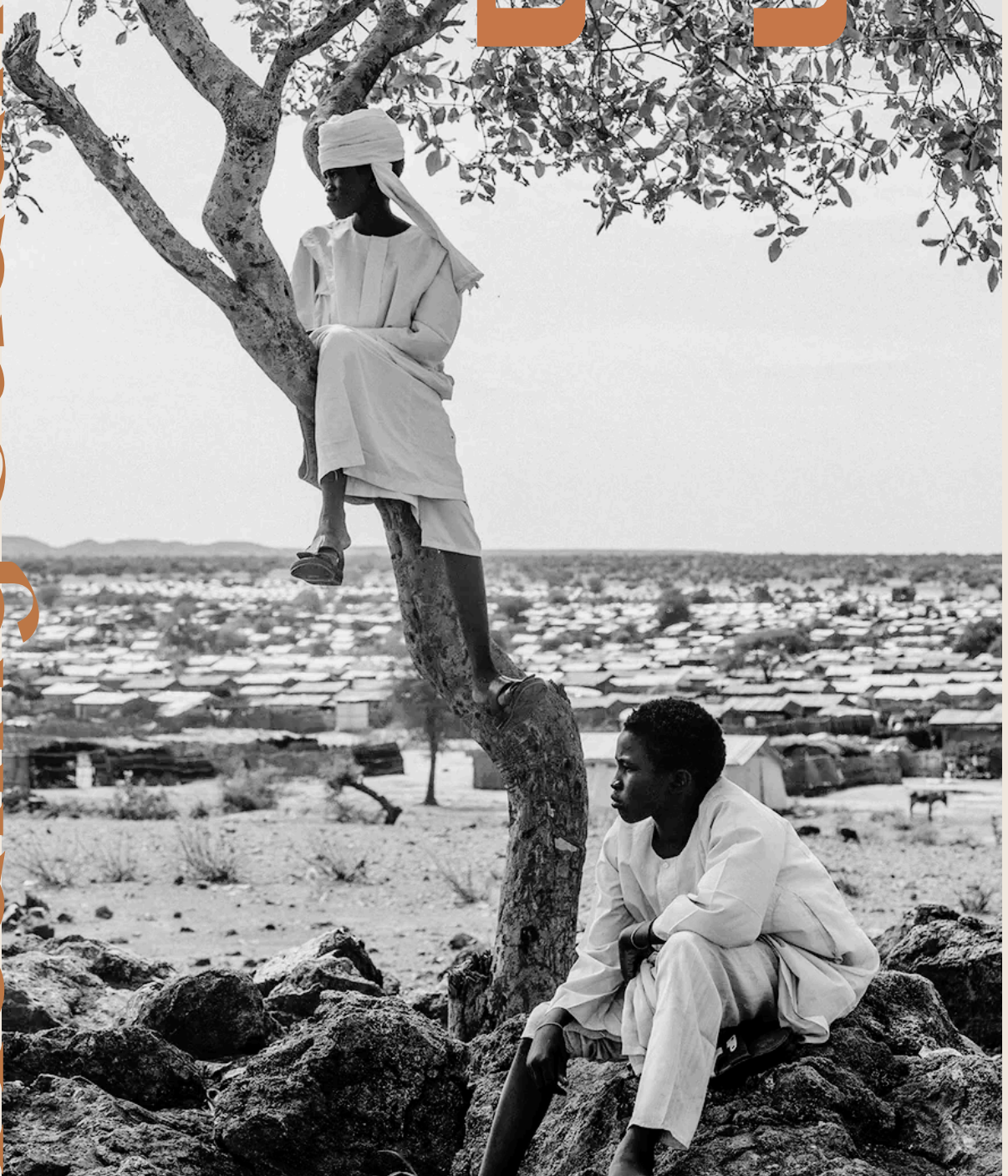


السودان

Healing Sudan



A COMMUNITY GUIDE TO HISTORY,
FAITH, AND RESILIENCE

MARISTAN

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ancient History

Sudan's history is rich and complex, marked by ancient kingdoms, periods of foreign rule, and civil war. Early human settlements in Sudan date back to over 60,000 years. The Kingdom of Kush was one of the earliest civilizations in Sudan, emerging along the Nile River and exerting a powerful influence on ancient Egypt (Collins, 2024). Nubia, an ancient civilization in modern-day Sudan, had significant relationships with Egypt in both its ruling and cultural aspects (Collins, 2024). This was followed by periods of Christian rule that flourished after the fall of the Kingdom of Kush, and then gradually began its conversion to Islam around the 14th century. During the 14th and 15th centuries, Bedouin tribes expanded and settled in large parts of Sudan (BBC News, 2023).

Ottoman and British Colonial Rule

In 1517, the Mamluk Sultanate was defeated by the Ottoman Empire, which led to the addition of Egypt to its territory. This was an important conquest, as the land was fertile and led to the control of the Red Sea trade routes. By the early 19th century, the Ottoman center was weakened, and Egypt was ruled by viceroy Muhammad Ali, who sought to expand control of his territory by conquering Sudan. Muhammad Ali was interested in Sudan's natural resources, namely its gold, and securing a supply of enslaved people for

Egypt's army and labor force (Robinson, 1925). The Red Sea slave trade predated Muhammad Ali's rule, beginning as early as the 7th and 8th centuries. However, he sought to expand routes and systemize the practice, turning it into a state-run system. It is estimated that around 500,000 enslaved people were exported from Sudan during the 19th century, and the Red Sea slave trade remained one of the most enduring slave systems, persisting until the network's abolition in the mid-20th century (Miran, 2022). This marked the beginning of systematic resource exploitation, which set the stage for later British colonial rule (e.g, using Sudan for cotton, arabic gum, and labor), and the current exploitation of Sudan's gold by the UAE (Mollan, 2020).

