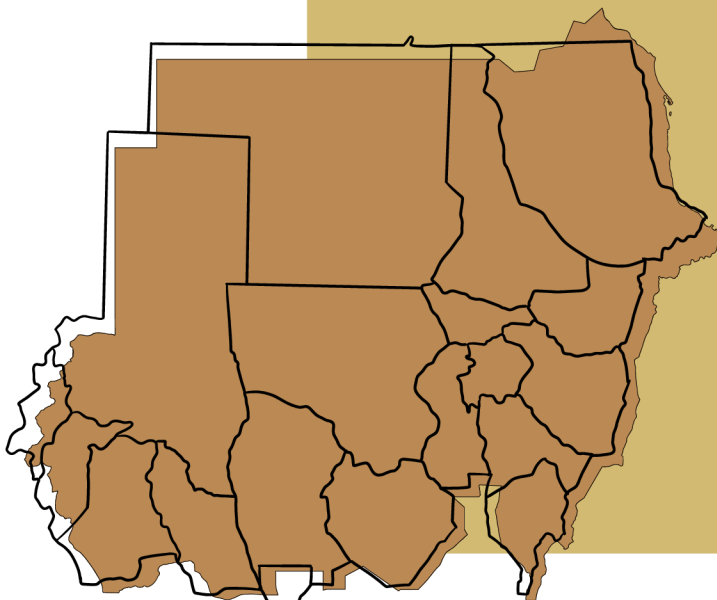


KEY ASKS SUDAN

A New Advocacy Strategy for
Civilian Power, Accountability and
Sustainable Peace



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than three years into the devastating war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), international diplomacy has failed to protect civilians or forge a credible path to civilian rule. Sudan is enduring mass atrocities, starvation, and fragmentation. Current policies risk legitimizing military power by treating the SAF and RSF as the sole architects of Sudan's future.

Sustainable peace cannot be achieved through another elite bargain. It requires a fundamental shift: protecting civilians, disrupting the war economy, and building civilian political power before a final settlement. Sudanese women, youth, local responders, and marginalized communities must design the peace, not just be included in it. This brief outlines a humanized, civilian-centered approach for our advocacy engagements across the US, UN, and civil society spaces.

Why This Matters to U.S. Policy

A SAF-RSF peace agreement is necessary to stop immediate fighting but cannot by itself resolve Sudan's crisis because both institutions are products of the political and economic system that produced repeated wars. Sustainable peace requires attention to equal citizenship; religion, law and the state; land rights and restitution; equitable governance of gold, minerals and agricultural wealth; and redistribution of political and economic power away from a highly centralized military-security elite.

The policy test should therefore be broader than whether the generals sign an agreement: does international engagement protect civilians and increase Sudanese civilian political power relative to armed actors? Humanitarian assistance, diplomacy, sanctions, accountability, resource governance, civilian funding and post-war planning should operate under one theory of change.

BACKGROUND & ROOT CAUSES

- Colonialism, Centralization, and Marginalization: Sudan's conflicts stem from a political order that concentrated power and wealth in Khartoum, marginalizing peripheral regions. This created an enduring center-periphery struggle over belonging, governance, and wealth distribution.
- Identity, Religion, and the State: Sudan's diversity cannot be reduced to simple binaries. Conflicts intensified when specific Arab-Islamic identities were weaponized and intertwined with authoritarian state-building. The struggle is fundamentally about power, land, and representation, not just religion.
- Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and "Ethnicized" Violence: The weaponization of ethnicity is evident in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. Drought, land competition, and state-backed militia strategies (like the Janjaweed, which birthed the RSF) transformed local pressures into militarized ethnic conflicts.
- Oil, Gold, Minerals, and Land: Natural resources fuel the war. Gold and commercial networks are deeply intertwined with military interests. Furthermore, land dispossession alters demographic realities; peace must address land restitution and equitable resource governance, not freeze wartime theft.

