

Sudanese Media: Four Months of Violations

The Joint Statement

In collaboration with Dabanga – Radio TV Online, and in partnership with the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate and Journalists for Human Rights - Jahr - Sudan, the undersigned chief editors, managing editors, and leaders of independent media institutions and Sudanese press organizations, committed to upholding freedom of the press, expression, and publication, have collectively examined the dire circumstances facing Sudanese journalists amid the ongoing catastrophic conflict since April 15, 2023, up to the present day. We hereby issue this joint statement on August 15, 2023.

After enduring four months of conflict, Sudanese journalists, akin to other civilians, find themselves caught in the crossfire of both opposing factions. Accusations of disloyalty, collusion, and allegiance to either party abound, subjecting them to threats of detention, arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or even death. These dire consequences are determined by the whims of the warring factions in the city or state where they are situated.

Female journalists, in particular, are disproportionately susceptible to gender-based violence. Just as women and girls in Sudan encounter various forms of discrimination, "sexual violence," exploitation, and sexual enslavement, female journalists are at heightened risk.

During this period, many journalists have lost their lives, suffered injuries, and faced unjust imprisonment. Their homes, belongings, and work equipment have been pillaged, while others have been pursued and persecuted simply for expressing opinions contrary to the stance of one of the warring parties. This cumulative suffering has resulted in the flight of dozens of male and female journalists to neighboring countries and regions, compelled some to abandon their profession, and prompted others to vanish voluntarily.

Confronted by this dire predicament, journalists based in Khartoum and other conflict zones are hindered from navigating freely within or between battle areas for the purpose of news coverage. The absence of protective measures and the disregard of binding international conventions pertaining to press freedom and the safety of journalists during armed conflicts—conventions that Sudan has ratified—contribute to this challenging situation.

Media organizations across Khartoum and many other cities have been abandoned entirely. Their locations either fall within contested zones, rendering access problematic, or have fallen victim to direct assaults, looting, vandalism, or occupation by belligerent parties. Notably, the Rapid Support Forces have occupied the premises and studios of Sudan Radio and Television Corporation, as well as the buildings of the Broadcasting Technical Regulatory Body in Omdurman.

Furthermore, regions to which hundreds of thousands of Sudanese have fled in search of safety—such as Al-Jazira, the White Nile, Sennar, the Red Sea, the Nile River, the Northern states, and cities including Kassala, Al-Qadarif, Al-Obeid, and Port Sudan—are facing the looming threat of becoming media dark zones. Persistent efforts to stifle journalists and prevent them from conveying the ongoing crisis and the people's harrowing narratives have led to continuous restrictions on their movements. The security apparatus, military intelligence, the governmental Humanitarian Aid Commission, and local authorities impose insurmountable hurdles, effectively obstructing professional and independent media coverage.

The states of Darfur, along with afflicted cities such as Al-Geneina, Sirba, and Morni in West Darfur, are witnessing catastrophic atrocities, tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed by the Rapid Support Forces and their allied militias. These heinous acts have driven hundreds of thousands of civilians to seek refuge in neighboring Chad, while similar atrocities have unfolded in Nyala, Kass, Manwashi, Zalingei, Garsila, Kutum, Kabkabiya, El Sereif, and Tawila in Northern Darfur.

The result is a region plunged into comprehensive media darkness, with severed communication networks effectively isolating the area from press and media coverage. Journalists are left with no choice but to flee to neighboring countries or other regions within Sudan in search of safety and protection.

In neighboring Kordofan, a similar scenario unfolds, with Um Rawaba, Bara, and especially Al-Obeid enduring comparable atrocities. The capital city of Al-Obeid has been under siege for four consecutive months, subject to fierce battles between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces faction. This has resulted in hundreds of casualties.

Meanwhile, the states of South Kordofan, specifically Nuba Mountains, and Blue Nile have become battlegrounds for the Sudanese People's Liberation Army SPLA – North, led by Abdulaziz al-Helo, and the Sudanese army, and the Rapid Support Forces. The ongoing confrontations in Nuba Mountains have led to an unspecified number of civilian deaths and injuries. Consequently, thousands, including journalists and media professionals, have been compelled to seek refuge in neighboring countries or internally flee to remote villages far from conflict zones or other states offering relative safety.

Given this dire situation, we, the undersigned parties of this joint statement, urgently call upon the following entities:

First and foremost, addressing both sides of the conflict, **the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, we urgently appeal for the following:**

- An immediate cessation of hostilities, the establishment of humanitarian corridors, and the facilitation of press and journalists' access to report accurate facts and truths to both the Sudanese populace and the global community.

- Unhindered access for the press to displaced centers across central and eastern Sudan, where hundreds of thousands of civilians have sought refuge, ensuring free and independent coverage devoid of restrictions or security censorship. This includes opening doors for journalists and media professionals to convey citizens' opinions, war stories, suffering, perspectives, and future aspirations within these regions.
- Granting journalists, the freedom to move safely and seamlessly with their press equipment and tools to achieve impartial and independent coverage. This entails unfettered access to any area or location without harassment, constraints, censorship, or conditions, particularly in Greater Darfur and its villages, North Kordofan with its capital El-Obeid, and the two regions of Kordofan "Nuba Mountains" and the Blue Nile.
- An immediate halt to all forms of attacks against journalists, across all media platforms – visual, audio, print, and online. This encompasses ensuring journalists can carry out their professional duties freely and independently.
- Ensuring the safety of journalists, their premises, equipment, and all media-related resources, based on the overarching protection guaranteed by international humanitarian law for civilians and civilian infrastructure. This encompasses radio and television stations, premises, satellite channels, printed newspapers, and other media platforms, all of which should be regarded as civil spaces shielded from attack, occupation, or harm.