The Mahdist revolt expelled Ottoman forces in 1881 and created the short-lived Mahdist state (Sikainga, 2022). However, the British soon conquered Sudan in 1898 after defeating the Mahdist forces, forming a British colony (Sikainga, 2022). Later British-Egyptian colonial rule deepened existing divisions between North and South Sudan, as the two regions were governed and administered differently. For example, the regions had increased missionary activity in the south and differed in labour and development policies (Wendt, 2018). This deepened cultural and religious divides, widening north-south differences (Collins, 2024). However, Sudan ultimately gained independence from British colonial rule in 1956 (Collins, 2024). Following their independence, the Sudanese government in the north, Khartoum, centralized power while excluding the southerners from key political and military positions. Promises of regional autonomy were broken, fueling mistrust and culminating in South Sudan's secession from the Republic of Sudan in 2011 (Randeree, 2010).

Recent History (Civil War)

The discord between the North and South began due to deep-rooted ethnic and economic divisions, which were exacerbated by political marginalization and uneven resource distribution. With continued conflicts between the north and south, the Addis Ababa Agreement was developed in 1972 in an attempt to cease the north-south civil war in Sudan (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). This agreement led to South Sudan's regional autonomy and allowed local control of its education and administration. However, after ten years, the President at the time, Jaafar Nimeiri imposed Islamic law nationwide and abolished the south's autonomy. This led to the breakdown of peace and resulted in the second civil war (1983-2005). In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, leading to a referendum and the official secession of South Sudan (BBC News, 2023a).

The Darfur Conflict

The Darfur conflict stemmed from deep political, ethnic, and economic inequalities that had long plagued Sudan. The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) was founded in 2003 by brothers Khalil and Gibril Ibrahim, with the goal of addressing the country's long-standing inequalities by overthrowing the president of Sudan at the time, Omar al Bashir (Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, 2013). The organization aimed to reform the systematic imbalance of power and wealth in Sudan and prided itself on representing a diverse set of tribes to support its efforts. However, many critiqued this mission Abdelaziz & Dziadosz, 2012)

From the JEM organization, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) emerged as a faction from the group due to the arrest of Adam Ali Shogar, a leader from the JEM, who was accused of secretly working with the government of Sudan (Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment, 2010). This led the JEM commanders to reorganize as SLM. They began to work with tribes, political groups, as well as the Government of Sudan, to reach a peace that works for Darfur and its displaced community (Sudan Human Security Baseline Assessment, 2010).

In February 2003, The JEM and SLM led an uprising protesting the government's neglect of Darfur by targeting the military forces due to their role in imposing the government's rule. The government retaliated by using Arab militias known as the Janjaweed, who persecuted civilians in Darfur, burned down homes and villages (Human Rights Watch, n.d), and prevented the delivery of international aid, such as food and medical supplies (Collins, 2019). The International Criminal Court (ICC) opened investigations in June 2005 to assess crimes of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur by the government and the Janjaweed (International Criminal Court, 2019). By 2007, the violence had escalated into a genocide, with hundreds of thousands dead and over two million people displaced in Darfur. Under the observation of the ICC, Al Bashir was charged with three counts of genocide, five crimes against humanity, and two counts of war crimes (Coalition For The International Criminal Court, nd).

Current Crisis

The escalation in Sudan came after years of unresolved tension among military leaders following the fall of Omar Al-Bashir in 2019. The current crisis began in April 2023 when fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) led by General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) (Gohar, 2025). The RSF is a powerful paramilitary group that evolved in 2013 from the Janjaweed militia, hired by Bashir to protect him from coups and assassination attempts. Ultimately, the SAF and RSF had enacted a coup together to remove Bashir from power. Burhan and Hemedti established a joint leadership labeled the Transitional Sovereignty Council (Council on Foreign Relations). Disagreement between the co-leaders on plans for the future of the Sudanese government led to tensions between the SAF and RSF. What began as a power struggle for governmental control in the capital of Khartoum expanded across the country and has led to devastation.

The current situation in Sudan is considered to be the world's largest and fastest displacement crisis, with 14.6 million civilians displaced, 30.4 million in need of humanitarian assistance (International Rescue Committee, 2025), and estimates of up to 150,000 civilians dead (Ferragamo, 2024). At least 11.3 million Sudanese are displaced within Sudan, and 3.5 million are forced across borders into neighboring countries such as Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt. Famine has severely befallen the Sudanese people, with 24.6 million experiencing food insecurity and starvation (World Food Organization USA, 2024).

Humanitarian access has been almost entirely blocked, with aid convoys denied entry or looted, stopping necessary supplies from entering the country (Nashed, 2023). Communication blackouts and attacks on humanitarian workers have impeded lifesaving assistance (Amnesty International, 2024). Healthcare facilities, such as hospitals and clinics, are facing destruction, resulting in 80% of facilities being unable to function (Kolstad, 2025). Disparities are especially prevalent among women in Sudan, who make up the majority of displaced persons across all age groups (United Nations Women, 2025). As a weapon of war, Sudanese women are enduring escalating rates of gender-based violence and sexual abuse at the hands of members from the RSF. An estimated 25% of the population is at risk, and it is important to note that such cases are vastly underreported. The collapse of the central government has enabled armed groups to act with impunity, as there is no unified authority to enforce protection or human rights measures.

