



THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF RESOLUTION 1325 & SUDAN: PROMISES, REALITIES & POTENTIAL

by Rita Morbia

The Promise

Twenty-five years ago, when the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), activists, feminists, and peacebuilders concerned with women as autonomous, independent actors capable of changing the world must have had full hearts. The resolution was groundbreaking, positioning women at its core. The Security Council has never been known for its radical feminist perspectives. But this resolution was a fulsome promise, with the powers that be centring women's protection, rights, roles and agency in a formal, legal commitment. It must have felt like a triumph.

Fast forward almost two decades to the period from 2019 to 2021 with Sudan in the midst of a heady democratic political transition brought on by a popular women and youth-led revolution. Its 30-year dictatorship deposed. Citizens experiencing new-found freedoms. Civic dialogue at an all-time high. And women's rights being discussed, debated, and even implemented (occasionally and imperfectly) through laws and policies. In Sudan, the potential for realizing the goals and spirit of Resolution 1325 in a way that fundamentally impacted the daily lives of women was vast. For women's rights activists in the country, it was more than a moment; it was the culmination of a generation of hard-fought struggles. Sudanese women's rights activists caught a glimpse of Resolution 1325 made manifest.

So, what has happened to that promise today?

The Reality

There are not enough superlatives to describe the devastation brought on by the current conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan, which began in April 2023. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports 11.9 million people have been forcibly displaced. Of those, 7.5 million have relocated within Sudan, and another 4.1 million have left the country altogether. This is the largest displacement crisis in the world.

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Over 30 million people require humanitarian assistance. This is the greatest level of need recorded within a single country. Children are dying from conflict-related famine in Sudan. In total, there are over 600 thousand people experiencing famine, while half of the population faces severe hunger. This is the highest level of food insecurity being documented in any country. Civilians have been killed, assaulted, held hostage, and sold into slavery with impunity, the scale of which is massive, but under-reported. Health facilities and health workers have been targeted. The RSF has committed genocide. The toll of the conflict on all aspects of life, from disruptions in the banking and communications infrastructure to the high price and lack of accessibility of basic goods to the collapse of many educational facilities, is unbearably heavy.

The WPS Agenda

Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda as a whole have never been more relevant to Sudan. Nor have they been further from reach. It is as if each and every aspect of Resolution 1325 has been dismantled. The lives of women and girls in Sudan are extremely precarious in areas directly experiencing armed conflict (such as Darfur in Western Sudan or Khartoum), but also in areas that have seen less gunfire (such as Kassala in Eastern Sudan) – and everywhere in between. The social fabric that often supports women has been shredded. State services for women are severely lacking. Representation of women in political decision-making is virtually non-existent. And furthermore, women and girls are being targeted in the conflict with unspeakable brutality.

Resolution 1325 “calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse...” Sexual violence targeting women and girls has been a constant and unrelenting feature of the conflict in Sudan. Documentation by human rights organizations, women’s rights advocates, and UN bodies has overwhelmingly featured the RSF as perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence that is widespread and systematic in nature, though the SAF have also been named. Given the logistical constraints, social stigma, and political barriers faced by survivors, the scale of this phenomenon is significantly under-reported and difficult to estimate.

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Women and girls have been raped in their homes, when fleeing attacks, in refugee camps, or while in the streets, simply searching for food and basic necessities to survive. Women and girls have been kidnapped and repeatedly raped by multiple armed attackers, sometimes for ransom, in incidents of sexual slavery or through forced marriages. Young children (under five years old) and boys have not been spared. Social stigma, lack of healthcare services or trauma-informed counselling, and the daily restrictions of living in a conflict-affected area have all resulted in very few survivors being able to access physical or psychological care.

UNSCR 1325 “emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls...” With the justice system severely constrained, survivors cannot access the legal system (inadequate as it was before the war). There are few to no safe spaces from which they can act without fearing retaliation from armed actors or their trauma being instrumentalized by the opposing side. As a result, impunity reigns. Accountability initiatives such as the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for the Sudan are woefully under-resourced with “a secretariat whose capacity is approximately 40 per cent due to the United Nations liquidity crisis.” Despite this, the Mission’s latest report states that both sides are responsible for atrocities against civilians, but that the RSF has “committed myriad crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, enslavement, rape, sexual slavery, sexual violence, forced displacement and persecution on ethnic, gender and political grounds.” The SAF has also denied repeated requests for the Mission to enter Sudan. The state-sponsored protection measures called for in 1325 are nowhere to be found in Sudan.

UNSCR 1325 stressed the “importance of [women’s] equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.” Women in Sudan toppled a dictator. And yet the legitimate and carefully considered attempts of the women’s movement and women leaders at being engaged in any of the previous ceasefire negotiations or dialogues have been tokenized or outright ignored by the belligerents.



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None of the warring parties include high-level representation by women. Major geopolitical players in the conflict, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates also do not prioritize women's involvement in peacemaking. The prospects for any peace negotiations or ceasefire talks have dimmed, given the RSF's ambitions to carve the parts of the country under their control into a separate state, and what appears to be a lack of political will by regional and international powers.

The Potential

Despite the chaos and destruction, or maybe because of it, Resolution 1325 has immense potential as a strong, guiding framework for the WPS agenda in Sudan. In a recent report by Sudanese Organization for Research and Development, SORD (Feminist Peace & Security Agenda in Sudan, 2025, unpublished), based on research with internally-displaced and refugee women, as well as those from six different states in Sudan, women who were aware of Resolution 1325 strongly emphasized its relevance. Even under the current circumstances, they wanted it to be popularized and for its provisions (protection, peacebuilding, participation, etc.) to be localized.

Women's heroic leadership at the grassroots community level remains critical in Sudan, as both a practical intervention as well as a form of political mobilization. For example, this can take the form of women's emergency response groups or community kitchens, providing critical food, healthcare, psychosocial counselling, hope, and so much more. The community kitchen movement (also known as emergency rooms) largely grew out of the Resistance Committees, decentralized political organizing bodies that formed during the 2019 Revolution. They are largely made up of young activists who act in the public interest. Since geopolitical powers are failing to work towards a genuine peace – starting with a complete ceasefire – it is the women of Sudan who carry the torch of Resolution 1325 today, holding space for its untapped potential.

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