



May 05.2024

## One Year of War in Sudan: Truth's Fatal Toll

### **A Summary report on media freedom and human rights violations against journalists in Sudan from 15 April 2023- 15 April 2024**

#### Introduction:

The war in Sudan has concluded its first year, with journalists and the media becoming primary targets. Truth became the initial casualty of the conflict, as highlighted by the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate (SJS) in its address hours before the outbreak on 15 April. On Saturday night, April 14th, the SJS convened the syndicate bodies at its headquarters in Khartoum and issued a joint statement titled "Evading A War."

The Syndicate's motto, "No to War," was not merely a stance but a belief that war is a scourge affecting the people of Sudan, its institutions, history, civilization, land, and sovereignty. Since then, the SJS has been present in all civil initiatives and alliances aimed at stopping the war and achieving peace.

The year of conflict has been characterized by a surge of violations against media freedom and journalists across most states in Sudan, starting with the killings of both male and female journalists, and followed by threats and detentions, among other attacks. From the very first moment, media outlets swiftly became casualties of the war, with many forced to cease operations due to their locations in conflict areas.

90% of the media infrastructure was destroyed or looted. The closure of newspapers and media outlets led to a void in professional media coverage, and over 1,000 job losses, prompting some journalists to transition to other professions or just not





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May 05.2024

having a job at all.

Truth suffered further as fewer outlets were able to provide accurate information, leading to a rise in disinformation and misinformation, which proliferated unchecked. Additionally, the monopolization of information by both warring factions and the dissemination of fabricated content through the war media apparatus exacerbated the situation, fostering the spread of harmful rhetoric. Protecting the right to access and disseminate information, along with freedom of expression, entails significant responsibility in combatting rumors, false information, and harmful propaganda. In times of war, it is more vital than ever to ensure access to accurate information.

This report offers an overview of the violations perpetrated against journalists and attacks against media outlets during the war, providing a comprehensive account of the state of media institutions in Sudan. The SJS's Secretariat of Freedoms documented 377 instances of direct violations throughout the year, meticulously categorizing and recording each violation, including cases of killing, assault and injury, detention and enforced disappearance, threats, and shootings.

#### The Fate of Media Institutions:

Since 15 April 2023, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate has documented the closure of 26 newspapers in Sudan. Additionally, 10 radio stations in Khartoum State have ceased operations, while the public Sudanese Radio has resumed broadcasting from Port Sudan. Eight state radio stations have been completely shut down, while only two radios operating in El Obeid in North Kordofan State and El Fasher in North Darfur, are operating intermittently.





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May 05.2024

Some stations, such as, Atbara Radio in River Nile State and Red Sea Radio in Port Sudan, temporarily halted broadcasting but later resumed. In Khartoum State, six TV stations have ceased operations, while the public Sudan TV has resumed broadcasting from Port Sudan. It is noteworthy that some stations that have resumed broadcasting are characterized by a rhetoric supporting the continuation of the war, being controlled by the army, and staffed by journalists affiliated with the remnants of the former regime. Moreover, a decision to close three foreign news channels, Sky News, Al-Arabiya, and the Al-Hadath, was issued by the Minister of Culture and Information, but later revoked.

During the conflict, 29 media institutions and a journalist's office were expropriated, destroyed, and closed during the conflict. The Radio and Television Corporation (NRTC) in Omdurman was stormed at the beginning of the conflict and used as military barracks for over ten months, resulting in severe damage to the buildings and equipment. The radio broadcasting station was damaged, the workers cooperative branch was attacked, the safe was broken into, and money was stolen.

Interruption of communication and internet shutdown:

As the complexity of journalistic coverage and the availability of information for monitoring and documentation becomes increasingly difficult, the deliberate disruption of communications on 5 February 2024, including cutting off mobile phones and internet service networks in most of the states of Sudan (the five states of Darfur, three states of Kordofan and four states of Central Sudan), left more than 80% of the states completely without coverage. This has led to a complete blackout of crimes and violations.





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May 05.2024

The communication blackout, including internet shutdown, had inflicted a devastating impact on an already precarious humanitarian situation. It hampered the reach and ability for humanitarian organizations to assist those in need, putting the lives of millions at risk. People were unable to contact family members who have fled the conflict, and they also lack access to essential health and banking services, further increasing their vulnerabilities.