These humanitarian consequences are inextricably connected to Sudan's ethnic and political tensions. Although Sudan is predominantly composed of an Arab majority population, numerous ethnic groups exist, including the Darfuri people who speak numerous languages such as Fur and Masalit. The Darfur region continues to be ethnically cleansed by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group. Within the Darfur region, the RSF has taken control of the Zamzam refugee camp, a site of confirmed famine among residents. Several factors have exacerbated this crisis. Among those is geopolitical complicity. Surrounding Arab nations contribute to the ongoing violence in Sudan for multiple strategic reasons. Due to Sudan's geographic

location and abundant natural resources, the country has become a significant hub for exporting goods to neighboring nations, attracting substantial political investment from countries worldwide (World Bank, 2024). Many nations, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen, are benefiting from the constant arms sales into Sudan (Amnesty International, 2024). With weapons and ammunition flowing into Sudan, the conflict has only escalated. Arab nations have also been accused of exploiting the Sudanese people's desperation in the midst of this crisis. For example, Darfur families were bribed by Saudi Arabia to send their children aged 14 to 17 to fight in the Saudi war against Yemen in 2015 (Al Jazeera, 2018). External groups have taken advantage of the crisis by assuming control of resource mining in the region. Sudan is Africa's third-largest gold producer, but the process is controlled by the RSF, which then supplies external nations such as the UAE and Russia. Sudan's gold reserves have nearly doubled in production since the start of the fighting, with some of the gold being smuggled illegally into the UAE (Saed & Pearce, 2025). Despite the scale of suffering, the international response has been minimal.

Currently, the RSF continues to seize cities across Sudan, prolonging the ongoing crisis and affecting millions of civilians. El-Fasher, the last major city in Darfur still under the control of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), has been under siege by the RSF since May 2024, trapping an estimated 260,000 civilians (Ali, 2025). Since the siege began, UNICEF has documented at least 1,000 children maimed or killed by the RSF and over 1,100 grave violations against children (Ali, 2025). In October 2025, after more than 540 days of siege, the RSF captured El-Fasher, leading to

major displacement and civilian casualties. The city's fall has effectively given the RSF full control over Darfur, raising fears of ethnically motivated violence. The fall of the city has contributed to the world's largest internal displacement crisis, with over 10 million Sudanese individuals displaced (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2025). Since then, humanitarian organizations have pulled out of the region, intensifying shortages of food, water, medicine, and increasing disease outbreaks (International Rescue Committee, 2023). These atrocities have been confirmed through satellite imagery from the Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab (2025), however, there has been a limited international response, with no effective accountability measures put in place.



Daraja Oula, El-Fasher 27 October 2025

Cluster of objects consistent with the size of human bodies and reddish ground discoloration

13.6337961, 25.3256965

In imagery collected over Daraja Oula on 27 October 2025, the presence of two clusters of light and dark colored objects consistent with the size of human bodies, reddish ground discoloration, and vehicles are visible. These observations are not seen in prior satellite imagery.



Yale SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Humanitarian Research Lab

27 October 2025 © Airbus DS 2025

Daraja Oula, El-Fasher 27 October 2025

Clusters of objects and ground discoloration

13.6329010, 25.3271401

Imagery collected over the Daraja Oula neighborhood in El-Fasher on 27 October 2025 shows the presence of clusters of objects, ground discoloration, and light technical vehicles. The objects within these clusters measure between 1.5 meters – 2 meters in length. A group of light technical vehicles appear to be blocking the road near where what appears to be red discoloration on the ground. One cluster of objects is flanked by 3 light technical vehicles.



ISLAMIC CONTEXT

Sudan is a Muslim-majority country. Yet many Muslim-majority nations and communities have remained silent regarding the suffering of the Sudanese people. Islam demands more from us. It calls us towards equality and justice. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared, “O people, your Lord is one and your father Adam is one. There is no favor of an Arab over a foreigner, nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin, nor black skin over white skin, except by righteousness. Have I not delivered the message?” [Musnad Ahmad No. 22978]. This simple message dismantled notions of racial superiority more than fourteen centuries ago. It reminds us that every believer, regardless of race or nationality, is bound together by collective faith and human dignity. When we see the people of Sudan facing violence, displacement, collective punishment, and barbaric actions of people claiming to be Muslims, our hearts hurt at this blatant contradiction of Islamic values and teachings. The Prophet ﷺ taught us that “If anyone relieves a Muslim believer from one of the hardships of this worldly life, Allah will relieve him of one of the hardships of the Day of Resurrection. . . Allah helps His slave as long as he helps his brother.” (Ibn Majah No. 225). To stand with people of Sudan is not an act of charity, but also an act of faith. As such, helping our brothers and sisters in this world not only helps us follow the teachings of our beloved messenger but also directly benefits us in the next life. It is the most practical expression of the Tawhid (The Oneness of Allah): the recognition that all people from one Creator are equal in the eyes of our

Lord. Islam emphasizes that every human being has a right to basic needs: “There is no right for the son of Adam other than these things: A house which he lives in, a garment which covers his nakedness, and Jilf (a piece of bread) and water.” [Al-Tirmithi Hadith No. 2341]. It is our job as humans and followers of our beloved Messenger to advocate for the refugees, provide shelter, and ensure that no one is deprived of their most basic human rights.

