



SUDAN **CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST**

OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS TO CIVIC FREEDOMS



GALLO



INTRODUCTION

Escalating attacks on civic freedoms have been noted in Sudan, with pro-democracy protesters and women human rights defenders repeatedly targeted since the October 2021 coup.

On 25th October 2021 a coup d'état was staged by the military leadership following ongoing [tensions](#) between military and civilian factions in the government, prompting mass protests. Security forces [arrested](#) 63 government officials, which included Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, six ministers and several members of the country's civilian leadership, such as members of the Transitional Government and Transitional Sovereign Council (SC), who were placed under house arrest or taken to unknown locations. A state of emergency was [declared](#) by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, with the dissolution of the SC and the civilian-led Transitional Government.

After a turbulent month, a political agreement was [signed](#) on 21st November 2021, with Abdalla Hamdok reinstated as prime minister and the transition to civilian rule restored, including the release of political prisoners. However, on 24th December 2021, Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan [issued](#) a decree giving further power to the military by authorising General Intelligence Service (GIS) agents to carry out home searches, surveillance, arrests and detentions and granted GIS agents immunity from prosecution. This prompted mass violations against protesters, civilian political leaders, journalists and human rights defenders. On 2nd January 2022 Hamdok [announced](#) his resignation as Prime Minister due to political deadlock between the civilian and military factions which [sparked](#) further political uncertainty, as the position was left vacant. Throughout 2022, protests staged by the pro-democracy movement have continued and faced violent and lethal repressions (for more see our coup anniversary [research brief](#)).

In December 2022, a two year deal [was signed by](#) the military and political parties, mapping a framework for a civilian-led transition towards elections. However, pro-democracy resistance committees have rejected the deal as [transitional justice](#) and security sector reform are yet to be included. This prompted renewed protests in December 2022 and January 2023.

PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Violations on the right to peaceful assembly have continued unabated. On 25th October 2022, protests were staged on the one year anniversary of the coup to demand peaceful civilian rule. During the protest one person [was killed](#) after being run over by a security forces vehicle. According to [Netblocks](#), the internet was disrupted ahead of the protest, lasting approximately eight hours. This wasn't the first time that the military shut down access to information, with a previous internet blackout during October 2021 protests lasting for 24 days.

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The [CIVICUS Monitor](#), an online platform that tracks threats to civil society in countries across the globe, rates civic space – the space for civil society – in Sudan as **"Repressed"**.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN



On 6th December 2022, following the signing of the deal, a “March of Millions” protest [was staged](#) and was heavily repressed by security forces. According to the Sudanese Doctors Association (SDA), 73 people [were injured](#) by security forces using harmful chemicals in water cannon, tear gas canisters filled with stones or glass and rubber bullets, in violation of [international law](#). Five protesters were also run over by armoured vehicles of the regular forces. On 19th December 2022, a protest [was staged](#) to mark the four-year anniversary of the 2019 protests which ousted former President Omar Al-Bashir, during which security forces fired tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades, injuring at least 155 people.

In the new year violent repression of protests continued. On 5th January 2022, 111 people were [injured](#) during protests of which 39 had to be treated in hospital. 30 protesters sustained injuries from tear gas, while one was injured by a rubber bullet to the face, and four others were injured by glass projectiles shot from a tear gas launcher. In addition, 30 people were detained. Similarly, on 17th January 2023, the SDA [reported that](#) at least 112 protesters were injured, with 13 admitted to hospital. Of these, eight involved incidents where protesters were hit in the head with tear gas and stones. In addition, 60 were detained during protests.

According to the United Nations, since October 2021, 119 people, including at least 21 children and one woman have [been killed](#) during protests. In addition, It is [estimated](#) that about 7,000 people have been injured since the beginning of the protests.

WOMEN PROTESTERS TARGETED BY VIOLENCE

Women, who are at the forefront of protests, have faced excessive violence during protests, including sexual violence. The Sudanese Women’s Monitor [reports that](#) on 17th November 2022 security forces threw a 24-year-old woman protester off a bridge in central Khartoum, resulting in severe spinal injuries. On 13th December 2022, one woman protester lost her eye during protests in Omdurman, Khartoum after she was shot by a tear gas canister shotgun. Additionally, in early November 2022, at least two women volunteers in charity groups faced legal prosecution following unfounded accusations of collecting money to support protest movements. Women lawyers have also been beaten and suffocated by tear gas during continuous police attacks inside Sudanese Bar Offices in Khartoum (see more under association).

