

Children and armed conflict: focus on Sudan and South Sudan

Since Sudan gained its independence in 1953 at the end of the joint British Egyptian rule over the country, it has been ruled by a succession of unstable civilian and military governments. Unresolved constitutional tensions with the South flared up into full-scale civil war between 1955 and 2005.

Sudan, once the largest and one of the most geographically diverse states in Africa split into two countries in July 2011 after the people of the south voted for independence. More than 98 per cent of voters were in favour of the separation, making the Republic of South Sudan the newest nation in the world.

Sudan has long been torn by conflict and has the highest number of internally displaced persons in the world - an estimated 6 million people are displaced. Two rounds of north-south civil war costed the lives of more than 2 million people, and the continuing conflict in the Western region of Darfur has driven 2.7 million people from their homes and killed more than 200,000.

Omar El Bashir, the current president of Sudan who came to power after a military coup in 1989, faces an arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Sudan has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (3 August 1999), the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (26 July 2005) and accessed the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2 November 2004).

South Sudan has yet to ratify the Convention and its optional protocols.

Children have been the most affected by the conflict in South Sudan and in Darfur and the Sudanese authorities have so far failed to implement any legislation aimed to protect those children. Fourteen parties in Sudan and two parties in South Sudan are listed on the UN Secretary-General's list of shame of parties who recruit, kill or maim children, commit sexual violence and attack schools and hospitals ([read more](#) on the list of shame and the office of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict).

Armed groups and forces recruit and abduct children (10,000 children remain associated with armed groups and forces) and conduct attacks on civilians, including children. Sexual violence against women and girls is used as a weapon of war. 36 per cent of girls marry before the age of 18, female genital mutilation and corrupting affect 68 per cent of women and girls - mostly in the north of Sudan. Only 39 per cent of children have their births registered. [Read](#) Sudan's full list of persistent violations of children's rights.

The conflict in Darfur

Conflict began in Darfur, western Sudan, in 2003. It was driven by a range of factors, including perceptions that the west of the country was being marginalised and growing conflict over the areas' resources.

The Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) began attacking government targets in early 2003 accusing Khartoum of oppressing black Africans in favour of Arabs. The central government was arming the Arab Janjaweed militia. The population in Darfur says the Janjaweed patrol outside the camps and men are killed and women raped if they venture too far in search of firewood or water.

The UN estimates that between 200,000 and 300,000 people have died in Darfur since the start of the conflict. Some 4.7 million people are currently directly affected by the conflict, out of a total population of around 6.2 million. In 2008 alone, 310,000 people were displaced, or newly displaced - bringing the current total displacement to 2.7 million.

Half of those affected by the conflict are children; of these, nearly 700,000 have grown up knowing nothing but the conflict.

Some 200,000 people have fled to neighbouring Chad. Most of whom are still camped along a 600 km (372 mile) stretch of the border and remain vulnerable to attacks from the Sudan side.

Chad's Eastern areas have a similar ethnic make up to Darfur and the violence has spilled over the border area, with the neighbours accusing one another of supporting each other's rebel groups. Cross border attacks have stopped since the signing of a peace agreement in 2010.

Darfur's conflict has moved into a [new phase](#) recently with the Khartoum government increasingly relying on non-Arab militias to attack civilians and rebels in the east of the troubled region.

In 2009, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the president Omar Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity. After that decision, the president banned several aid agencies from operating in Northern Sudan.

Children affected by armed conflict (from January 2009 to February 2011)¹:

- a total of 501 children, including six girls were verified as being associated with at least 10 armed forces and armed groups in Darfur;
- 27 children were killed and 36 others were maimed²;
- 52 allegations of sexual violence were received by the UN;

The conflict in South Sudan

An overwhelming majority of South Sudanese voted to secede in the January 2011 referendum.

¹ Report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict in the Sudan, the UN Security Council, S/2011/413, 5 July 2011.

² The exact number of child casualties resulting from government aerial attacks, ground fighting between armed groups and ethnic clashes is unknown, due to security restrictions and limited access to affected area, as well as the displacement of population.

Shortly after Sudan's independence in 1956, unresolved constitutional tensions between North and South flared up into full-scale civil war. The conflict was temporarily settled in 1972 before it resumed and escalated in 1983 as the government introduced Sharia law. The conflict was led in the south by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its armed wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

The conflict raged for two decades until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in January 2005. The conflict is estimated to have cost more than two million lives with another four million displaced. The CPA also provided for a referendum on the independence of the South.

Since South Sudan's independence, continuing disputes with Sudan have led to increased tension and conflict between both countries mostly over oil issues and the three disputed areas of Southern Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei. Inside South Sudan, fighting between rival groups in Jonglei state has left hundreds of people dead and some 100,000 displaced since independence.

The referendum for the residents of the border region of Abyei to decide whether to join north or south has been delayed over voter eligibility. The conflict is rooted in a dispute over land between farmers of the pro-South Sudan Dinka Ngod people and cattle-herding Misseriya Arab tribesmen.

The conflict in the South Kordofan border zone is between the largely Christian and pro-SPLA Nuba people and northern government forces.

Children affected by armed conflict in 2011³:

- the UN verified 352 cases of recruitment or use of children;
- 104 children were killed and 78 were maimed;
- 21 schools were used by the SPLA and an additional 10 schools were damaged as a result of fighting between different armed groups;
- 602 children were reported abducted.

Sources:

- Children's Rights Wiki:
<http://wiki.crin.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Sudan>
http://wiki.crin.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=South_Sudan
- Office of the special representative of the Secretary-General for children in armed conflict:
<http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/south-sudan/>
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- BBC, Sudan country profile:
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- BBC, South Sudan country profile:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14069082>
- UNICEF: <http://www.unicef.org/sudan/overview.html>

³ <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/south-sudan/>