A Different Approach: Civilian Power, Not Another Elite Bargain

The conventional sequence of "ceasefire-first" must be reconsidered. Our theory of change is: Protect civilians + weaken the war economy + strengthen civilian institutions = negotiate from a balance of power that yields accountable governance.

1. Shift Political Legitimacy: Stop treating SAF and RSF as Sudan's presumed representatives. Build a credible civilian political proposition capable of shaping negotiations.
2. Women as Peace Architects: Move beyond "participation." Sudanese women must design the settlement, developing concrete proposals on protection, governance, and constitutional reform.
3. Disrupt the War Economy: Target the systems that make war profitable: gold, weapons, banking, logistics, and military-controlled businesses.
4. Hold External Enablers Accountable: Foreign governments and corporations must face consequences for materially enabling belligerents while posing as neutral peacemakers.
5. Finance Civilian Resilience: Create dedicated funds for locally led humanitarian responses, women's organizations, and grassroots governance capacity.

National Reconciliation and Reimagining the Sudanese State

National reconciliation must be a core strategy, not an afterthought. It requires a Sudanese-led conversation resulting in a new social compact where no community is "more Sudanese" than another. Key pillars include:

1. Recognizing indigenous and marginalized communities as equal constituencies with cultural rights.
2. Guaranteeing freedom of religion and equal citizenship, ensuring religion is not used to deny legal equality.
3. Implementing land restitution, safe return, and women's land rights.
4. Ensuring transparent resource governance, removing military institutions from commercial control.
5. Decentralizing power and transforming the security sector under civilian authority.
6. Institutionalizing women and youth as architects of dialogue, justice, and reconstruction.

Humanitarian Protection and Accountability

The shift to civilian power must not eclipse immediate survival. Priorities include unconditional humanitarian access, protecting civilians and aid workers, stopping the use of starvation as a weapon, and preventing conflict-related sexual violence. Accountability—through evidence preservation, survivor-centered transitional justice, and atrocity investigations—must be built into the peace architecture from day one, avoiding collective punishment.

KEY ASKS U.S. GOVERNMENT

1. **Protect Civilians & Restore Humanitarian Lifelines:** Press for an immediate humanitarian truce, unrestricted access, and substantially restored aid to stop starvation and protect civilians from mass atrocities.
2. **Reject a political settlement that simply divides power** between armed actors: U.S. diplomacy should insist that Sudanese civilians—including women, youth, displaced communities, civil society and local peacebuilders—have meaningful influence over negotiations and Sudan's political future.
3. **Disrupt the War Economy & Sanction Enablers:** Direct Treasury and State to dismantle the gold, weapons, logistics, and mercenary networks financing the SAF and RSF. Apply strict diplomatic and financial consequences to foreign governments and corporations enabling the war.

4. Fund & Elevate Sudanese Civilian Power: Establish dedicated, flexible funding mechanisms for grassroots, women-led, and youth organizations. Ensure civilians;—not just armed actors, —design the political settlement and transition.
5. Mobilize Congressional & Interagency Action: Mandate Congressional hearings on the war economy, arms flow, and external actors. Develop a comprehensive interagency strategy to coordinate financial measures, resist the normalization of military rule, and prepare a civilian-led reconstruction framework.

KEY ASKS

UNITED NATIONS AND DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

1. Reaffirm Civilian Governance & Coordinate Mediation: Push the African Union and regional bodies to reject permanent fragmentation and military rule. Create formal mechanisms for civilian representatives to influence ceasefire and transition agendas.
2. Protect & Fund Local Humanitarian Responders & Survivors of SGBV: Prioritize funding and protection for Sudanese local responders. Improve civilian-protection monitoring and ensure humanitarian aid does not inadvertently empower military patronage systems. Also, scale up funding and technical support for SGBV survivor services, and center their voices (survivors) and protection in all peace and humanitarian processes
3. Document Foreign Interference: Systematically document arms flows and foreign interference. Integrate evidence preservation and survivor-centered transitional justice into the core peace architecture from day one.
4. Drive Accountability from the all involved: Strengthen accountability for atrocities through accountability mechanisms directed at individuals and networks responsible for the atrocities, conflict-related sexual violence, attacks on civilians and obstruction of humanitarian assistance—while avoiding broad measures that further harm Sudanese civilians.