We must rise above empty platitudes and passive concern. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart; and that is the weakest of faith.” [Al-Nawawi Hadith No. 34]. Our response to Sudan should reflect this Prophetic call to action. Begin with what is within your reach. Support relief organizations that provide food, water, and shelter. We must use our voice to raise awareness and remind others that silence is not neutral in the face of oppression. And if for whatever reason, we are unable to act or speak, then at the very least we must let our hearts remain alive. Let it ache for your brothers and sisters, and turn that ache into dua. Pray for them in sujood, in the stillness of the night when no one can hear other than our lord most high. Verily, dua is never lost with Allah.

When physical access or support is limited, prayer can be our meaningful avenue. Do not underestimate the impact of dua and prayer. It is authentically reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) would pray Qunut prayer (a special supplication during the standing position of prayer, usually in the

final rak'ah during times of collective hardship or need) in congregational prayers for months if the situation demanded it (Wahb 2024). At one point, after the Prophet had arrived in Medina, the Quraysh had restrained a group of Sahaba in Mecca and subjected them to the most cruel tortures and restraints. The Prophet was deeply hurt by their situation, not knowing how to intervene directly. Instead, he turned to Allah and made dua by name for the people as well as made dua against the oppressors (Al-Bukhari Hadith No. 6200). We must use dua to center our intentions and actions, not replace them. In addition, the Prophet would make a general dua for protection. Furthermore, Ibn Majah reports that the Prophet (ﷺ) never abandoned saying this dua every morning and evening: "O Allah protect me from my front, behind me, from my right and my left, and from above me, and I seek refuge in Your Magnificence from being taken unaware from beneath me." (Ibn Majah Hadith No. 3871) In addition, when the Prophet (ﷺ) was worried about a specific situation, he would say, "O Allah! We ask You to face them, and seek Your Protection against their evil." [al-Nawawī Hadith 981)].

May Allah (ﷻ) ease the burdens of our Sudanese brothers and sisters, grant them healing, and inspire us to be instruments of His mercy.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health cannot be addressed without first acknowledging the magnitude of physical violence the Sudanese population is experiencing. The constant threat of violence, risk of injury and death, ongoing famine, and exposure to sexual violence leave individuals fighting for survival daily. When individuals do not feel physically safe, their minds remain in a state of fear, as their safety is not guaranteed. Recognizing the impact of physical violence is essential as restoring safety, dignity, and fundamental human rights is a necessary prerequisite to meaningful mental health support.

Effects of War, Displacement, and Violence

The war in Sudan has brought both physical and emotional harm as communities are experiencing forced displacement, family separation, community breakdowns, and the loss of financial security. Bombings, shootings, the breakdown of medical facilities, and the cessation of schooling have led to the loss of hope and protection (Hujale, 2024). These experiences are physically harmful, and they also have a lasting mental impact. In the White Nile State, it was found that 45% of internally displaced Sudanese had poor physical health, such as respiratory infections, gastric upsets, insomnia, and prolonged flu episodes (Ali et al., 2024). 18% of respondents also endorsed depressive symptoms, 20% had Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, and 14%

experienced anxiety (Ali et al., 2024). These numbers reflect the harsh realities of life in crowded camps where families are separated, food is scarce, and safety is uncertain. In places like Zamzam camp, which shelters nearly 300,000 people, women and children make up the majority, and the risk of distress is magnified by poor healthcare access and daily insecurity (UN Women, 2024). Indirect effects of violence, such as losing social support, homes, and the disintegration of community networks, all exacerbate feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, and anxiety. These are all normal reactions to extremely difficult situations, and further illustrate that mental well-being is closely linked with one's sense of physical safety.

Mental Health System and Stigma

Sudan's mental health services were in crisis even before the genocide in 2023 broke out, ranking among the most limited systems worldwide. Years of underfunding, persistent stigma against mental health, and a reliance on short-term humanitarian aid meant that support was limited. Aid and services that did exist were highly centralized in urban areas, which created a geographic inequality. Populations in rural Sudan, and especially displaced communities, were unable to access psychiatric hospitals or specialized clinics. For most of the country, specialized care simply did not exist, and mental health needs fell to primary care providers or non-specialized health workers. These structural weaknesses meant that mental health care was often unavailable, underutilized, and poorly integrated into the broader health system. Before the war,

according to Sudan's national health plan, Sudan had only 0.92 mental health workers per 100,000 people (Mohammad et al., 2025; Shoib et al., 2022). This figure is below the World Health Organization's recommended minimum of 3 per 100,000 people. Most of Sudan's psychiatrists and psychologists were based in urban centers like Khartoum, leaving rural and conflict-affected regions with almost no access to care (WHO, 2008).

Before the war intensified, the country was served by only 2 psychiatric hospitals, 12 general hospital psychiatric units, and 34 psychiatrists nationwide (WHO, 2008). Now, due to the war and facilities in Khartoum, Gezira, and Kassala collapsing, even that care has disappeared, cutting off entire regions from specialized care (Mohammed et al., 2025).

In many Sudanese and broader cultural contexts, long-standing beliefs and social norms contribute to negative stigmas surrounding mental illness, shaped by religious interpretations, family expectations, and limited mental health education, leading people to view those living with mental health conditions as dangerous (Shoib et al., 2022).

In some communities, mental illness may be misunderstood as possession or moral weakness, discouraging individuals and families from openly discussing mental health struggles or seeking treatment. Instead, problems are often hidden, resulting in delayed care until symptoms become severe. In many communities, visiting a psychiatrist is associated with shame, so many rely on spiritual healers or alternative coping methods instead.

