

Sudan's Displaced Millions the World Chooses Not to See

November 2025

OP-ED



**CENTRE FOR
GLOBAL AFFAIRS**

**WRITTEN BY
NOUR GHALI**

In Sudan's shattered neighbourhoods, families huddle in makeshift shelters, afraid to step outside. Sudan is currently the world's largest [displacement](#) crisis, [dubbed](#) the 'epi-centre of human suffering' by the UN Relief Chief, with [over 14.5 million people](#)-5 million of whom are children- internally and externally displaced. That is nearly one-third of the population of Sudan. It is not just the violence that prevents people from returning home, but also the threat of unexploded weapons. It will have a huge generational impact unlike other previous conflicts, where in the [past](#) even while there was ongoing conflict citizens were still able to access healthcare facilities or other essential services. The crisis is particularly atrocious in Sudan because unlike most other conflicts, the war is mainly occurring in urban areas. Yet, the world barely notices. The question is why?

To understand Sudan's displacement crisis, it is important to understand the [war](#) driving it. After the 2019 ousting of long-serving President Omar al-Bashir following mass protests, a joint military-civilian government was formed, but this transition collapsed after a 2021 coup led by General Burhan, head of the armed forces, and his deputy, Rapid Support Forces (RSF) leader General Dagalo. The two men disagreed on the move toward civilian rule, but the main [point of contention](#) was the plan to fold the 100,000-strong RSF into the army—and who would lead it. Both generals sought to consolidate their own power, neither willing to give up their position. Fighting erupted in April 2023, when RSF deployments around the country were perceived by the army as a threat. Today, the RSF controls most of Darfur and Kordofan, while the army holds much of northern and eastern Sudan.

The Sudan war is not an isolated or short-term crisis. The issue of displacement is [two-fold](#): internally, the unprecedented displacement means that basic services in Sudan are collapsing, leaving millions at risk of disease, famine and mass violence. Externally, their displacement puts pressure on neighbouring countries and humanitarian capacities, threatening regional stability further. Over 18 million Sudanese people face [acute](#) food insecurity, including 4 million children under the age of 5 suffering from malnutrition. Sudan's future is bleak, with displacement severing over half the population's access to water, food, healthcare and shelter. With [over](#) 80% of healthcare facilities shutting down, and education being put on the backburner for more immediate needs, getting statehood to function again is going to be a very difficult endeavour. More than half of the country's essential infrastructure is damaged. Agriculture is a core sector for the Sudanese economy which has been severely disrupted due to displacement, with water and electricity infrastructure being damaged from the war as well. State revenues [shrunk](#) by 80%. The devaluation of the currency and overall economic collapse occurring is launching it into the territory of a [fragile state](#), where a state is in danger of crisis in one or more of its subsystems, amounting to weak governance and less capacity to provide public services.

Despite the scale of the crisis, international humanitarian assistance remains insufficient. The United Nations (UN) appealed for \$2.7 billion in relief, yet [less than half](#) of that amount has been secured, leaving millions without crucial aid. The 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan reached [barely a fifth](#) of the US \$4.2 billion needed to achieve its objective of providing critical relief for 21 million Sudanese. In contrast, Ukraine [received 78.1%](#) of their total funding objective. Many advocates for Sudan emphasize that it has become a ["forgotten](#)



war,” drawing [minimal](#) media coverage and leaving the suffering of Sudanese communities largely ignored.

While Gaza and Ukraine have received a lot of international coverage, some conflicts like Sudan and the Congo have received less media attention. The answer to why is not so simple. Many choose to view it solely as an internal conflict, assuming nothing can be done about it. Harmful [stereotypes](#) and this area being conflict-ridden renders their suffering to the peripheral of global conflict. Structural disadvantages provide a barrier; global security and economic structures are [engineered](#) to prioritize the interests of colonial-era metropolises. Global actors make profit from exports of Sudanese resources through supplying arms and other materials. In this way, global actors are prioritizing Sudanese resources over Sudanese lives. Sudan's mineral wealth continues to flow in international markets, but its refugees flow to Chad, Egypt and South Sudan, not Europe or North America. Without sustaining [strategic](#) impact from the conflict, global powers turn the other way.

Sudan's crisis exposes a grim paradox: the country is strategically coveted by global powers, yet still ignored when it comes to donor priorities and media spotlight. Sudan's neglect is reinforced by a global system where agenda-setting institutions remain dominated by voices far from the continent. In these spaces, African experts are too often reduced to spectators, their insights filtered or silenced by Global North interlocutors who shape the narrative and the response, prioritizing their own agendas. Board seats in the largest global health institutions who are in a position to render aid [rarely](#) belong to people from low-income countries such as Sudan and therefore remain low on the priority list. In practice, this means that across 2000 positions on global health boards, a 2022 [study](#) found that about 75% of the seats were held by nationals of high-income countries, who only make up 16% of the world's population. This translates to woeful underrepresentation for low and middle income countries in [major health institutions](#), including the World Health Organization, the Global Fund targeting AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, Gavi, and the Pandemic Fund.

[Compassion fatigue](#) and crisis saturation also play a role in Sudan's neglect with constant exposure to warzones and suffering flooding our screens. As a result, audiences can find difficulty determining what to give their attention to, leading to “compassion fatigue” or “empathy fatigue”. Relentless media coverage can desensitize viewers, leading to apathy, boredom, or indifference. It can also lead the audience to feel helpless or stuck, believing that nothing they do can change the outcome, which could result in active avoidance. That is why it's important to not normalize suffering of any kind, and counter this onslaught of media coverage with [empathy cultivation](#), i.e. stories where they are not solely portrayed as tragic victims, but relatable through showing their commonplace concerns such as family, career, and daily life to humanize them. As media spectators, we should be mindful of the type of media we consume so that we do not become apathetic to others' suffering.

Sudan's war, famine, and displacement are a stark reminder that sustainable solutions must be African-led. Regional actors have the opportunity to step forward. Localizing peace and opening lines of dialogue with the actors in Sudan will be an important step for the countries in the Horn of Africa to facilitate. The African Union should utilize its intended purpose and mechanisms to



find lasting solutions and ramp up regional diplomatic pressure in the wake of the failure of other global aid and health institutions. First and foremost, an immediate and lasting [ceasefire](#) is needed, then a negotiated agreement to start off the process of a legitimate and inclusive Sudanese-led political process and state-building. Opening a humanitarian corridor so aid can be delivered effectively is essential. None of this can happen without the world paying more attention to Sudan's plight.

