

Written evidence from Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (UKA0005)

UK-SUDAN RELATIONS

HART is a UK-based NGO. We work through local partners in Sudan to provide: (a) aid to those who suffer oppression and persecution; and (b) advocacy to reflect the priorities of local communities. We have long-argued that UK policy in Sudan should be guided by the Sudanese people's pursuit of lasting peace, freedom and democracy.

UK policy towards Sudan

The initiation of the 'UK-Sudan Strategic Dialogue' in March 2016 – as well as active participation in European Union engagement with the Government of Sudan – marked a strategic shift in UK policy towards Sudan.

The UK Government moved from the 'stick' to the 'carrot' policy, choosing to cooperate with Omar al-Bashir's regime to induce behavioural change and to secure its own interests in the region. This change in approach warrants scrutiny, not least because it bestowed credibility upon the regime without yielding any tangible results for the UK.

Since the overthrow of al-Bashir, the UK appears to have changed its approach. Yet it remains unclear whether Strategic Dialogue has been either temporarily or permanently suspended – as of 3 April, no future meetings had been confirmed.¹

Genocidal policies

Omar al-Bashir is indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. His Government were responsible for genocidal policies, including the deaths of three million people and the displacement of five million people in Darfur and the Two Areas (South Kordofan and Blue Nile States), while still perpetrating gross violations of human rights.

Despite his overthrow in April, attacks on civilians continued in Darfur and the Two Areas,² as well as on peaceful protesters in Khartoum and elsewhere, including the brutal dispersal of protesters by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces on 3 June, resulting in over 130 deaths.

From January this year, the UK and its Troika partners (US and Norway) issued a series of strongly-worded statements condemning the violence. The UK Government must not de-prioritise human rights in its future relationship with the Transitional Government of Sudan. Nor should it shrink from making public statements when faced with grave human rights violations.

¹ House of Lords Written Answer, 3 April 2019, HL14773

² See, for example, *Human Rights Update*, April-June 2019, Nubsud Human Rights Monitors Organisation

Civilian protests

The recent outbreak of attacks against peaceful protesters in Khartoum are well documented. The Transitional Military Council (TMC), which seized power in April after the fall of al-Bashir, bears full responsibility.

The TMC should be held accountable for attacks on peaceful protesters. Perpetrators must be brought to justice.

Transition to democracy

On 17 August, the TMC and civilian leaders signed a deal as part of a planned 39-month transition to democracy. We hope their Constitutional Declaration will lead to the formation of a Government that can guarantee peace and stability throughout Sudan.

We share widespread concerns about whether military and political officials associated with the former regime will prove trustworthy partners – especially given their history of repression and violence.

For example, the TMC's leader, General al-Burhan, who has been sworn in as Chair of the newly-established Sovereign Council, played a key role in the former regime's brutal counter-insurgency campaign. People in Darfur have expressed their outrage at al-Burhan's appointment, claiming that under his command, the Border Guards committed numerous killings and forced displacement of civilians.

The TMC's deputy head, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, was a mid-level commander in the Border Guards before being promoted by al-Bashir in 2013 to become commander of the Rapid Support Forces, drawn mainly from the Janjaweed militia and accused of committing grave human rights violations in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and, more recently, in Khartoum.

Since assuming power in April, the TMC has released political prisoners across the country and has arrested a number of high-ranking officials within al-Bashir's former ruling party, though many fear that elite politicians remain in power behind the scenes.

The UK and its Troika partners must maintain pressure on the country's interim Government and demand a clear timeline for a sustainable transition to democracy – real change must occur. In this context, the UK must use its strong diplomatic ties with Gulf states, who it is believed will play a key role in region's future, identifying the costs of another military dictatorship and the benefits of democratic institutions.

Humanitarian crisis

Despite improved food availability from the 2018/19 harvest, many households are expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes through September, the peak of the lean season. This means households will either: have food consumption gaps, which are

reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.

Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected in much of Darfur, North Kordofan, South Kordofan, southern Blue Nile, northern Kassala and Red Sea States. The increase in returnees to South Kordofan and Blue Nile (partly driven by events in Khartoum) is expected to put pressure on already stretched resources.

According to the South Kordofan and Blue Nile Coordination Unit, diarrhoea, malaria and coughing are reported to be widespread in the Two Areas. Whole communities in Blue Nile are cut off from accessing health clinics by flooding rivers. Furthermore, the supply of essential drugs has significantly reduced, a problem which is compounded by the fact that malaria cases are expected to rise as usual during this time of year. Many children will be left untreated for malaria and will risk severe complications. During this lean season, children and pregnant women are extremely vulnerable to malnutrition, with nutrition services available at just a small number of health facilities, seriously insufficient to cover the needs.

Access to reproductive health services and safe childbirth facilities remains extremely limited, with only few supported health facilities providing comprehensive care. Women and girls in particular continue to be exposed to unwanted pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, sexually-transmitted infections and the risk of maternal mortality.

Cross-border aid

The people in the Two Areas have deep distrust of the Government of Sudan due to their experience of sustained genocidal policies perpetrated against them for so many years. They are in desperate need of aid to come from across the border rather than Khartoum.

In particular, they are worried that aid will be tampered with and used to further the military regime's agenda. Their fear and distrust is not unfounded as there is history of the regime interfering with international aid operations in Darfur. We therefore urge the UK Government to make representations to the interim Government of Sudan, urging them to allow cross-border aid to reach the Two Areas to enable the survival of civilians.

At this critical time for Sudan, the Sudanese people will be watching closely the UK's response, hoping that this will support sincerely and effectively their courage and the very high price they have paid for the eventual achievement of peace, freedom and democracy for which they have yearned for so long.

**The Baroness Cox, CEO Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust
30 August 2019**