ASSOCIATION

WHRDS AND CSOS SEVERELY THREATENED

Following the signing of the deal, attacks on WHRDs and women’s groups have continued. As [documented by](#) the Sudanese Women’s Monitor (SUWRA), on 14th December 2022, the office of Alharisat, one of the prominent women’s groups, was raided by plain clothes officers who presented a warrant for violations of the city garbage disposal law. They proceeded to break into the office of the director and harassed and threatened the staff with detention. Similarly, on 5th January 2023, the newly opened office of another women’s group was raided by a plain clothes officer who searched the organisation’s computers. In a statement, SUWRA stated: “These forms of intimidation, attacks and arbitrary use of the law present serious threats to the safety and work stability for women’s groups in Sudan.”



Separately, the chairman of the Sovereignty Council, Lt Gen Abdelfattah El Burhan, [accused](#) “certain groups, political parties and NGOs of distributing narcotics to young people, under the guise of spreading democracy”. According to civil society, these allegations are “an attempt to demonise civil society” and may lead to “more control and oppression of civil society organisations”.

In addition, CSOs told the CIVICUS Monitor that they often need permission for holding workshops and trainings, especially in hotels or commercial venues.

TARGETING CRITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

On 23rd October 2022, the office of the [Sudanese Consumers Protection Society \(SCPS\)](#) received a delegation of seven employees from the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) delivering a letter of cancellation of its registration and the seizure of all its assets. The group confiscated property such as seals, headed paper and other documents. The organisation has played an important role in protecting consumer rights. For example, during October 2021 protests, the SCPS [challenged](#) internet shutdowns in court in order to get the military to restore it. Additionally, in May 2022, the SCPS submitted a complaint to the office of the prosecutor in Khartoum against the minister of energy because of tempered and poor-quality oil at fuel/gas stations upon receiving several complaints from consumers.

On 24th October 2022, the Supreme Court of Appeals ruled to reinstate Al Bashir-allied trade unions and federations which were dissolved in 2019 by the now suspended Empowerment Removal Committee (ERC). The Sudanese Bar Association appealed the decision. Shortly afterwards, in November 2022 the SBA's premises [were taken over](#) and attacked by the police and members of the former regime's Lawyers' Syndicate. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sudan and Head of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), Volker Perthes, [condemned](#) the attack.

EXPRESSION

[According to](#) the Sudanese Journalists' Syndicate (SJS), the press and media in Sudan have faced “unprecedented targeting”.

On 20th October 2022, the police [raided](#) an exhibition taking place at an art gallery in Khartoum and confiscated 9 out of 12 art pieces, damaging one of them in the process. Nine young artists and designers were arrested and charged with “calling for opposition to authority by use of violence (article 63), disturbance of public peace (article 69) and public nuisance (article 77) of the Sudanese Penal Code 199.” They were released on bail the next day. The exhibition was held by Ahmed Esam, a 21-year-old human rights defender and an artist whose artworks focused on his experience of detention during the anti-coup protests. Esam was detained for 55 days and subjected to threats and ill-treatment.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To Sudanese authorities:

- Respect the right to peaceful assembly and ensure that security forces respond to ongoing and future protests in line with the country's international human rights obligations and address the underlying causes of the protests.
- Immediately cease the unnecessary and disproportionate use of force – including the use of live ammunition – against peaceful protesters.
- Release protesters who are unlawfully detained, drop all charges against them and refrain from further arbitrary detention of protesters and conduct investigations into the forced disappearance of protesters.
- Conduct independent, impartial investigations into the killing of protesters and human rights violations by military forces during protests to ensure perpetrators are held to account.
- Immediately end the targeting of WHRDs, women's rights groups and women protesters and protect the rights of WHRDs to advocate and promote women's and human rights.
- Conduct an immediate investigation into the violations and gender-based violence against women protesters and WHRDs and engage in inclusive and wide consultations with civil society, including women human rights defenders.
- Respect the rights of citizens to access information by halting all disruptions and shutdowns to telecommunications services.
- Sudanese military leaders should end arbitrary arrests, torture and other forms of ill-treatment, and establish credible mechanisms of oversight over its detention practices.
- Prioritise justice and accountability in any upcoming political solution.

To the United Nations, the African Union and IGAD:

- Sudan's international partners and multilateral organisations, including the UN and African Union, should continue to issue calls to Sudan's authorities that ongoing violations, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, will not be tolerated.
- Continue efforts to foster an inclusive dialogue involving different stakeholders, including women and youth, in all processes geared towards the facilitation of a transition to civilian rule.
- We urge the UN Human Rights Council to take action that will enable continued scrutiny, including the vital monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation in the country by the High Commissioner and the designated Expert.



To the European Union, the US and development partners:

- Coordinate actions and impress on the Sudanese military the need to abide by its commitment made in the power-sharing agreement to foster a civilian-led transition and conduct military and security sector reforms
- Continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, those displaced and those most affected by the crisis.