

Women and Girls in Sudan



What's next?

Inter Pares, October 2025

Summary

Inter Pares collaborates with counterpart organizations and individuals in Canada and the Global South, promoting transnational solidarity and equality. In Sudan, Inter Pares has supported the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD), for more than a decade. **Supported by original action-research, SORD is working towards developing and implementing a comprehensive feminist peace and security agenda that foregrounds the need for an inclusive, coordinated and sustainable women's movement rooted at the nexus of feminism, peace and humanitarianism.**

Even as the war in Sudan rages on, SORD and its partners aim to proactively influence both regional and international peace processes. This document has been prepared using SORD's recommendations, unpublished research, data and findings to increase awareness and advocate for greater support from Canadian civil society and government for that agenda.

Current situation in Sudan

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a devastating war, primarily between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). **The conflict has spread across multiple states, displacing more than 7 million people internally and pushing millions more into neighbouring countries.** The conflict has impacted all aspects of life, making Sudan one of the worst crises in the world right now.

Women—especially women with disabilities—children and other vulnerable groups are more at risk of dying from conflict-related famine, suffering from preventable disease, lack of access to health and reproductive health services, and experiencing gender-based violence (GBV).



According to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), **nearly 25 million Sudanese individuals—half the population—require humanitarian assistance, and nearly three million people have fled** to neighbouring countries Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, South Sudan and Uganda.

Violence against women and girls

Women and girls have been disproportionately affected, facing conflict-related sexual violence, displacement, poverty and loss of livelihoods. **The number of people in need of gender-based violence related services has increased by 100 per cent since the beginning of the crisis.** The collapse of public services, insecurity, and stigma have compounded these challenges, especially in displacement camps and host communities. Despite this, women play crucial roles in community building, caregiving and informal peacebuilding efforts.

Women Peace and Security (WPS) and Resolution 1325

The WPS agenda is a global policy framework that recognizes the crucial role women play in preventing conflict, building peace and contributing to post-conflict recovery. It aims to ensure that women's voices, needs and rights are central to all efforts related to peace and security.

The WPS agenda focuses on four main pillars:

1. **Participation:** Increasing women's meaningful inclusion in peace negotiations, political decision-making and leadership roles.
2. **Protection:** Safeguarding women and girls from gender-based violence, especially sexual violence in conflict.

3. **Prevention:** Addressing the root causes of conflict and preventing gender-based and sexual violence.
4. **Relief and recovery:** Ensuring women's needs and capacities are included in humanitarian responses and post-conflict reconstruction.



United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 calls for women's inclusion in peace processes and decision-making. In Sudan, this principle is urgent because women—particularly grassroots activists, peacebuilders and civil society leaders—have historically **played central roles in resistance movements and local reconciliation. Yet, they remain excluded from formal peace negotiations and political transitions.**

The resolution highlights that:

- Women are not just victims of war, but also key actors in peacebuilding.
- Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for lasting peace.
- States and international organizations must include women in peace processes and protect them from sexual and gender-based violence.

SORD's research

SORD's research focused on gathering information regarding women's experiences living in conflict to develop recommendations and pillars for a feminist peace and security agenda. **Their work levers the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325**, which explicitly links women's experiences of conflict with international peace and security.

SORD conducted consultations with women in various areas within Sudan and refugee women who fled to Uganda to **reflect the diverse and complex lived experiences of women affected by the conflict in Sudan**. Their findings set the base for a feminist peace and security agenda for Sudan.

Consultation scope: Conducted with 157 women — 132 within Sudan (across six states: River Nile, North Kordofan, Khartoum, Gedarif, Red Sea, and Kassala) and 25 refugee women in Kampala, Uganda.

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Data collection: 16 focus group discussions with approximately 10 women each and 17 individual key informant interviews for deeper, personal insights.
Note: Due to high insecurity, consultations were held in low-profile and safe locations.