To Sudanese journalists and media organizations and institutions

- We call upon journalists, press, and media organizations to adhere steadfastly to the principles of independent professional journalism, combating the dissemination of rumors and media disinformation. The overwhelming influence of social media on news circulation and analysis during this dire conflict underscores the urgency of maintaining professional journalism standards to counteract misinformation and confusion. This necessitates diligent verification of sources and the accurate evaluation of published content.
- The dearth of a credible, national, professional Sudanese press has allowed biased and propagandist media to seize the void, advancing foreign agendas and resulting in skewed, misleading, and calamitous media coverage incapable of reflecting the unvarnished realities. We reassert the imperative of furnishing Sudanese press institutions with comprehensive support to resume their critical duties, adhering rigorously to professional standards. This will quell the deluge of media misinformation to which Sudanese are exposed, necessitating strict verification of all information sources.
- The exigencies of the current Sudanese conflict have laid bare the deficiencies in our journalists' and press institutions' abilities, tools, and means to cover armed conflicts. This underscores the urgent need to rapidly organize intensive training courses to equip journalists with the skills, means, and equipment to cover wars effectively. International professional journalist organizations can play a pivotal role by offering training opportunities, devices, and equipment in collaborative endeavors.
- Sudanese professional media institutions and journalists hold the collective responsibility to cultivate a shared professional media discourse against hate speech and racism.

To the Sudanese civil forces

- Recognizing media as a vital component of civil society, it should be integrated into the activities of political forces and civil society organizations, finding representation within their programs. This must go beyond supporting a free media and demanding its protection as an inherent human right; it should elevate press freedom as a foremost priority for all political and civil forces.
- Exert pressure on both conflicting parties to cease the harassment of journalists during their press coverage and field operations. Enable comprehensive coverage of on-the-ground events by furnishing them with the necessary facilities for their journalistic tasks, ensuring freedom of action devoid of interference or harassment.
- Champion the protection of women journalists from all forms of verbal, sexual, and physical violence, coordinating with national and international entities to facilitate recovery and offer advocacy. Extend support for press and journalists within Sudan and their presence across neighboring countries and the region, ensuring legal safeguards.
- Elevate the fight against hate speech and racism, which has intensified alongside the war and now threatens the very essence of the state. Make it a paramount agenda for political forces, civil society organizations, and resistance committees. Address these issues as top priorities in collaboration with the press, journalists, and their affiliated organizations, both during the current phase and the post-war period. Contribute to crafting a shared professional media discourse to combat hate speech and racism.
- Immediate engagement of Sudanese political forces, civil society organizations, and resistance committees in deliberations about the post-war era, post-war journalism, and the requisites of "peace journalism." This should align with the ideals of a democratic society, working collectively to restore the democratic trajectory of our nation.

To the international community:

- Exert pressure on warring parties to uphold international humanitarian law, safeguarding journalists' freedom to carry out their work and report freely, devoid of restrictions or censorship.
- International and UN institutions dedicated to journalists' safety and protection should conduct thorough investigations into crimes perpetrated against journalists and media personnel in Sudan. Urge the prosecution of those responsible.
- Extend a call to press and media unions worldwide, along with international organizations committed to press freedom and protection, to stand in solidarity with Sudanese journalists. Collaborate to implement all demands stipulated in this joint statement, guaranteeing the freedom, independence, safety, and protection of all media workers, irrespective of gender.
- Offer assistance to Sudanese press institutions to enhance their proficiency in the realm of journalist protection and safety.

- Undertake efforts to ensure the protection and safety of journalists who continue to operate in Sudan or have sought refuge from conflict zones. Facilitate their movement within Sudan, at border crossings, neighboring countries, and the region, enabling them to fulfill their professional responsibilities. This includes the imperative to safeguard women journalists from exposure to gender-based violence in all forms – verbal, sexual, and physical – necessitating coordination with national and international entities in their recovery.
- Pave the way for post-conflict initiatives and projects, considering the technical and financial challenges confronting the Sudanese media in resuming operations. The urgency of providing diverse forms of technical and material support to the press and journalists is paramount, allowing them to fulfill their roles with utmost professionalism, efficiency, and a conducive media environment.
- Collaborate actively to bolster journalists' capacities, with a focus on professional writing during times of both war and peace. Enhance training in combatting hate speech, racism, and all forms of discrimination rooted in gender, race, identity, culture, or gender.

This joint statement was formally issued on Tuesday, August 15, 2023.

Endorsed by the following media and press institutions:

- Dabanga – Radio TV Online - Kamal Elsadig, Editor in Chief
- Sudanese Journalists Syndicate - Abdelmoniem Abuedries, Chairperson
- Journalists for Human Rights - JHR – Sudan, Faisal Elbagir , General Coordinator..
- Sudan Tribune - Mohamed Nagi, Editor in Chief.
- Hala 96 FM - Yasir Aboshumal, Director.
- Sudanese Center for Training, Research and Development Services, Faisal Mohamed Salih.
- Sudanile.com - Tarig Elgazoli, Editor in Chief.
- The Democrat Newspaper - Elhag Warrag.
- Al-Ayam Center for Cultural Studies and Development - Mahgoub Mohammed Salih -.
- Teeba Press - Mohamed Latif, Director.
- Alalg Center for Press service - Madiha Abdalla .
- Female Journalists Network-Sudan - Sabah Mohamed Adam.
- Alrakoba.net - Waleed Elhussain, Editor in Chief.
- Aljreeda Newspaper - Ashraf Abdelaziz, Editor in Chief.
- Al-Tayar newspaper - Osman Mirghani, Editor in Chief.
- Altaghyeer Newspaper - Rasha Awad, Editor in Chief.
- Darfur24 - Adam Mahdi , Editor in Chief.