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## **32nd Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the implications of the ongoing situation in the Republic of the Sudan**

### **Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet**

5 November 2021

Madam President,  
Excellencies,

The military takeover of power in Sudan on 25 October 2021 is deeply disturbing. It betrays the courageous and inspiring revolution of 2019, and contravenes both international human rights law, as well as the country's own Constitutional Document and other foundational documents of the transition.

Events since the coup have recalled a sombre page in the country's history when freedom of expression was stifled, and human rights were comprehensively repressed. Numerous people – including government ministers, members of political parties, lawyers, civil society activists, journalists, human rights defenders and protest leaders – have been arrested and detained. Following his detention, the Prime Minister was placed under house arrest, while yesterday State television announced that four Ministers would be released.

The whereabouts of most of those arrested remains unknown, and they have been held incommunicado, with no access to lawyers or their relatives – enforced disappearances compounding the gravity of their arbitrary arrests.

As the Security Council called for last week and the Secretary-General reiterated yesterday, *all* those arrested and detained since the military takeover should be immediately released. This is also essential for commencing urgently needed dialogue and a swift return to civilian rule.

Massive street protests since 25 October were in several instances met with excessive use of force, including use of live ammunition, as documented by the Joint UN Human Rights Office in Sudan, particularly in Khartoum and Omdurman. According to medical sources, at least 13 civilians have been killed by military and security forces since 25 October, and more than 300 injured.

This disproportionate and deadly use of force by the Sudan Armed Forces, the Rapid Support Forces, and other security forces – including military police and intelligence elements – must end immediately. Those responsible for these and other human rights violations must be held fully accountable for their actions.

In a country where women and girls have been active leaders in the movement for democracy and

human rights, many women activists have reportedly been arrested, harassed, threatened, and in many cases, beaten while participating in protests. I have also received several disturbing reports of violence against women, including the early morning raid on a female student dormitory located near the military headquarters in Khartoum on 25 October. The students were terrorized and beaten, resulting in injuries.

State security agents, usually wearing plain clothes, have also targeted key actors in the civic space. The Joint UN Human Rights Office has documented the arrests and detentions of journalists, resistance committee members, and activists. The *Democrat* newspaper in Khartoum, and the Sudan News Agency, have been raided by military and unidentified forces, and the Director General of Sudan's state radio and television has been dismissed. I am informed that all radio stations and television channels in the country have ceased broadcasting, with the exception of Sudan National Television and Omdurman Radio, which are controlled by the military authorities. Newspapers have ceased printing. Raids have also taken place at a number of offices of civil society organisations.

Further contravening international human rights law, a nation-wide shutdown of the Internet has been imposed since 25 October. The shutdown has prevented the population from accessing information, including important information about services; and it has also significantly restricted the capacity of my own staff to operate.

Despite freedom of movement restrictions and the disruption of communications, the Joint UN Human Rights Office in Sudan has nevertheless been able to continue key human rights monitoring and reporting work, in cooperation with civil society partners. Advocacy work also continues regarding the identity, location and legal status of all people detained, with a view to visiting them to ascertain their status and conditions of detention.

Madam President,

I note reports that talks are underway in Khartoum between the military and civilian leadership.

I urge Sudan's military leaders, and their backers, to step back in order to allow the country to return to the path of progress towards institutional and legal reforms. In particular, the past two years have seen valuable progress towards setting up a National Human Rights Commission and key independent commissions envisaged in the Constitutional Document – including on transitional justice; land; women and gender equality; legal reforms; and corruption.

It is significant that several rapporteurs and members of the Committee for Dismantling the 30 June 1989 Regime, Anti-Corruption and Recovery of Public Funds have been targeted for arrest in the past two weeks. This is the transitional body tasked with vetting, recovery of public assets from the former regime's properties, and investigation and prosecution of corruption. As of 2 November 2021, the acting head of the National Committee in Khartoum; its alternate Chairperson; the Rapporteur; Spokesperson; and three members of the Committee had been arrested. At regional level, two Rapporteurs and five members of sub-national committees in Nyala, Sinnar and Aljazeera States have been arrested. Also arrested were numerous collaborators of the Dismantling Committee, including independent lawyers and civil servants.

This suggests that the military leaders have sought to overturn the commitments to transitional justice, institutional reforms, anti-corruption and guarantee of non-recurrence of past abuses that have been set out in the Constitutional Document.

The military's action also damaged prospects for the Juba Peace Agreement signed last year, and the situation in Darfur. While military authorities gave assurances that the Juba Peace Agreement will not be affected, at least two of the key signatories to that Agreement oppose the military takeover and threatened to withdraw from the Agreement. Non-signatory parties are also likely to be further discouraged, now, from joining the Agreement.

I remind the Council that any tensions between these armed actors risk exacerbating tensions on the ground in Darfur – which could once again present a direct threat to civilians in that region.

Excellencies,

My Office has been deeply engaged in assisting the democratic transitional authorities in Sudan to build national capacity to reform legislation and policies, to strengthen judicial remedies, to build sound transitional justice bodies, to open civic space, and to uphold the human rights of all people in Sudan.

Sudan has been a beacon of progress for the region, and it is urgent to restore civilian rule, and with it, a clear and principled path of reforms that can fulfil the people's aspirations to democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

The Sudanese people have a right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The use of excessive force – such as firing live bullets – to repress the expression of those rights is unlawful and unjustified. The Internet and all forms of communication must be reinstated, consistent with international law. This is particularly critical for people to remain informed during a crisis such as the present, and to be able to communicate with each other. And as previously stated, all those arbitrarily detained should be released, with a view to instituting dialogue and return to civilian rule.

I trust this Council will take appropriate action to ensure focused and expert monitoring of all aspects of the human rights situation in the country, through the establishment of an appropriate and independent mechanism, in addition to the support which the UN, including the Joint Human Rights Office, will continue to provide to Sudan and its people.

We must support the Sudanese people's clear aspiration for democracy and a society based not on arbitrary force, but on the rule of law – a wish they continue to express and a right they continue, with great courage and dignity, to justly demand.

Thank you, Madam President

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