5. Elevate Women & Ensure Inclusive Reconstruction: Mandate the inclusion of African women mediators and displaced Sudanese in all diplomatic tracks. Ensure post-war reconstruction plans prioritize equitable resource sharing and community reconciliation.

KEY ASKS

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Amplify Civilian Voices & Advocate for Peace: Use moral authority to challenge weapons transfers, advocate with policymakers (such as the US Congress), and center the demands of marginalized communities in the peace process.
2. Mobilize Humanitarian & Trauma Healing Resources: Channel resources directly to locally led responses. Support community-based trauma healing, psychosocial support, and survivor-centered reconciliation efforts.
3. Counter Hate Narratives & Demand Moral Accountability: Actively dismantle ethnic and religious hate speech. Call external governments and armed actors to moral accountability, emphasizing equal citizenship and shared national belonging.
4. Leverage the Diaspora as a Policy Asset: Engage the Sudanese diaspora as critical connectors—linking experts, women, youth, and peacebuilders to build consensus around minimum principles for a democratic, civilian-led future.
5. Moral Authority of Faith Leaders: Faith communities should collectively use their moral authority to challenge the assumption that military victory will bring peace. Instead, faith leaders can model a different vision of security: Faith communities can articulate that security comes from protection, dignity, justice, accountable institutions, and relationships across communities—not domination by an armed actor.

ABOUT THE CONVENERS

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Salama Hub and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) jointly implement the Horn of Africa Research and Advocacy Joint Project, an initiative established to respond to the complex and evolving peace and security challenges facing the Horn of Africa. The project convenes a diverse coalition of civil society organizations, faith leaders from multiple religious traditions, women and youth-led movements, and academic institutions to promote collaborative research and advocacy on peace and security in the Horn of Africa.

Through this partnership, AFSC and AACC work to address the root causes of violent conflict, militarization, shrinking civic and democratic space, and the humanitarian crises affecting communities across the region. By fostering inclusive dialogue, supporting locally led solutions, and amplifying the voices of affected communities in key policy and advocacy forums, including the United Nations, African Union, and United States Government, the project seeks to advance sustainable peace throughout the Horn of Africa.

ABOUT AFSC

The American Friends Service Committee, AFSC, is a 109-year Quaker international NGO (1917–2026) and a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of all Quakers (1947). AFSC promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. We work with people and partners worldwide of all faiths and backgrounds to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace. AFSC is particularly active in the Horn of Africa, where we have created the Salama Hub, a research and advocacy program for peace and stability.

The AFSC's Salama Hub, a research and advocacy program, works for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa by strengthening local civil society organizations and faith leaders in influencing policies from research. It also fosters community-led healing and reconciliation. What makes it unique is its African-led research, that connects issues from the communities to the policy level. The program presents an opportunity for civil society organizations (CSOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) capacities to be strengthened. The program works with a wide range of partners—from local groups to regional and international bodies like the African Union, IGAD, European Union, and the U.S. policymakers—to ensure these local insights directly influence policies and social dynamics.

ABOUT AACC

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is a continental ecumenical body that accounts for over 200 million Christians across the African continent. AACC is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, and Indigenous churches in Africa, and a member of the worldwide ecumenical network. As an ecumenical body, AACC is a fellowship of more than 215 members comprising of Churches, National Christian Councils (NCCs), theological and lay training institutions, and other Christian organizations in 43 African countries.

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SECOND UNITED STATES ADVOCACY TOUR 2026

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