Internet shutdowns severely restrict the right to freedom of expression of Sudanese people, including journalists, and access to information by the citizens. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate (SJS) has condemned the interruption of communications in a statement stating that "it greatly affects the work of journalists and obstruct the dissemination of information and news", and the monitoring of human rights violations, increasing the risk of a future lack of accountability. Some journalists have been out of contact for months, leaving their situations unknown and raising concerns about their well-being.

The situation of journalists inside Sudan:

Amidst the violent clashes and looting that took place in a number of states as a result of the war, media workers were subjected to serious threats. They faced grave violations including murder, displacement, imprisonment, arrest, threats, vandalism, and raids on private and public properties. These incidents raised fears that journalists and their properties were being targeted. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate has repeatedly sounded the alarm about the peril posed by the targeting civilians in general and journalists in particular, in violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL).





May 05.2024

In the face of escalating security restrictions and continuous targeting imposed on journalists, journalists have been compelled to conceal their journalistic identity. The profession of journalism has evolved into a dangerous occupation, bordering on criminality in the eyes of warring factions. Journalists have been subjected to harassment and abuse, with ongoing smear campaigns, false accusations, and unfounded doubts launched against them, in some cases by other media professionals, accusing them of supporting one side in the conflict.

Furthermore, there is a lack of support, protection, and advocacy for journalists in Sudan. As a result, many journalists, including women journalists, have been forced to flee to safer areas within Sudan, seeking refuge in shelters that lack basic necessities. This challenging situation has made it extremely difficult for journalists to fulfill their professional duties. Some have sought refuge across the border in dire conditions, while others have resorted to leaving Sudan illegally, which has severely impacted their professional stability.

In western Sudan, journalists are facing even worse conditions, especially in areas of intense fighting and clashes, with internet and telecommunications services blackout for more than seven months. The situation in Darfur, particularly in Al Geneina, West Darfur, is very challenging, as the region has been experiencing a high level of tribal conflict for a long time. After the outbreak of the April 15 war, West Darfur, with its capital Al Geneina, witnessed tragic tribal events that resulted in the death and displacement of thousands of families. Journalists who fled the war in West Darfur and crossed the border into Chad are facing extremely difficult conditions. They have had to walk tens of miles to reach the Chadian border and are now staying in displacement camps,





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May 05.2024

exhausted and sick, without access to necessary medical and health care. Many have lost family members and loved ones during the conflict.

In Gezira State, central Sudan, authorities have been obstructing journalists from reporting events and forcibly preventing them from filming on public streets and in shelters for war-displaced people. Subsequently, they have granted permission for coverage only under the condition of certification. Some journalists have encountered difficulties in obtaining clearance from the Gezira State authorities to practice journalism within the state borders, with some eventually succeeding in obtaining it.

Meanwhile, the Governor of Northern State, Abedin Awadallah, issued a decree prohibiting the publication of any media content related to the regular forces (security forces), the state government, or any of its organs or units without prior approval from the competent authorities of the Secretariat of the Government or the various statutory organs. Any individual found a violator of this decree, whether through acts, incitement, assistance, trade, or publication, will face imprisonment for up to five years and a fine not exceeding SDG 2,000,000. Repeat offenders will face double the penalty. Additionally, if it is discovered that any means of transport or other prohibited acts are used, the means of transport or other items will be confiscated by the Ministry of Finance and Manpower of the Northern State.

#### Situation of Journalists in Exile:

Hundreds of journalists have been forced to flee the country, seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The number of fleeing journalists has increased notably after the attack





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May 05.2024

on Wad Medani in Al-Jazeera state between 15 and 19 December 2023, Sudan's second-largest city which hosted close to half a million internal displaced people. more than 200 journalists have sought refuge in neighboring countries, among them more than 100 Journalists in Uganda, and about 150 Journalist in Egypt alone. These journalists now face difficult living conditions and encounter challenges in legalizing their stay, while some of them continue to be the target of smear campaigns.

