



### Joint Press Release

## SUDAN: TOP UN OFFICIALS SOUND ALARM AT SPIKE IN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

**(NEW YORK/GENEVA, 5 July 2023)** Senior United Nations officials today voiced shock and condemnation at increasing reports of gender-based violence in Sudan – including conflict-related sexual violence against internally displaced and refugee women and girls – since fighting erupted in the country more than 11 weeks ago.

They called for an immediate end to gender-based violence, including sexual violence as a tactic of war to terrorize people; for prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into all alleged gross violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law; and for perpetrators to be held accountable. They stressed that all parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law to protect civilians, including women and girls, including allowing safe passage for survivors to access health care and for health workers to reach health facilities.

The heads of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Human Rights Office, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO) also stressed the need to swiftly scale up gender-based violence prevention and response services in Sudan as well as in neighbouring countries, where those fleeing violence have sought safety as refugees, to meet the soaring needs.

Even before fighting broke out on 15 April, more than 3 million women and girls in Sudan were at risk of gender-based violence, including intimate-partner violence, according to UN estimates. This number has since climbed to an estimated 4.2 million people.

Since this conflict began, the UN Human Rights Office in Sudan has received credible reports of 21 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence against at least 57 women and girls. The victims include at least 10 girls. In one case, as many as 20 women were reportedly raped in the same attack.

The Unit for Combatting Violence against Women under Sudan’s Ministry of Social Development also continues to receive reports of conflict-related sexual violence. It has documented at least 42 alleged cases in the capital, Khartoum, and 46 in the Darfur region.

Given the significant underreporting of gender-based violence, the real number of cases is undoubtedly far higher. Many survivors find it challenging to report sexual violence due to shame, stigma and fear of reprisal. Reporting violations and getting support is also made difficult, if not impossible, by the lack of electricity and connectivity, as well as lack of humanitarian access due to the volatile security situation.

Attacks on and occupation of health facilities also prevent survivors from seeking and accessing emergency health care.

Yet health-care providers, social workers, counsellors and community-based protection networks inside Sudan have all warned of a marked increase in reports of gender-based violence as hostilities continue across the country. Women, including refugees living in Sudan prior to the conflict have reported incidents of gender-based violence when fleeing Khartoum to other areas. Women fleeing across Sudan's borders have told UNHCR and UN Human Rights teams in neighbouring countries of the horrific violence they faced.

The risk of sexual violence is especially high when women and girls are on the move seeking safer locations. There is an urgent need to ramp up assistance at reception sites for internally displaced people in Sudan's conflict-affected areas, as well as in neighbouring countries.

Despite the violence, UN agencies are working to reach survivors. UNFPA is providing gender-based violence case management and sexual and reproductive critical care, including clinical management of rape. The organization also supports safe spaces for women and girls, distributing dignity kits, training service providers and expanding remote services where physical access has been disrupted. WHO is working with UNFPA and other health partners to ensure faster access to emergency health supplies. As part of its broader protection interventions, UNHCR is providing services to survivors, including medical and psychosocial support, while UNICEF is working on procurement of post-rape kits, risk mitigation, participation of women and girls as well as prevention and response interventions.

For survivors of sexual violence, timely access to health services is life-saving. In Sudan, women activists have underscored the need for more medications, medical supplies, dignity kits and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis kits to prevent HIV transmission for the clinical management of rape. These items must also reach local clinics, community-based organizations and key front-line responders when survivors cannot access health facilities.

Helping women and girls at scale requires generous support from donors. The revised Humanitarian Response Plan for Sudan calls for US\$63 million to fund prevention and response services for survivors of gender-based violence in Sudan, aiming to reach 1.3 million people. Funding requirements for protection programmes, including gender-based violence prevention and response for those who fled Sudan to neighbouring countries, stand at nearly \$63 million in the complementary Regional Refugee Response Plan.

### Quote Sheet:

**Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (OCHA):** "It is unconscionable that Sudan's women and children – whose lives have been upended by this senseless conflict – are being further traumatized in this way. What we are witnessing in Sudan is not just a humanitarian crisis; it is a crisis of humanity."

**Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):** "We are receiving shocking reports of sexual violence against women and girls, including rape. And in the aftermath of such cruelty and brutality, the women and girls are left with little or no medical and psychosocial support. There must be zero tolerance for sexual violence. All perpetrators must be held accountable."

**Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** “Our teams in the region describe horrific ordeals being faced by forcibly displaced women and girls when fleeing Sudan. This shocking array of human rights violations must stop. Help to support survivors and those at risk is urgent, but so far, funding is falling extremely short.”

**Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of UNFPA:** “The use of sexual violence in conflict as a terror tactic is abhorrent and must never be met with impunity for the perpetrators. UNFPA stands by the women and girls of Sudan as they call for justice, and as we lead efforts to prevent gender-based violence and provide survivors with medical treatment and counselling. Our work is not done until they have all the support they need.”

**Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF:** “What we’re seeing yet again is a rise in horrific sexual violence during times of crisis. It’s a pervasive, yet all too often concealed human rights violation, which can have devastating long term physical and mental impacts on survivors. It’s critical to design prevention and response plans that put the needs of women, girls and all survivors at the heart.”

**Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women:** “Sexual violence is one of the most challenging international crimes to document and pursue in court. Pervasive stigma inhibits survivors from coming forward or seeking the support they need. This in turn limits survivors’ access to crucial medical and legal services, resulting in unresolved urgent needs as well as underreported and undocumented cases. Allegations of sexual violence must be rigorously investigated, prioritizing the rights, needs and safety of those affected.”

**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO:** “The ongoing violence, including attacks on health, are preventing survivors of gender-based violence from accessing essential health services at a time when they need them most. Women and girls need to be protected from sexual violence, and survivors must have unhindered access to the care they need. Health workers and facilities must be protected.”

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