

Human Rights Watch urges U.S. to stop atrocities in Sudan's Darfur

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New York, August 5 (RHC)-- A leading human rights group has urged the United States to stem "ongoing atrocities" in Sudan's western region of Darfur as Washington holds the presidency of the United Nations

Security Council in August.

As evidence of scorched-earth attacks mount, Human Rights Watch (HRW) appealed to the U.S. and UN to impose further sanctions on the Sudanese individuals “responsible for the atrocities” in Darfur.

“The world should not stand by as town after town in West Darfur is burned to the ground, sending tens of thousands of civilians fleeing for their lives,” HRW Executive Director Tirana Hassan said. “The United States government needs to put words into action and ensure that the UN Security Council finally acts to protect civilians and to hold those responsible for the atrocities to account.”

The northeast African country plunged into chaos in April when months-long tensions between the military, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere.

The fighting – concentrated in Khartoum and Darfur – has killed more than 3,900 people, according to the NGO ACLED, and has displaced more than 3.3 million, according to the United Nations.

In Darfur, the scene of genocidal war in the early 2000s, the conflict has morphed into ethnic violence, with the RSF and its allied Arab militias targeting African communities, UN officials said.

The New York-based watchdog said there had been “repeated deliberate attacks on civilians, most by RSF forces and allied Arab militia targeting the ethnic Masalit population.” The HRW said at least seven villages and towns have been almost burned to the ground or destroyed in West Darfur alone, according to satellite footage and testimonies analysed by the group. These are Habilla Kanari, Mejmere, Misterei, Molle, Murnei, Gokor and Sirba.

Darfur is home to about a quarter of Sudan’s 48 million people.

In June, the U.S. imposed sanctions against four key companies either linked to or owned by the warring factions. The White House also placed visa restrictions on army and RSF officials and leaders from the former government led by Omar al-Bashir. It did not specify which individuals were affected.

Last Month, Karim Khan, a prosecutor from the International Criminal Court, told the United Nations that he would be investigating alleged new war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur.

The HRW’s call for sanctions comes just days after Amnesty International separately accused both warring parties of committing extensive war crimes, including deliberate killings of civilians and mass sexual assaults. Amnesty said almost all rape cases were blamed on the RSF and Arab militias.

In its 56-page report, the HRW said the RSF abducted 24 women and girls as young as 12 and held them “for several days during which they were raped by several RSF members.” “Given the council’s responsibility for the premature withdrawal of peacekeeping forces from Darfur in late 2020, the council should consider ramping up civilian protection there,” the HRW said.

“While Darfur is already on the Security Council agenda, the council has not actively addressed the issue, in part due to pushbacks by some of its members, preferring regional and bilateral ceasefire efforts to take precedence, an approach that has done nothing to stem the devastation and abuse.”

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