In Egypt, for those who entered the country with visas have faced challenges in obtaining the residency. Some applied for the residence as early as October but have yet to be granted. Others entered the country through smuggling and they were given appointment six months later to register at the Commissioner of Refugees, and through this time they remained illegally in the country and subject to deportation to Sudan by the authorities in Egypt. The residence in Egypt (Except students' residence) restricts individuals from freely travel out of the country, necessitating a new visa for re-entry, which significantly impacted the ability of journalists to travel for work and return to their families.

In Uganda asylum seekers are required to reside in refugee camps for a minimum of two weeks under harsh conditions to apply for asylum. Additionally, language barriers hinder their integration into host communities, exacerbating their plight. In Saudi Arabia, a number of journalists informed the Syndicate that they entered the country through a visitor visa which expires in three months; and to obtain residency it is required to pay 6000 Saudi Ryal (about 1600 USD) and to leave the country and return. As a result of this context, Sudanese journalists in exile, are struggling to afford rent, medical expenses, and education for their children. Most of the Sudanese journalists





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May 05.2024

suffer from trauma stemming from their experiences in Sudan, which is exacerbated by the hardships they face in their host countries. Several journalists have left the journalistic profession and are doing other jobs or have established other type of private business, for example a member of the executive committee of the SJS has left the journalism work and sought living in another profession.

#### Killing of Journalists:

During the reporting period, the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate documented the killing of six journalists, including two women, in Central Darfur, Khartoum State, and North Darfur. At least two of these journalists were targeted because of their work. For example, on October 10, 2023, Halima Idriss, a correspondent for Sudan Bukra TV Channel, was fatally hit by a military Rapid Support Forces (RSF) vehicle after covering a story at Omdurman Hospital. Similarly, on March 2, 2024, armed individuals raided the home of journalist Khalid Balal, Director of Information at the Commission of Shepherds and Nomads in North Darfur and killed him in El Fasher. Another incident occurred on January 12, 2024, when armed individuals wearing a uniform of the Sudanese Army raided the home of journalist Ahmed Yusuf Arabi, a correspondent for Blue Nile TV Channel in Omdurman, accusing him of supporting the opposing party and later delivering his dead body to his family after shooting him.

#### Assault and Injury:

Eight cases of assault and injury have been documented, including three cases of injuries among female journalists and one case of sexual assault as follows: one jour-







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May 05.2024

-nalist was injured from shrapnel during an airstrike on his home in South Khartoum; one journalist was injured in his arm following clashes in Nyala, South Darfur; one journalist was struck by a stray bullet in her leg in Nyala, South Darfur; a journalist was injured during the attack at her house in Omdurman; a journalist suffered various injuries and a broken leg in a drone attack; a journalist was injured due to the bombardment of his home in Nyala; a journalist suffered an injury in his leg in Ardamata city, where they currently reside in a precarious security situation.; a female journalist was attacked and sexually harassed in her family's home in Omdurman.

Journalists have been wounded by gunshot at work and in their homes, endangering their lives, killing family members, and damaging their homes. The number of journalists subjected to gunshots has been 28, including 8 women. For example, one journalist was shot with a pistol while covering the clashes in the east of the capital Khartoum. Two journalists were also shot by snipers while at work in Khartoum, Al-Sitteen Street, an area controlled by the Rapid Support Forces. Additionally, the surroundings of the building where the offices of eight news channels are located on As-Sitteen Street in Khartoum were bombarded, threatening the safety of journalists and their lives due to the bombardment and the escalation of fighting in the vicinity of the building.

Since the beginning of the war several journalists faced assault at checkpoints throughout the capital city of Khartoum, with 27 cases of theft of phones and other personal belongings were documented. For instance, on April 15, a BBC reporter was beaten by an army force as he attempted to cross the Al-Futaihab bridge between Omdurman and Khartoum to reach his workplace, and Al-Jazeera Chanell four-man crew of journalists were expelled from the Kalakla area while covering the war events.





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May 05.2024

One journalist was assaulted, beaten and his phone and cash were robbed at Nyala's Malaja Market by a Rapid Support Force while documenting shops that were looted and burned in the fighting. One journalist was beaten by unknown assailants while covering the press conference of the Rapid Support Forces in Geneva and trying to rob her phone. A journalist was also beaten by a police officer on the public street at the market entrance in the city of Al-Qadarif after filming a police vehicle that blocked the street for more than 48 hours.

