sudan is given equal consideration, and that no region is excluded from documentation, condemnation or protection on political grounds.

VI. Procedural and legitimacy concerns regarding the de facto authorities

27. The Coalition draws attention to a serious legal and procedural concern arising from the decision to afford the de facto military authorities in Port Sudan exclusive access to United Nations platforms to advance a unilateral narrative, while disregarding the position of the African Union, which has maintained the suspension of the Sudan since 27 October 2021 following the unconstitutional military coup against the civilian-led government.

28. Granting this authority international diplomatic legitimacy risks reinforcing its intransigence and further undermining ongoing peace efforts and negotiation processes. It also sits uneasily with recommendation 137.83, supported by the Sudan, on the restoration of civilian rule on the basis of the 2019 Constitutional Document.

29. Ahead of the fourth cycle, the Coalition invites the Working Group and the Office of the President of the Human Rights Council to remain vigilant regarding the representativeness of any delegation presenting itself on behalf of the Sudan, so that the review is not instrumentalized to confer legitimacy upon authorities that the African Union does not recognize.

30. The Coalition also recalls that the crisis has a pronounced regional dimension. The suspension decided by the African Union, the mediation efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the initiatives of neighbouring States all presuppose an interlocutor whose authority is not contested. Persisting ambiguity on this point weakens every mediation track and delays the silencing of the guns that the Sudanese people, and the region as a whole, urgently need.

VII. Grave matters omitted from the Council's agenda

31. The Coalition expresses grave concern over the omission from the Human Rights Council's agenda of several matters of exceptional seriousness, and calls for an urgent and independent international investigation into documented allegations concerning the use of internationally prohibited chemical weapons by the Sudanese Armed Forces.

32. The Coalition further draws attention to the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilians and civilian infrastructure under the pretext of targeting alleged social support bases; to the obstruction of humanitarian relief operations, including convoys of the World Food Programme; and to the reported involvement of foreign cross-border armed groups, including Seleka elements from the Central African Republic, whose presence further internationalizes the conflict.

33. Each of these omissions carries measurable humanitarian consequences. The obstruction of relief has contributed to the confirmation of famine conditions in displacement camps and to the loss of humanitarian personnel; the bombardment of markets, hospitals and water infrastructure has multiplied the secondary victims of the conflict; and the persistence of unexamined allegations of prohibited weapons erodes the normative barriers whose enforcement is the common responsibility of the international community.

34. The omission of these matters from the Council's agenda deprives victims of the protection of international law and weakens the evidentiary record that the fourth cycle of the universal periodic review will be called upon to assess.

VIII. Conclusion

35. Four years after its third review, the record of the Sudan is characterized by the near-total non-implementation of the recommendations it supported, the reversal of its cooperation with international mechanisms, and the deliberate restriction of access that has made the comprehensive documentation of violations impossible. The selective treatment of the crisis — geographical, institutional and procedural — compounds the suffering of victims and contradicts the principles of universality, impartiality and equal treatment that underpin the universal periodic review.

36. The Coalition stands ready to cooperate with the Working Group, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the members of the troika in the preparation of the fourth review, and to make available the documentation gathered by its member organizations.

37. The fourth review will constitute a defining test: either the universal periodic review confines itself to a formal exercise in which commitments are recorded and forgotten, or it becomes the framework within which the gap between the commitments of February 2022 and the reality of July 2026 is named, measured and redressed. The Coalition urges all participating States to seize this opportunity.

IX. Recommendations

38. In light of the foregoing, and recalling the recommendations supported by the Sudan at its third review, the International Coalition of Human Rights Organizations submits the following recommendations to the Sudanese authorities:

1. Access to international mechanisms — Grant immediate, safe and unhindered access to all regions of the Sudan, including Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, to OHCHR, the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, the Fact-Finding Mission and the special procedures, and issue a standing invitation to special procedure mandate holders, in line with supported recommendations 137.57–137.60 and 137.65 and with noted recommendations 137.61, 137.63 and 137.64.
2. Independent investigations and accountability — Establish, or fully cooperate with, independent and impartial investigations into all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed since April 2023, including the alleged use of internationally prohibited chemical weapons, the indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilians and the events of 29 June 2026 in Kulbus, West Darfur, and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable, in line with supported recommendations 137.131, 137.133 and 137.137.
3. Protection of civilians — Cease all indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and ensure the protection of civilians in all conflict-affected areas, including Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile, in line with supported recommendations 137.124 and 137.127.
4. Humanitarian access — Guarantee the safe, rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief, including World Food Programme convoys, and ensure the safety of humanitarian workers and facilities, in line with supported recommendation 137.117.
5. Ceasefire and negotiation — Engage immediately and unconditionally in regional, international and United States-facilitated ceasefire initiatives, without unattainable preconditions, and halt the violence permanently so that mediation efforts may succeed, in line with supported recommendations 137.78, 137.79 and 137.232.
6. Follow-up to the universal periodic review — Re-establish a functioning national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up on human rights recommendations, associate civil society with the preparation of the fourth review, and submit a voluntary mid-term report on the implementation of the recommendations of the third cycle, in line with supported recommendations 137.68 and 137.69.
7. Restoration of civilian rule — Take immediate steps to restore civilian-led rule on the basis of the 2019 Constitutional Document, consistent with supported recommendation 137.83 and with the decisions of the African Union.
8. Cooperation with the International Criminal Court — Resume full cooperation with the International Criminal Court, including on outstanding arrest warrants, and ensure accountability for crimes under international law, in line with supported recommendations 137.51, 137.134 and 137.139.
9. The Coalition further recommends that the Human Rights Council: (a) ensure that any resolution on the Sudan is comprehensive, balanced and reflective of the full scope of human rights violations committed throughout all regions of the country, without geographical selectivity or partial treatment; and (b) adopt a principled position consistent with the decisions of the African Union by refraining from extending recognition to the military authorities established following the coup, thereby preventing the misuse of international forums to justify the continuation of the armed conflict.