Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, U.S. House of Representatives

“One Year After the Fall of El-Fasher: How Transnational Networks Finance Crimes in Sudan”

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Chairman Smith, Chairman McGovern, and the Members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, thank you for holding this important briefing. I just returned from visiting Sudan two days ago and appreciate the opportunity to share what I saw and heard.

But first, let me say that I have been working on Sudan for more than two decades, starting my career with Save Darfur and I had the honor of helping Chairman McGovern get arrested outside the Sudanese Embassy when they were blocking food into parts of Sudan in 2012. I want to thank him for continuing to speak out on Sudan.

I was in Sudan over the past two weeks with Refugees International President Jeremy Konyndyk, as part of Refugees International’s ongoing efforts to highlight what is the largest humanitarian and displacement crisis in the world. Refugees International is an independent organization dedicated to advocating for lifesaving assistance, human rights, and protection for displaced people and promoting solutions to displacement crises. We do not accept any government or UN funding, ensuring the independence and credibility of our work.

During our trip to Sudan, we visited Khartoum, an IDP center in Omdurman, and IDP sites in Ad Dabbah to the north and Kosti to the south, as well as the site of a massacre in Wad Al Noura, meeting with IDPs from two of the most affected areas of the country, namely Darfur and the Kordofans.

You have heard the numbers: more than 11 million people displaced, including 4.6 million who fled to other countries; more than two-thirds of the population in need of humanitarian assistance, with the UN warning of an increasing risk of famine; and tens of thousands killed, by conservative estimates.

The picture becomes more stark when you see the destruction in Khartoum and speak to the Sudanese people in displacement camps or in city neighborhoods banding together to survive and recover. I will focus my remarks on trying to convey some of that picture and then speak to one of the key factors that has fueled this crisis, the role of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

To start, driving through Khartoum, it is impossible not to be struck by the extent of physical destruction. Buildings demolished, walls pockmarked by bullet holes and shrapnel, and an eerie emptiness in many neighborhoods. In one health center, now being rehabilitated by local Sudanese Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) we could see how every locked storage door had been smashed in so that all supplies could be looted.

But there are deeper, unseen scars. Speaking to IDPs in the Al-Afad camp made this abundantly clear. Most of the IDPs in Al-Afad camp are survivors of the violence in El Fasher in October 2025, having fled hundreds of miles for refuge.

Almost exactly one year ago, the world witnessed one of the worst days of mass atrocities in modern history. The fall of El Fasher, Darfur, to the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was marked by thousands of ethnically targeted killings, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and widespread sexual violence.

One of the women we spoke with was a midwife in the main hospital in El Fasher, working there on the day it fell. She described a shell, or perhaps drone strike, that hit the hospital. She escaped, but lost four of her colleagues as well as her father and brother. A 96-year-old man told us he was beaten with guns even though he used a cane and could hardly walk. And another woman shared that she had been taken by RSF soldiers and raped for eight days.

Such stories are all too common and not limited to Darfur. We also visited the village of Wad Al Noura in Gezira state, south of Khartoum. It was the site of a massacre at the hands of the RSF resulting in the deaths of more than 100 people. We spoke to survivors who showed us the mass grave where they were buried, including small mounds, the size of children. The UN has reported that at least 35 of those killed were children.

The RSF, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and their allied militias have committed grave violations of human rights throughout the conflict since April 2023. They have also restricted access for humanitarian aid. The SAF has carried out arbitrary executions and struck markets, medical facilities, and other civilian infrastructure. The United States has found that the RSF and SAF are responsible for war crimes and that the RSF is responsible for crimes against humanity and genocide. And the violations continue.

Just over the last three days there has been a marked increase in civilians killed by drone strikes, with RSF drone strikes reportedly killing civilians in Khartoum and SAF drone strikes reportedly killing more than 200 people across Darfur, the Kordofans, and Abyei, including at markets.

Indeed, our trip, and what we heard from Sudanese, was not just about looking back at what has happened, but also about looking ahead at how to anticipate, plan, protect, prevent, and - where possible - recover. The atrocities in El Fasher, in particular, were a failure of prevention. Months of warnings failed to generate action. This cannot be repeated.