As a result, survivors of trauma and displacement are now dependent on overstretched primary health care services or turn to traditional healers. The gap between mental health needs and available services has widened dramatically, particularly for women and children who make up the majority in displacement camps and face compounded risks of violence, malnutrition, and psychological distress (Mohammed et al., 2025; Shoib et al., 2022).

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence has become a devastating aspect of the ongoing war in Sudan, impacting survivors in a myriad of ways. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been linked with widespread atrocities, including gang rape, sexual slavery, and assaults on women and children (Amnesty International, 2025). At least 36 incidents have been reported across four Sudanese states between April 2023 and October 2024 of sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2025). However, these numbers are vastly underreported, as the medical infrastructure has collapsed. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) also reported 659 survivors of sexual violence in South Darfur, with most survivors being women and girls (94%), 86% reporting they were raped and 55% stating they experienced physical violence (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2025).

The RSFs' use of sexual violence has immediate effects like widespread fear and humiliation, and can lead to chronic mental health consequences

like PTSD, social isolation, and disrupted family structures (Hemmeda et al., 2025). The absence of mental health services leaves survivors without the necessary support to heal. Sexual violence has also been used to instill fear in the population and assert control, thereby leaving the population in a constant state of vigilance. More than a quarter of the population, an estimated 12 million people, are at risk of gender-based violence (United Nations Population Fund, 2022). The violence will have reverberating effects, with this trauma profoundly impacting Sudanese communities for generations to come.

Ethnic Cleansing, Displacement, and Racial Trauma

The conflict in Darfur, beginning in April 2003, targeted non-Arab groups such as Masaalit Fur and Zaghawa under the ideology of racial superiority. Beyond physical destruction, this created what is known as racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), where emotional and psychological harm is rooted in hate crimes, discrimination, racism, and identity-based violence (Mental Health America, n.d.). The collective impact of identity-based harm through violent events or repeated microaggressions can be psychologically detrimental not only to individuals but also to their communities. Due to repeated exposure over time, these experiences can mirror post-traumatic stress, leading to anger, depression, anxiety, and mistrust (Cenat et al., 2023). Other

physical symptoms include headaches or insomnia, hypervigilance, low self-esteem, and emotional detachment. (Mental Health American, n.d.). Although all violent crimes can cause psychological harm, individuals targeted by hate-motivated violence face an even greater risk of developing mental health problems. Survivors often live with the knowledge that they were attacked because of who they are, embedding trauma into their collective identity. Compared to victims of similar cases without a bias component, they are more likely to experience conditions such as depression, anxiety, anger, and PTSD (McWhorter, 2025). The violence in Darfur was not random; rather, it was motivated by bias, targeting entire groups based on ethnicity. This makes racially motivated violence and resulting trauma especially severe and harmful, because it damages not only individuals but also entire communities' sense of safety and trust.

In Sudan, internally displaced persons have some of the highest mental health burdens. Surveys show that over half (53%) of internally displaced met criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder, including Major Depressive Disorder (24.3%), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (23.6%), and PTSD (14.2%) (Shoib et al., 2022). Because of the stigma around mental health and a crumbling healthcare system, most people never get treatment. Many rely on general health workers who are not trained in mental health or turn to traditional healers for help.

For Sudanese survivors and diaspora communities, this trauma does not just end with internal displacement. A mental health needs assessment conducted by Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA) among

Darfur refugees in Cairo documented moderate to severe emotional distress, with high levels of depression, trauma, interpersonal conflict, and domestic violence compared to pre-genocide levels (Meffert & Marmar., 2009). These findings show that racial trauma experienced in Darfur does not end with displacement; rather, it follows survivors into exile, where new layers of discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion in host countries perpetuate their suffering. For many refugees, the trauma of being targeted for their ethnic identity is compounded by marginalization abroad, reinforcing the collective and transnational nature of racial trauma.

Racial trauma is also carried across generations, influencing well-being and reinforcing cycles of fear and trauma. This phenomenon, known as intergenerational trauma, refers to how severe stress or trauma experienced by one generation can affect the psychological health of future generations, even if the new generations did not directly witness fear and discrimination. Symptoms such as anxiety, hypervigilance, and emotional dysregulation are common in such cases (Hankerson et al., 2022).

Impact on Children and Youth

Children and youth are most impacted by the war in Sudan. In River Nile State, 38% of displaced children were diagnosed with PTSD, 36% with depression, and 22% with anxiety (Mohammed et al., 2025). In Khartoum State, 13% of secondary school students also reported depression or

anxiety (Shoib et al., 2022). Malnutrition compounds these struggles, causing 3.8 million children to be acutely malnourished, which not only weakens their bodies but also disrupts memory, learning, and emotional regulation (Mohammed et al., 2025). In Khartoum State, where the conflict is less intense, 13% of secondary school students still reported symptoms of depression or anxiety, showing that mental health burden reaches beyond active conflict zones (Mohammed et al., 2025; Shoib et al., 2022). These findings are consistent with global evidence demonstrating that children in conflict-affected areas are about twice as likely to experience depression or anxiety compared to children in stable environments (Charlson et al., 2022). Symptoms such as nightmares, social withdrawal, and aggression are common. Without support, many children risk carrying untreated trauma into adulthood, threatening the future of entire communities.

