SUDAN
MARCH – MAY 2019 BRIEFING

Humanitarian Figures

5.5 million
people in Sudan need humanitarian assistance. The current figures fail to reflect the impact of the economic crisis and are expected to rise this year, according to the European Commission.

4.8 million
people are living at emergency levels of food insecurity in Sudan. These figures are among the highest in Africa, the European Commission reports.

3.3 million
people urgently require water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) support to prevent the outbreak of disease, according to UN Children’s Fund.

2.4 million
children are suffering from malnutrition. One in six children suffers from acute malnutrition, the most serious and life-threatening form of undernourishment in children. Figures sourced by the European Commission.

1.6 million
people in the Darfur region continue to seek shelter in camps. And internal conflict is continuing in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, according to a report by the European Commission.

Highlights

> Thirty-year regime ended as Omar Al-Bashir is ousted from power
> At least 30 killed as Sudan sees worst violence since Bashir’s brutal response to protests
> Growing political influence of General Dagado is marked as a concern for Sudan’s democratic transition

Key Developments

> On April 10, Omar al-Bashir’s regime, which engaged in a campaign of terror defined by oppression, war and genocide, was brought to an end by the military that served under his rule for more than thirty years. After 100 days of nationwide protest that demanded the former president to step down, the military forcibly removed Omar Al-Bashir and set up a transitional council.

> On June 3, at least 30 people were killed and over 100 injured in attacks on protesters that were perpetrated by the Transitional Military Government. “The protesters holding a sit-in in front of the army general command are facing a massacre in a treacherous attempt to disperse the protest,” said the Sudanese Professionals Association, the group that has spearheaded protests.

> Sudan has closed the Khartoum bureau of Al-Jazeera as pro-democracy demonstrations continue. The broadcasting channel’s journalists have been banned from reporting sit-ins as civilian forces and the military remain divided over how much power soldiers should have in a transitional government, the Guardian reports. “The network sees this as an attack on media freedom”, Al Jazeera said in a statement of May 31.
Context:
Conflict between Sudanese Arabs and Indigenous African tribes emerged in reaction to decades of ethnic and religious persecution in Sudan. Adhering to Sharia Law and the government in Khartoum, 97% of the Republic of Sudan practice Sunni Islam, while Christian minorities and those following different divisions of Islam are marginalised in fragile conflict states in the south.

President Omar al-Bashir was convicted by the International Criminal Court for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for his actions in Darfur that killed 300,000 indigenous Africans. Since the start of the civil war, which resulted in the split of South Sudan into a separate nation in 2011, an estimated 2 million civilians have been killed under the scorched earth policy which destroyed health facilities, infrastructure, places of education and religious worship.

The government continues to restrict religious freedoms: violent conflict has erupted in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, amongst many other states, as ethnic minorities are locked into political dispute with Khartoum. Humanitarian relief organisations are refused entry in conflict zones. Famine, displacement, and ongoing threats of religious and ethnic persecution severely afflict these minority communities.

Demographics
Sudanese Arabs account for 70% of the total population. The minority is made up of Arabized groups such as Nuba, Copts and Beja, and peoples belonging to more than 500 Indigenous-African tribes.

The current estimate of Sudan’s post-independence population is placed at 41.5 million. Projections suggest that one million live in Blue Nile, representing more than 40 ethnic groups, and 2.5 million people account for the multi-ethnic population of South Kordofan.
Recent Developments in Sudan

Dispute Over Transfer of Power Between Civilian Forces and the Military

Talks between protest leaders and Sudan’s military have been suspended, according to reports. Islamist movements are said to support the transfer of power to the army in efforts to keep Sharia Law in place. In May, hundreds of Islamists rallied in Khartoum to warn that they would reject any deal that excluded Sharia Law from Sudan’s political roadmap. Reports indicate that they are also showing support for the military’s demands that the head of Sudan’s new governing body should be a military figure, claiming that the revolution was not against ideology, but corruption and tyranny. “The Sovereign council should be headed by the armed forces because there is a security problem”, says Hassan Rizk, deputy head of Islamist Reform Movement Now.

Two Day Strike Held by Protesters to Pressure Military Leaders into Sharing Power

On May 28, protesters began a two-day strike to put pressure on the military to hand power over to a civilian government, Al Jazeera reports. "The two-day strike aims to deliver a message to the whole world that the Sudanese people want a real change and they don’t want the power to be with the military," says Saddiq Farrukh, a leader of the protest movement. Sudan’s Central Bank said the majority of its employees are on strike. A dozen commercial banks in the capital were closed, Muez Ahmed, a strike organizer at the Bank of Khartoum told Al Jazeera. General Dagado, also known as Hemeti, accused the opposition of not being serious about sharing power.

UK Government Questioned Over Next Movements regarding Sudan

On April 30, Baroness Cox (crossbench) spoke in the House of Lords to question how the British Government plans to redeem its reputation over conditions of ‘strategic dialogue’ with the regime in Sudan. Baroness Cox asked the government to provide substantive humanitarian and political support in the push to transition towards a civilian government, following the ousting of former President Omar al-Bashir in April. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon replied: “I assure the noble Baroness that the issue of impunity for those who have committed crimes has been raised at all levels, including with the current transitional military council. We remain committed as a Government to the ICC, and we believe that any indicted criminal under the ICC should be brought to the ICC.”

Concern for Sudan’s Transition Towards Democracy

The emergence of military leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo could complicate Sudan’s transition towards democracy, Reuters reports. The involvement of a military chief in politics – and one that played a significant role in terrorising Darfur – could undermine the efforts to create a democracy in Sudan, potentially provoking army officers wary of his ambitions, opponents and Western diplomats say. In the most recent development, in which 30 people have been killed during a protest in Khartoum, witnesses reported that security forces perpetrating the violence belonged to the Rapid Security Forces, which are led by General Dagalo.
March

Persecution against Christian communities continues

April

Omar Al-Bashir deposed as president of Sudan

UK Government questioned over its position on Sudan following ousting of Bashir

May

Al Jazeera bureau shut down in Khartoum as work permits are cancelled

Emergence of General Dagalo raises concerns about Sudan’s transition

Talks between protest leaders and the military are suspended

Two-day strike held to pressure the military to share power

June

30 killed in attacks against protesters in Khartoum