#### Enforced Disappearance and Detention:

A total of 39 journalists, including 5 women journalists, have been abducted, arrested, and detained. At the time of publication of this report, three journalists remain in detention, and a prosecutor has allegedly ordered the arrest of 20 journalists for alleged affiliation with the Rapid Support Forces, whose names were not disclosed. Sudanese Army checkpoints have openly displayed hostility towards journalists, often followed by accusations.

On April 15, 2023, a broadcast engineer was arrested from inside the National Radio and Television Corporation (NRTC) headquarters by the Rapid Support Forces. The engineer was detained within the premises and forced to work with them for three months before being released. In June 2023, a journalist was arrested by the Intelligence of the 2nd Infantry Division in Al Qadarif city. Following interrogation, he was released, but his passport and phones were confiscated, rendering his family unable to contact him and disrupting his work. He was then compelled to remain detained in Al Qadarif city without any identification papers amidst the ongoing war conditions, with-





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May 05.2024

-out explanation. On August 15, 2023, the General Intelligence Service (GIS) arrested a journalist from Sinja city in Sinnar State for releasing a press report disclosing the harassment faced by displaced persons in Sinnar by the Security Forces. In September 2023, a female journalist was arrested from her home in Atbara, River Nile State, and held for two weeks for publishing an article critical of the state's governor. On 29 September 2023, a female journalist was summoned to the police station for investigation and threatened with arrest while covering cholera awareness in an area where cholera cases were reported, in Gedarif and its localities. Also in September 2023, a journalist was arrested by the RSF from a residential area and taken to an unknown destination, where he remains forcibly disappeared. On 13 December, an unidentified entity arrested a journalist from the market in his neighborhood in Haj Yusuf, East Nile. Upon the identification of his occupation as a journalist, he was taken to an undisclosed location and is currently missing. On 30 December 2023, a photojournalist in Port Sudan was arrested by a group linked to military intelligence and is still in detention. In January 2024, a technician from the NRTC was arrested by the RSF and remains detained at an undisclosed location.

Trapped in the workplace:

When the conflict erupted on 15 April, over 100 journalists from various radio and television stations were stranded at their workplaces for up to 72 hours during intense bombardment without access to food. Some journalists made individual efforts during truce periods, while others were evacuated by the Red Cross after appeals from the Journalists Syndicate. For instance, on Saturday, April 15, each crew working on the





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May 05.2024

day was detained from the Radio and Television Corporation (NRTC) amidst the fighting before being released in groups. On the same day, 15 journalists from the Sudan News Agency were held for 72 hours at their office in central Khartoum. Several journalists were also trapped in Al-Nelain Towers since April 15. In the following week, 13 journalists at Nelain Towers and one journalist were rescued by the Sudanese Red Cross on April 23 after spending nine days and nights in their offices in a conflict-ridden area without food supplies. Eight journalists from Al Jazeera News Channel were stranded at their office on As-Sitteen Street in Khartoum due to escalating clashes in the vicinity. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate sought assistance from the Red Cross to relocate them to a safe location, and the request was promptly addressed.

#### Threats to Journalists:

A number of journalists have faced threats, including death threats through phone messages and social media. Posters publicly accused two journalists of treason, displaying their photos, which the SJS considered an explicit threat to their lives. Another journalist received a phone call from someone claiming to be affiliated with military intelligence in Karri locality, Omdurman, informing him that there was an arrest warrant issued against him and another journalist colleague on charges of working with rebels. This forced them to flee and travel illegally to a neighboring country. In Ad Deain, East Darfur, a female journalist was chased down to her family home and threatened with death and sexual assault for producing news articles and videos in Darfur. Another female journalist received a series of threats through phone calls, WhatsApp and social media messages. She has also received threats through WhatsApp, including





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May 05.2024

a warning in April that military intelligence would pursue her. One female journalist was threatened and tortured with her family members by the RSF before leaving their house in East Nile, Khartoum. The house of another female journalist was raided by an unknown assailant after they left, and neighbors were asked about her whereabouts, and threatening letters were written on the wall of the house with ethnic connotations. A journalist's house in West Darfur was attacked by an unknown entity, with all his belongings stolen, including his personal computer and all journalistic belongings being burned. While the journalist fled the Ardamata area, he was hunted down and shot in the lower leg.