Malnutrition is another important contributor to these mental health struggles. Today, 3.8 million children in Sudan are acutely malnourished. This weakens their bodies and harms memory, learning, emotional regulation, and overall cognitive development (Suryawan et al., 2022). Research also shows that trauma appears differently across age groups, with younger children often regressing to bedwetting, clinginess, or sleep disturbances, while older adolescents may show aggression, withdrawal, or emotional numbing (Frounfelker, 2019). This dual burden of hunger and trauma makes it harder for children to cope with the psychological impact of war, as they are vulnerable. In White Nile State, research has shown that nearly 72% of children under five years old in displacement camps are malnourished, a crisis with long-term consequences for their

cognitive and emotional development (Mohammed et al., 2025).

Recent studies highlight just how widespread mental health problems are among Sudanese children and youth. During the 2023 genocide, a survey of 963 children and adolescents aged 11-17 found that an alarming 67.7% met criteria for Major Depressive Disorder, and many reported suicidal thoughts (Awad et al., 2024). These findings emphasize that Sudan's children are growing up under extraordinary psychological pressures, with a combination of violence, hunger, and instability creating conditions that threaten the development and the future stability of entire communities.

Community Resilience

Although psychological harm results from national instability and displacement, individuals, particularly youth, demonstrate remarkable resilience. Protective factors can act as psychological buffers, shielding individuals from the full weight of harm. Young Sudanese volunteers began to take the lead on organizing grassroots Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) in the war-torn Khartoum. These ERRs were set up in neighbourhoods to act as small hubs that coordinated food, medicine, and safety information through WhatsApp and community networks (CMI, 2023). Additionally, community members stepped in to operate damaged and abandoned hospitals, bringing in fuel and medicines, and arranging safe transportation for medical workers so that health services could continue even during war.

In rural areas, communities opened their homes and fields to displaced families, providing both material support and a sense of belonging. Families who had no earlier connection to rural life still found care and belonging there. This resilience shows that even during war and destruction, the Sudanese people are creating fresh pathways towards peace and collective recovery.

Survivors' Guilt and Impact on Diaspora Communities

According to the Oxford dictionary, survivors' guilt is defined as, "A feeling of guilt for surviving a tragedy in which others died, often associated with a sense of having been partly responsible for what happened" (n.d.). The concept of survivor's guilt also applies to the Sudanese diaspora, who have been geographically separated from the ongoing genocide. These feelings of guilt and shame can especially be associated with having safe homes, food, and water compared to the immense suffering of the Sudanese people, who do not have access to basic survival needs. Thus, the Sudanese diaspora is coping as a community through collective healing and responsibility. This includes a combination of activism and advocacy, maintaining cultural identity, promoting community support, and normalizing seeking professional mental health services. Coping mechanisms are especially emphasized through community solidarity and cultural ties. Survivors' guilt can leave

individuals feeling powerless, so maintaining open dialogue through listening and storytelling can be very powerful as we validate experiences and feelings (Wilkinson, 2025). Leveraging transnational networks by supporting family and loved ones back home through donations also aids in communities feeling more powerful and helping to make a difference.

In cities like Washington D.C., Toronto, and London, Sudanese diaspora communities are embracing storytelling, cultural gatherings, and humanitarian projects to process shared grief. Organizations at both the local and international levels are spearheading these efforts. The Sudanese American Public Affairs Association (SAPAA) mobilizes Sudanese Americans through civic engagement, mentorship, and youth leadership programs, channeling emotional pain into advocacy and service. Likewise, AMEL-SDA (Amel Sudanese Diaspora Association) provides support for displaced families via fundraising, awareness-raising events, and mental health initiatives, fostering a sense of connection to Sudan's ongoing struggles and encouraging collective healing in the diaspora.

Mental healthcare is especially important, with support groups, group counseling, and other therapeutic interventions that can aid in creating judgment-free spaces and collective understanding (Wilkinson, 2025). Instilling religious beliefs by praying together can be very therapeutic for many and oftentimes is where many diaspora communities find their strength. Collective resilience through faith and community support is a major resistance to pain and a powerful defense against mental health struggles in diaspora communities (Bakhit, 2025). "There is something

profoundly healing about being surrounded by a community of people who refuse to give in to sorrow,” (Bakhit, 2025). Despite this, there continues to be a lack of awareness and education, in addition to specific community-accepted coping mechanisms, calling for the need to examine coping strategies and their impact in refugee and diaspora communities.

Additionally, mental health programming has started to gain momentum within the Sudanese diaspora in recent years. The Sudanese Diaspora Vicarious Trauma Workshop, co-hosted by Muslim Women For, Philly for Sudan, and HEART Women & Girls, delivers solidarity-based therapy groups facilitated by therapists from Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) backgrounds. Participants are guided through discussions of survivors' guilt, grief, and anxiety in a setting that is both faith-sensitive and culturally relevant. This growing emphasis on culturally competent care represents a significant advance in challenging stigma and supporting community-wide healing.

UNDERSTANDING INJUSTICE IN ISLAM

The central theological challenge in any religion is understanding the existence of injustice in a world created by a merciful and omnipotent being. Islamic tradition presents a framework in the Quran and the Sunnah, which addresses theodicy. At its core, suffering serves as a means of spiritual awakening, a moral test, and a reminder of the limitations of human knowledge when it comes to divine wisdom. Suffering serves to reawaken the soul, realign it with Allah while drawing people back to focus on their purpose. Throughout the Quran, Allah never criticizes turning to Him during times of calamity; rather, He criticizes the Muslims who forget to mention Allah after the calamities are lifted (Surah 10:12; Surah 39:49). At its core, suffering can be understood through knowing that Allah's divine wisdom is beyond human comprehension. Therefore, while Muslims may not understand why they suffer, they should resign themselves to the knowledge that God understands what they do not. Additionally, Muslims believe that there is a purpose to all human trials and suffering, where suffering can be seen as a means of spiritual growth, or getting close to Allah through His remembrance, dua, patience, etc. Moreover, with a large emphasis on achieving Jannah, or heaven, Muslims are encouraged to remember that true justice is not achieved in this life; rather, it is measured out in the next life, and on the Day of Judgement (Qadhi, 2018).

