

## **Sudanese women advocate for peace at conference in Uganda 25 OCTOBER 2023**

“We must work together to formulate a clear vision to achieve the aspirations of the Sudanese people, bringing back security, peace, and the establishment of a civil state where all citizens are equal, and opportunities are provided regardless of their gender, ethnic, religious, or tribal backgrounds.”

Those are the words of Samia Argawi, a lawyer and founder of “Women Against War” and member of the “Peace for Sudan Platform”, a peacebuilding initiative by Sudanese women-led organizations and initiatives supported by UN Women.



Participants interact during a conference with Sudanese women leaders in Kampala, Uganda. Photo: UN Women/James Ochweri.

Since fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces broke out on 15 April 2023, hundreds of people have been killed and thousands injured. [UN reports](#) have found that gender-based violence has increased during the conflict, and the humanitarian situation has significantly worsened, with food prices peaking and limited access to water and electricity.

The Peace for Sudan Platform comprises more than 49 women-led peace initiatives, humanitarian initiatives, and civil society organizations, featuring representatives from across the different regions of the country.

Soon after fighting broke out, UN Women and partners including the African Union, the African Women Leaders Network, at the request of the Peace for Sudan Platform, organized a [virtual high-level solidarity mission](#) to support and amplify calls to end the conflict, highlight its impact on women and girls, and mobilize support to women’s peacebuilding and protection efforts.

In late October, shortly after the conflict passed its six-month mark, UN Women in partnership with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), African Union, and International Women’s Peace Center organized a conference with Sudanese women peacebuilders in Kampala, Uganda.

The conference included consultations with more than 400 women across 14 Sudanese states about their priorities and demands and aimed to build bridges between women in Sudan and in countries across the region. Women joined online from Sudan and in-person, with many refugees and exiles attending.

The conference also aimed to enhance women’s leadership and highlighted the leading role Sudanese women and young women are playing in mobilizing the peace movement.

### **A long history of peacebuilding**

“Sudanese women have their own narrative of resilience and determination as agents of peace”, said Adjaratou Ndiaye, UN Women’s Sudan representative. “Conflict and displacement have never shaken their mission for peace, as we witness this gathering today and recognize all the women-led peace initiatives and responses on the ground and in other parts of the world”.

Many women joined Sudan’s 2019 revolution, which saw the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir after 30 years in power. Women were able to organize protests and support young people throughout the upheaval, and their activism was highlighted by alternative media outlets that arose after the revolution. But 2019 represented just one episode in a long line of women’s work for peace and justice in the country.

“Since the founding of Sudan 67 years ago, the women of Sudan have always stood out as a beacon of hope and the voice of reason during the successive crises that have faced the country”, said Workneh Gebeyehu, Executive Secretary of IGAD.

“Let us remember the wise words of our African proverbs: ‘When men go to war, it is women who must pick up the pieces’”, he said. “Together, we can empower the women of Sudan to be the agents of peace and rebuild our shared nation.”

### **Calls for an immediate peace**

Speaking on the sidelines of the conference, Suzan Hussein, a Sudanese woman activist living as a refugee in Uganda said, “This war should stop as soon as possible not just in Khartoum, but also in different areas in Sudan”.

“For me, this conference means a platform and a [form of] resistance. A platform in which I can represent the diversity of women in Sudan”, Hussein said, adding that she hoped the conference could link “different groups of women in order to create a feminist agenda” and resist violence against women.

Women-led organizations in Sudan have the expertise and experience to work on sensitive issues including gender-based violence and to provide services to women, girls, the elderly, and those with disabilities.

“Men do not consider our participation a priority, and they do not respond to women's demands for participation in negotiations”, said one woman activist whose anonymous testimony was presented at the conference.

“We are capable of representing ourselves on any platform, and we do not want men to speak on our behalf”, she said.

Another woman whose name was not disclosed to protect her safety was quoted in testimony as saying that existing women’s programming was difficult to continue during the conflict. While she was formerly able to provide kits to sexual violence survivors, “now we cannot reach the survivors to assist them”.

The current war is a manifestation of wider political, social, and economic forces. Argawi noted that peace was intimately tied with combating “poverty, marginalization, and discrimination, [and] creating a healthy and resilient environment”.

“We also hope to work together to develop a political consensus among the components of the people, a consensus that holds the recipe for political, economic, and social success”, Argawi said.

She explained that, only by developing agreements among all political actors, could the peace process “ensure the continuity of this approach, healing wounds, mending the fabric of our society, and injecting life into the nation's veins”.