Highlight of findings

- **Participation:** Sudanese women are deeply involved in peacebuilding yet remain marginalized in formal political processes. Women's grassroots organizations play key roles in community mediation, humanitarian response and social cohesion, especially in conflict-affected areas. However, formal peace negotiations, transitional councils and decision-making spaces are still dominated by men and militarized elites. Women's participation is perceived as symbolic rather than intentional.
- **Gender-based violence:** Sudan is experiencing widespread GBV, used as a weapon of war and means of control by armed groups. Displacement camps and conflict zones were identified as high-risk spaces for women and girls, where impunity for sexual violence remains pervasive. Survivors face stigma, lack of access to justice and inadequate psychosocial and medical services. Ending GBV requires structural change such as dismantling patriarchal systems, increasing women's representation in security institutions and linking justice to broader social reform.
- **Knowledge:** Women in Sudan have limited awareness and understanding of existing WPS policies, including UNSCR 1325. Many grassroots women activists and local leaders have heard of gender equality frameworks but lack practical knowledge of how these policies are implemented or how they could access related programs. This points to a top-down implementation problem, where WPS and feminist peace commitments exist on paper but are not localized or translated into action for women in conflict zones.

Where to from here?

The feminist peace and security agenda proposed by SORD seeks to operationalize WPS principles in Sudan by:

- Elevating women-led organizations in peacebuilding.
- Ensuring intersectional inclusion of women from rural areas, displaced communities and minority ethnic groups as well as women with disabilities.
- Questioning militarized and patriarchal governance structures that silence women's political voices.

Challenges

There are **structural, cultural, and institutional barriers, which deter women's inclusion and leadership in peacebuilding and security**. Patriarchal social norms marginalize women, their voices and lived experiences. Other barriers like economic insecurity, limited physical and social mobility and an overall lack of resources, hinder women's ability to organize and advocate effectively.

High levels of violence and insecurity, especially in displacement settings, exacerbate these challenges, leaving many women vulnerable and without adequate access to essential services. **This violence, coupled with a fragile justice and legal system, make the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda that much more challenging**. State structures are unable to uphold their commitment to the protection of women's rights and support for survivors of GBV.

On the operational side, women's organizations are limited mainly by funding shortages, which makes it difficult to maintain services, such as psychosocial support for women who have experienced violence. The exclusion of women and women's organizations from formal peace negotiations limits their influence on policy development. **This demonstrates policy actors' disregard for the needs of women and girls in conflict, peace building and displacement settings, and reflects the fragility of peace and social reconstruction.**

Opportunities

The WPS agenda and UNSCR 1325 can be **leveraged as a tool for advocacy, increasing awareness about women's role in peace building and systemic change**. This framework highlights opportunities for:

- **Advocacy**
- **Collaboration**
- **Peacebuilding**
- **Women's empowerment**

Women-led grassroots organizations require support to address community issues, increase awareness on the importance of women's role in peacebuilding and organize **training programs that focus on building women's skills and leadership potential**.

Economic empowerment programs are also key to stability and protection of women, by fostering financial independence and resilience in conflict and post conflict transition situations. Collaboration between local and international women's networks is needed to strengthen advocacy efforts and collective impact. Finally, ending war and moving toward peace are essential to feminist peace and security priorities—especially for marginalized and displaced women.

Moving forward

Women's experiences in Sudan are complex and diverse across different regions. Peacebuilding policies and frameworks need to reflect this diversity to prioritize localized interventions while leveraging international frameworks like UNSCR 1325. **A one size fits all approach will inevitably leave some women behind and will not be effective in social and peace rebuilding.**

A strategic, practical and immediate feminist agenda is essential for supporting women in Sudan, keeping in mind the following principles and recommendations:

1. **Ending the war:** Prioritize immediate cessation of hostilities. Prioritize disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts and expand support capacity with provisions for pregnant women and vulnerable groups.
2. **Awareness and advocacy:** Raise awareness about women's rights and WPS frameworks, especially Resolution 1325, through community initiatives.

Provide training for women on advocacy, leadership and project development.

3. **Protection and legal frameworks:** Establish safe spaces and protection protocols for women in conflict zones and develop mechanisms for documenting GBV cases and ensuring accountability.
4. **Capacity-building:** Prioritize economic empowerment programs for displaced, disabled and other marginalized women as primary earners, especially in rural areas. Support grassroots efforts to build inclusive peace processes.
5. **Partnerships and monitoring:** Strengthen networks between local and international women's organizations to advocate for better monitoring and evaluation of support programs to ensure they meet women's needs effectively.
6. **Coordination and solidarity:** Support coordination between feminist groups, acknowledge grassroots initiatives and the central role of women in them, promote social inclusion and combat racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, sexism and hate speech.
7. **Feminist peace is the solution:** Acknowledge the views of women around peace and war, fostered on the principle of intersectionality and their different lived experiences in the context of conflict. Encourage the development of a feminist peace agenda based on thorough and in-depth critique of the previous male-dominated agreements to prioritize women's interests and well-being.