In summary, Islamic thought does not necessarily seek to resolve the problem of suffering in a purely philosophical sense. Instead, it shifts the question from "why does God allow suffering?" to "what is the believer's response to suffering?"

The Quran provides many tangible examples of how to respond to hardship through the stories of the prophets. The Quran recounts the story of Prophet Ayyub, who lost everything: his wealth, his health, his community, and even his children. Yet through it all, he never lost faith and only continued calling out to Allah. Surah Al-Anbiya narrates the supplication of Prophet Ayyub when he was afflicted with adversity. He cried out to his Lord, saying, "Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful" (Surah 21:83). The Quran also reflects on the life of Prophet Yusuf, whose journey was defined by the betrayal of his brothers, unjust imprisonment in Egypt, and exile from his family. At the end of his story, Prophet Yusuf summarizes the Islamic viewpoint when he states, "Surely whoever is mindful 'of Allah' and patient, then certainly Allah never discounts the reward of the good-doers" (Surah 12:90). His story, and the stories of other prophets, is a testament to resilience and divine wisdom.

And of course, there's no greater example than the Prophet Muhammad, whose life was marked by trials. One of the most painful moments, which he himself described as the most difficult day of his life was his visit to Taif. After facing harassment and discrimination in his hometown of Makkah, he was forced to search for a safe place for himself and the other Muslims in Makkah to migrate to, and he hoped to find that safety in Taif.

Instead, the Prophet was met with hostility and was followed out of the city, while its residents threw rocks at him and his feet, to the point where he was profusely bleeding. The Prophet narrates that after leaving the city, "Then the angel of the mountains called [him], greeted [him] and said: 'O Muhammad, Allah listened to what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mountains, and my Rabb has sent me to you so that you may give me your orders. If you wish, I will bring together the two mountains that stand opposite to each other at the extremities of Makkah to crush them in between.'" But Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "I rather hope that Allah will raise from among their descendants people who will worship Allah the One, and will not ascribe partners to Him (in worship) (An-Nawawi, Hadith 642).

The prophet's rejection from Ta'if and his eventual migration to Yathrib is not just a lesson in patience, but also a deeply human moment. For migrants today, especially those facing the trauma of family separation and/or deportation, the emotional weight of being cast out, criminalized, and treated as unwanted is heavy. It can be comforting to know that the most beloved of Mankind, the Prophet (PBUH), felt similar pain. He was driven from his homeland of Mecca, reached out to cities seeking sanctuary, and found none open. Yet, after being pelted by rocks and rejected from one of the most wealthy cities in Arabia, he called out to Allah with a dua of mercy. His example reminds Muslims that to be rejected in this world is not a sign of being forgotten by Allah. Rather, it is even in those moments of displacement that we should uphold mercy for others and get closer to Allah. This is only one of the many trials that the prophet experienced. The believer finds strength in these moments of

hardship, as they demonstrate a prophet who wept, who confided in his loved ones, and who called out to Allah for help, giving people a guide for how to process their own pain.

FAITH-BASED TOOLS

In addition to stories, the Quran and the Sunnah also offer practical, faith-based tools for the believer to endure hardship. The spiritual practices are not abstract ideals but embodied acts that connect the believer to Allah in deeply personal and transformative ways. One of the most powerful among these is Salah, and in particular Tahajjud, the voluntary night prayer that the Prophet was commanded to uphold early in the sirah. Allah says in the Quran, “Stand all night ‘in prayer’ except a little” (Surah 73:2). Prayer is often performed alone; as such, it becomes a sanctuary for a soul in the chaos of this world. It is in the stillness of the night when the world is asleep that the believer can speak most vulnerably with Allah. The Quran promises, “Indeed, worship in the night is more impactful and suitable for recitation” (Surah 73:6). Always remember that before going to anyone else, go to Allah: talk to him, cry to him, complain to him, explain to him. Salah is the anchor of the believer. Do not miss it for the trials and tests of this world. Indeed, the Prophet (SAWS) said this entire world and everything in it is not worth the two sunnah prayers before Fajr (An-Nawawi, Hadith 1102). If this is true for two non-obligatory or Nafl prayers, imagine the weight and the value for the mandatory five prayers of the believer.

Dhikr, Remembrance of Allah, also holds an immense power during

moments of hopelessness The Prophet said, “The example of the one who celebrates the Praises of his Lord (Allah) in comparison to the one who does not celebrate the Praises of his Lord, is that of a living creature compared to a dead one.” (al-Bukhari, Hadith 6407). Dhikr allows the believer to sit with their emotions while anchoring their heart to the Eternal. Dhikr is an action of the body but affects the mind. It allows for a constant state of remembrance that allows your physical actions to reflect your spiritual composition.

Dua, or calling out to Allah, is also an essential lifeline during trying times. There are certain phrases that are emphasized in the Quran and the Sunnah. For example, the Prophet on his expedition to Khaybar made the following dua:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْهَمِّ وَالْحَزَنِ
وَالْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ وَالْبُخْلِ وَالْجُبْنِ وَضَلَعِ
الدَّيْنِ وَغَلَبَةِ الرِّجَالِ

“O Allah! I seek refuge with You from distress and sorrow, from helplessness and laziness, from miserliness and cowardice, from being heavily in debt and from being overcome by men.”

