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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

War in Sudan

Since 15 April 2023, the armed forces of the Sudanese Army (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been waging a war against each other in Sudan that has caused great hardship for several million people. There is a threat of state disintegration and further destabilisation of the already crisis-ridden region.

The background is the conflict between General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who is in power, and his former deputy, General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. In October 2021, they jointly overthrew the civilian transitional government in a coup. International observers and civil society organisations had warned that the power struggle between the two could escalate into war. In the meantime, fighting has intensified in both the capital Khartoum and Nyala in South Darfur, Zalingei in Central Darfur, El Obeid in North Kordofan, and South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

The fighting has been extremely ruthless towards the civilian population and has so far resulted in four thousand deaths, the number of unreported cases is many times higher. More than 3 million people have been forced to leave their homes and have fled to other parts of Sudan or to neighbouring countries. According to the UN, 25 million people are in need of protection and assistance because of this conflict. The latest reports for instance by Human Rights Watch show how rape is used as a weapon of war. Aerial images released by the Humanitarian Research Lab show that large parts of West Darfur's capital, El Geneina, have been razed, and confirm the presence of corpses in the streets. Schools appear to have been systematically targeted. Tribal leaders in the region claim that over 10,000 have been killed, mostly from Massalit and other non-Arab populations. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Radio Dabanga reported that the RSF targeted civilians who attempted to flee the violence in El Geneina. New arrivals in Chad told media and rights groups how RSF-backed militia groups attacked them, killing civilians, including children and how specific ethnic groups are targeted, for instance the Massalit in Darfur.

People in Khartoum and other cities are suffering from heavy weapons fighting in the middle of populated areas, SAF airstrikes on suspected RSF positions, the seizure and looting of homes, offices, hospitals, etc. by the RSF. Access to water and food is cut off for many. There is often a high risk of death when trying to leave the house. Electricity supply and mobile telephony have failed over large areas. Ongoing violence has seriously undermined the country's health infrastructure. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80% of hospitals nationwide are no longer functioning. WHO has confirmed 51 cases of attacks on healthcare facilities and workers. Armed forces have occupied hospitals, targeted them with explosives, and looted medicines. At least 15 aid workers have been killed. WHO is warning that previously controlled diseases such as malaria, dengue, and acute watery diarrhea are increasing and likely to increase further as the rainy season begins unless urgent action is taken.

Sudanese rights groups have continued to report cases of sexual violence across the conflict zones, including abduction and rape of girls by the RSF. The Combating Violence Against Women Unit, formerly a government office, has documented 88 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence since the conflict began, with reports that the majority of the cases are attributed to the RSF. Human Rights Watch has documented several dozen cases of rape in El Geneina alone between late April and late June 2023. The assailants appear to have targeted women and girls because of their Massalit ethnicity and, in some cases, because they were known activists.

Human rights defenders and journalists have also been targeted, with many shot, beaten, detained, and threatened by the two sides. Four Darfur Bar Association lawyers were killed after apparently being deliberately targeted, and the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies reported on eight additional cases of threats against Human Rights Defenders.

Refugees at the border crossings are demanded large sums of money, many run the risk of falling into the hands of human traffickers. RSF and allied militias are destroying entire villages and killing and displacing the population on a scale that must be described as ethnic cleansing. The danger of genocide is being voiced from various sides.

It seems that even governments with good relations with one or both of the adversaries have no lasting influence on them, or do not want to exert their influence fully in order to achieve a lasting ceasefire. This poses the risk that the conflict will drag on for a long time, causing the country to break apart and further destabilising the entire region.

Therefore, the Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to:

- support a coordinated response to the crisis together with the UN Security Council and affiliated UN bodies. This response should make the protection of the civilian population and humanitarian aid a priority. At the same time, international mediation must aim to end the war. A ceasefire is the first step towards ending the war. However, the price must not be a division of power between generals. All civilian forces must be involved in the negotiations on a future government formation. The representatives of Sudanese democratic civil society must be assured a leading role in the negotiations.

- create an independent mechanism with a mandate to investigate, collect, and preserve evidence of grave violations and abuses being committed in the regions of Sudan where war is waged in order to identify those responsible and make recommendations for accountability. Support Sudanese human rights organisations and human rights defenders in documenting human rights violations.

- actively advocate for the creation of demilitarised zones, including the airport in Khartoum, to provide safe access for humanitarian aid.

- call upon the representatives of the Rapid Support Forces and allied militias to fully abide by international humanitarian law, including by adopting measures to end rape and other sexual violence by their forces.

- support meetings and conferences of Sudanese democratic civil society and invite representatives of Sudanese democratic society to international fora to give accounts of the situation of the civilian population of Sudan

- call upon the UN Security Council member countries to publicly identify and condemn governments not respecting the existing arms embargo on Darfur, and impose targeted sanctions against commanders and officials responsible for serious abuses, including sexual violence.

- initiate a process in the UN member states, especially of the EU and other concerned governments including the United States in line of which targeted sanctions on leaders of the RSF, the Sudan Armed Forces, and armed groups responsible for serious abuses against civilians are imposed.

- call upon the Security Council members and other countries to actively support the International Criminal Court's investigation in Darfur, particularly in light of the prosecutor's announcement that his office is investigating recent atrocities. Past obstruction of the court's investigations by the Sudanese government and the UN Security Council's passivity in the face of that obstruction has facilitated impunity and new crimes.

Society for Threatened Peoples, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.