In February 2024, an army intelligence force known as the Special Squad raided the home of a journalist on Aba Island (Aljazeera Aba), White Nile State. The journalist was not present during the raid and was not found. The force conducted three searches of the house, in an attempt to locate him. Subsequently, the journalist traveled from Rabak to Kosti, Renk, and eventually reached South Sudan after a month and a half of journey that coinciding with the disruption of communication and internet networks. In October 2023, a journalist faced death threats and a smear campaign by an unknown entity. The campaign started on January 19 with a post on social media making false accusations against the journalist, claiming a connection between his reporting and a violent artillery attack. The post also disclosed the journalist's home address with precise coordinates.

In Al Geneina, West Darfur, RSF released a blacklist of individuals accused of working for the opposing warring party, including death threats. One female journalist on the list shares a name with another journalist based outside Sudan. The first journalist





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May 05.2024

contacted the syndicate upon learning of the list, while the second journalist received threatening phone calls from an unknown number, warning her that they knew her whereabouts and intended to harm her. Another journalist was confronted by an unidentified individual outside of Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath studios in Cairo, who warned him against appearing on certain channels and threatened his life, claiming to be part of a group of five individuals tracking him. Additionally, four journalists have been labeled as war criminals by the Public Prosecutor's Office, with allegations of violations by the Rapid Support Forces against political leaders within the Civil Democratic Forces Coordination (TAQADUM).

#### Attack on Journalists' Homes:

During the war, journalists' houses are raided, looted, and destroyed almost daily, with some being converted into military barracks. At least 100 houses have been raided. The most significant incident took place at the residence of Professor Ali Shommu, a former Minister of Culture and Information, Director of Radio and Television, and Professor of Media at Sudanese universities. His house was raided three times by the Rapid Support Forces, who expelled his family and looted the house and cars in May. The Journalists Syndicate issued a statement warning about the seriousness of this situation. Professor Ali Shommu's library contains a vast historical legacy, including documents and pictures documenting important stages of Sudan's history and his media work. This collection is an invaluable asset for future generations.

#### Smear Campaigns:





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May 05.2024

There have been online campaigns that threaten media and press freedoms. A campaign on Facebook led by military figures targeted journalists and TV channels, urging citizens to expel journalists from news sites and demanding authorities to shut down the TV channels. Anonymous lists have emerged, naming male and female journalists who have been accused of working for one of the warring parties and putting their lives at risk. Some individuals on these lists have reported receiving threatening calls, warning of physical harm once the conflict is over.

False accusations and insults have been aimed at Abdelmonim Abu Idriss, the Head of the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, and several journalists. The Syndicate has been labeled as the "Boko" syndicate, accused of organizing meetings to criticize the armed forces for their actions against citizens. It is alleged that they are using media platforms to launch a campaign against the army. These accusations suggest that they are inciting security and intelligence agencies against journalists and their syndicate in mid-September.

The Sudanese Radio and Sudanese Television, now broadcasting from Port Sudan, are under the control of the Sudanese Armed Forces and employ journalists linked to the remnants of the former regime. This violates, for example, the independence that any public service broadcaster is expected to apply in human resources policies, and ethical principles.

#### Conclusion:

In times of war, journalists play a vital role, bringing essential information to light and holding power to account. However, the alarming trend of attacks against journalists





May 05.2024

during the conflict, documented by the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, undermines the very foundation of the right to freedom of expression and protection journalists, as per international humanitarian and human rights law. These attacks not only endanger the lives of those reporting from the frontlines but also deprive the global and local communities of vital information needed to take informed decisions. The international community must stand united in condemning such acts of violence and take concerted actions to protect media freedom and ensure the protection of journalists, so they can continue to provide live-saving information to the people of Sudan.

**The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate calls on the international community to:**

- 1. Support the protection of Sudanese journalists on the ground.**
- 2. Create a dedicated international emergency fund for the protection of Sudanese journalists.**
- 3. Call for the investigation of crimes against journalists and for holding those responsible accountable.**
- 4. Supporting Sudanese journalism resilience, sustainability, and viability.**
- 5. Take measure to address disinformation and hate speech online.**

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