(Al-Bukhari, Hadith 2893)

While eloquent supplications exist in the Quran and Sunnah, the most powerful duas are the ones made in one’s own language. It is the language

of the heart: a one-way connection between a person and their master. Furthermore, as the Prophet (PBUH) said in an authentic hadith, “Be afraid of the curse of an oppressed person as there is no screen between his invocation and Allah” (al-Bukhari Hadith 4347). Particularly during moments of crisis and clear oppression, be reassured that a person’s prayer is always answered. Some people mistakenly believe that for a dua to be answered, a person must get exactly what they asked for. However, this is not the case. Classical scholars offer various interpretations for why a Muslim’s dua is always answered. Firstly, Allah may choose to delay their request, and give it to a person better time for their deen, their dunya, and/or their akhira. Alternatively, Allah may choose to open an alternative pathway for a believer that is better than the road ahead for them. Finally, Allah may choose to only show the value of the dua in the hereafter, where it will be far more valuable than anything a person could have received in this world.

Lastly, action itself is a form of worship. In Islam, spiritual resilience is not limited to inward rituals. Even outward efforts (such as activism, service, advocacy) when carried out with sincerity and for the sake of Allah, are acts of worship. The Quran says, “And say, ‘Do [righteous] work, for Allah will see their deeds, and [so will] His Messenger and the believers’” (Surah 9:105). Success is not always measured by results but by intention. To struggle for justice, to care for the vulnerable, or to speak the truth even when it is unpopular, all of these actions become sacred when aligned with sincere intention. The Prophet (PBUH) never abandoned the people, even when they rejected him. He kept walking, kept working, kept hoping. So too should a believer.

COMMUNITY CALL TO ACTION

Despite overwhelming evidence of atrocities and appeals for a ceasefire, the international response remains slow. Our collective voice matters now, more than ever. Here's how we can take action:

Raise Awareness

The genocide in Sudan continues to unfold largely in silence, and this only enables suffering to deepen. Raising awareness gives voice to the voiceless, creates public pressure, and allows the public to engage in more meaningful action. Muslim Student Associations can turn compassion into action through organizing fundraising events like bake sales, charity dinners, and awareness weeks to educate the public. Mosques can hold educational forums or khutbas, centering Sudanese voices whenever possible. Educating congregations connects faith with action and inspires collective compassion.

Support Relief Efforts

Supporting humanitarian relief is one of the most direct ways to help those in Sudan. Millions are struggling to survive amid severe food shortages, access to clean water, and a lack of medicine. Donating to trusted organizations like Islamic Relief and Doctors Without Borders

helps save lives and sustain hope.

Look out for our Sudanese Community

Many Sudanese Americans are coping with anxiety, grief, and uncertainty about loved ones still in danger. Be sure to check in on Sudanese friends, classmates, and community members to offer emotional support, listen to their stories, and create safe spaces for them to share their experiences. When we care for one another locally, we strengthen our collective resilience and reflect our shared Islamic values of upholding justice and mercy.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

An-Nu'man ibn Bashir narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said, “The believers in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy are just like one body. When any limb of it aches, the whole body aches, because of sleeplessness and fever” (Sahih al-Bukhari 6011). As Muslims, we may feel collective pain for the people of Sudan, understanding that their struggles are intertwined with our own. Their pain is our pain, their resilience is our strength, and their healing is our shared responsibility. As Muslims of the global community, whether as educators, community leaders, or parents, we form the other limbs of this aching body. It is our duty to advocate for and support mental health initiatives that address

the psychological impact of displacement and conflict. Evidence from the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet (ﷺ) encourages us to care for our mental and emotional health (Yaqeen Institute, 2020). Allah (ﷻ) says, “Surely with hardship comes relief” (Surah As-Shahr 94:6). In this verse, the Quran reminds us of Allah’s mercy and the importance of patience during times of hardship. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness nor a sign of weak faith. In fact, intertwining mental health support (ie. therapy) with Islamic practices such as salah, dhikr, and reading the Quran, can provide an integrated approach to healing. May Allah (ﷻ) ease the burdens of the Sudanese people, grant them healing, and inspire us to be instruments of His mercy.

The organizations listed below offer faith-based support and culturally congruent counseling services that are designed to meet the unique needs of the Muslim community and provide them with the tools needed to navigate mental health challenges.

1. [Maristan](#)
2. [Khalil Center](#)
3. [Naseeha Helpline](#): The first-ever 24-hour, 7 days-a-week helpline for Muslims, by Muslims:1 (866) 627-3342
4. [Ruh Care](#)
5. [Amaly](#)
6. [Institute for Muslim Mental Health](#)

Educational Resources

Keep Eyes on Sudan

Resource compiled by the Sudanese Diaspora to educate the public on Sudan. Provides relevant resources for educational initiatives about and in Sudan.

Against a Tide of Evil by Mukesh Kapila

A memoir from Kapila, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan between 2002 and 2003, who recounts his time before the outbreak of the Darfur Genocide.

Thirteen Months of Sunrise By Rania Mamoun

A collection of short stories by the Sudanese author and journalist exploring contemporary life in Sudan.

Sudan's Killing Fields: Political Violence and Fragmentation by Sondra Hale and Laura N. Beny

The scholarly and politically engaged book examines multiple post-independence Sudanese conflicts and addresses the political violence, gendered and religious conflict, and the genocide in Sudan.

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