Nor can the warning signs of growing hunger be ignored. IDPs in the Al-Afad camp survived that day in El Fasher, but are living on half rations and humanitarians warn that supplies may run out before the end of the year. The UN has warned that the combined effects of fighting, access restrictions, and drought due to the super El Niño effects are leading to a growing risk of famine.

And, in Al-Afad camp, newly displaced people continue to arrive from North Kordofan fleeing areas of fighting and near famine levels of hunger. Similar suffering is happening in Blue Nile state and still in Darfur where fighting continues.

The situation has been exacerbated by drastic cuts by the United States and other donors. Several humanitarian officials and IDPs told us that the effects of U.S. aid cuts were harsh and continue to reverberate, clearly costing lives. Shortly after the cuts the Emergency Response Rooms (ERRs) reported having to close 70 percent of their communal kitchens across Sudan. Many have been able to find ways to reopen but how long they can remain so remains precarious. Humanitarian officials in Kosti told us that many lives had been lost unnecessarily due to aid cuts, describing pregnant women with life-threatening labor complications unable to make it to hospitals, children dying of malnutrition, and showing us the graves of those they believe would still be alive but for the aid cuts.

We also spoke with many Sudanese humanitarian responders, including local mutual aid groups like the ERRs - rightfully finalists for the Nobel Peace Prize - and Sudanese National NGOs like Sudanese American Physicians Association (SAPA), that are doing lifesaving work in Sudan. Their messages were clear. They need more sustained, predictable, direct, and flexible funding.

But what is needed most is a stop to the fighting. To do this the external actors fueling the war must be stopped. This is where the UAE comes in. The SAF and the RSF have both committed atrocities and both have received support from other countries. The RSF has also committed genocide and systematically used rape as a weapon of war. A UN human rights report found that 87 percent of confirmed cases of conflict related sexual violence has been committed by the RSF and its allied militias. So the RSF stands out for its egregious atrocities and so must the most egregious backer of the RSF, the UAE. Numerous independent investigations and reports from the UN Fact Finding Mission and media outlets including the New York Times and Wall Street Journal to independent organizations like Refugees International and the Conflict Insights Group have found evidence of the UAE's supplying of weapons to the RSF.

I believe that the most meaningful step the world could take to prevent further mass atrocities and to mitigate humanitarian suffering would be to stop the flow of weapons from the UAE to the RSF. The UAE cares about its public image. It spends billions of dollars to curate its reputation. The UAE needs to see that the rest of the world cares if it is supporting genocide.

Which brings me to the NBA. The UAE has many partnerships with prominent businesses, educational institutions, sports leagues, and teams. If those entities began to speak out about what the UAE is doing in Sudan, it would change its calculations.

I commend the co-chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for sending letters to Disney, Warner Bros., the NFL, and the NBA. We at Refugees International have joined a growing coalition of partners sending similar letters and ensuring that these entities are aware of what kind of partnerships they have when dealing with the UAE.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Just over a week from now, the people of Sudan will mark one year since that horrible day of atrocities, the day El Fasher fell. Days later the NBA will kick off the Emirates NBA Cup, once again splashing Emirates logos and sports washing the deadly role of the UAE in fueling genocide in Sudan.

There are many things that the U.S. Congress and the people watching this briefing can do to support the people of Sudan.

- Congress can continue to appropriate more funding as part of the FY27 package to support local Sudanese groups directly and with more sustainable and flexible funding.
- Restore humanitarian assistance urgently needed to prevent famine, to rebuild Sudan's health infrastructure, and to support those who have experienced Conflict Related Sexual Violence.
- Expand the UN Security Council arms embargo on Darfur to all of Sudan, but also ensure that the current arms embargo is actually enforced.
- Support the UN Independent Fact Finding Mission and other accountability efforts.
- Extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Sudanese individuals so that they are not forced to return to unsafe conditions.
- Pass key legislation such as Representative Meeks' U.S. Engagement in Sudanese Peace Act, which comprehensively addresses accountability and humanitarian efforts for Sudan.

But if there is one thing you can do today that could have the greatest cumulative effect on the trajectory of Sudan's crisis, it is to call out the UAE for its role. Start by asking the NBA to end its partnership with the UAE. Let the UAE know that supporting genocide is not okay. Go to Bloodontheball.org or speakoutonsudan.org.

Thank you.