

**AFRICA**

UN official: 'Real and growing' risk of genocide in Sudan

May 21, 2024 4:18 PM

By Margaret Besheer

NEW YORK — The U.N. special adviser on the prevention of genocide warned Tuesday that Sudan exhibits all the risk signs of genocide, and it may already have been committed.

“The protection of civilians in Sudan cannot wait,” Alice Nderitu said. “The risk of genocide exists in Sudan. It is real and it is growing, every single day.”

Nderitu addressed a meeting of the U.N. Security Council to mark the 25th anniversary of a resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions.

She said many Sudanese civilians are targeted based on their identity.

“In Darfur and El Fasher, civilians are being attacked and killed because of the color of their skin, because of their ethnicity, because of who they are,” Nderitu said in a video briefing. “They are also targeted with hate speech and with direct incitement to violence.”

El Fasher is the capital of North Darfur, where fighting has recently escalated between the rival Sudanese Armed Forces, or SAF, based inside the city, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, who have now reportedly advanced into it.

El Fasher is the only city in the Darfur region that the RSF has not captured. More than 800,000 civilians are sheltering there, and a full-scale battle could unleash atrocities similar to those of the genocide carried out by Arab Janjaweed fighters against African Zaghawa, Masalit, Fur and other non-Arab ethnic groups in Darfur in the early 2000s.

Janjaweed fighters make up today's RSF.

“Ethnically motivated attacks targeting these specific groups — the Masalit, and also the Fur and the Zaghawa — have been, and reportedly continue, being conducted primarily by RSF and allied armed Arab militias,” Nderitu said. “They are reported to act in patterns whereby attacks against specific locations and individuals tend to be announced in advance, which could constitute indication of clear intent to destroy.”

Intent to destroy is a key part of the crime of genocide.

Nderitu said attacks reported on villages around El Fasher appear intended to cause displacement and fear, rather than accomplish specific military objectives.

“It is imperative that all possible actions aimed at the protection of innocent civilian populations, in El Fasher as in the entire territory of Sudan, are expedited,” she said. “It is urgent to stop ethnically motivated violence.”

Nderitu visited refugees in neighboring Chad in October and said she saw camps set up there in the early 2000s to house civilians fleeing that genocide, side-by-side with camps for the new refugees.

In West Darfur, she said Masalit communities have been targeted, with many people killed as they fled to Chad or during the conflict.

She criticized both the RSF and SAF for ignoring international human rights and humanitarian law, for using heavy weaponry in densely populated areas, for arresting youth and men at checkpoints, and for using hate speech and inciting people to violence.

The special adviser expressed particular alarm about the use of rape and gender-based violence, the burning and looting of villages, the bombing of medical facilities and the lack of access to water and electricity.

Famine is also stalking parts of Sudan due to the 13-month-old war, and Nderitu said access to humanitarian assistance is urgent.

She told Security Council members they have a “special responsibility” to consider measures to prevent another genocide in Sudan.