



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

### **Conflict and Hunger in Sudan**

**Wednesday, May 22, 2024**

**10:00 – 11:30 a.m.**

**2247 Rayburn House Office Building**

#### **As prepared for delivery**

Good morning and welcome to today's Human Rights Commission hearing on conflict and hunger in Sudan.

In the years since this Commission was founded, we have held nine hearings on Sudan; this is the tenth. There have been moments of great hope – the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Accord, the 2020 Juba Agreement. But too often, we meet in moments when despair is on the rise. That is where we are today.

At the beginning of 2023, Sudan was already facing record levels of humanitarian need. A third of the population, nearly 16 million people, needed assistance; 3.7 million people were internally displaced; and the country was hosting over a million refugees from South Sudan and elsewhere. This was before war broke out on April 15, 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and its former ally, the Rapid Support Forces.

Since then, in the space of a year and a month, almost 9 million more people have been newly displaced, of whom 2 million have fled to neighboring countries. The UN now estimates that about half the population – 25 million people – need humanitarian aid. Of these, almost 18 million are estimated to face acute hunger.

This is the largest hunger crisis ever recorded for Sudan during a harvest season. Experts fear that the scale and severity of hunger will escalate during the lean season, from now through September.

On March 20, senior UN officials [warned](#) the Security Council “of a far-reaching and fast-deteriorating situation of food insecurity in Sudan” that is “catastrophic” and “truly the stuff of nightmares.” On April 15, 26 humanitarian agencies [urged](#) all parties to the conflict to take immediate measures to prevent the escalation of the conflict-induced hunger crisis.

I recognize that the severe humanitarian and human rights crisis we are seeing in Sudan today is not limited to massive hunger and the beginnings of starvation.

In 2007, I visited the Sudanese refugee camps along the Chad-Sudan border. From what I’m reading and what I’ve been told, what’s happening today is as bad or even worse than the period of the early-to-mid-2000s.

There are credible, damning reports of ethnically-targeted killings, sexual violence, indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas, looting and destruction of health care facilities, torture, child recruitment, and attacks on humanitarian workers, journalists and human rights defenders. [Human Rights Watch](#) and the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) are among those who have recently sounded the alarm.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has [described](#) the war as a “reckless, senseless conflict taking place in a context of total impunity.”

But here’s the thing: hunger, malnutrition, starvation and famine have effects on survivors that persist long after wars end – generational effects.

Right now, aid agencies estimate that 3.7 million children under the age of five are acutely malnourished. Even if a peace agreement were signed tomorrow, these children may not fully recover from the developmental consequences of malnutrition.

This is simply, morally inexcusable.

It is also likely criminal.

As this Commission has [emphasized in the past](#), and as we will be reminded today, international humanitarian law prohibits the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.

The hunger crisis we are seeing today in Sudan is not mere collateral damage from hostilities.

Food stores and aid warehouses have been looted.

Markets have been destroyed and domestic food production devastated.

Bureaucratic impediments and operational interference limit aid delivery.

Civilians have been attacked as they search for food.

International aid agencies have been largely unable to deliver food assistance in the capital of Khartoum, an epicenter of the conflict, and parts of Darfur have not received aid since before the war began.

In other words, war crimes are among the drivers of hunger and starvation in Sudan.

As the war enters its second year, today's hearing has three objectives:

- To focus attention on what could become the world's largest hunger crisis in decades;
- To identify recommendations to try to avert a worst case scenario of escalating starvation and famine; and
- To begin to discuss paths toward accountability for the actors who are deliberately contributing to hunger and starvation as part of their war strategy.

I very much look forward to hearing the views of our witnesses on these three points, and I promise to share their recommendations with Tom Perriello, the new U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan.