Sudan: Rape being used as war tactic – UN

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A UN agency warned on Tuesday that rape is being systematically used as a weapon of war in Sudan, as the country’s brutal conflict enters its second year.  
  
Anna Mutavati, regional director of UN Women, told reporters via video link from Port Sudan that “we have seen a 288 per cent increase in demand for life-saving support for rape and sexual violence survivors.”  
  
“We are beginning to see the systematic use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. Women’s bodies have turned into a battleground,” she said, without specifying which side in the conflict was responsible.  
  
Sudan’s war between the national army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted in April 2023, derailing hopes for a democratic transition.  
  
The conflict has displaced millions and devastated areas like Darfur, where the RSF is trying to hold territory amid army advances in Khartoum.  
  
“This is just the tip of the iceberg,” Ms Mutavati added. “Not everyone is coming forward because of shame and victim-blaming attached to every woman who has been raped or gang-raped.”  
  
A UN fact-finding mission in 2024 described levels of sexual violence, including child rape, as “staggering.” The RSF and allied forces were identified as perpetrators in the majority of reported cases.  
  
The mission noted that reports were more difficult to collect in areas controlled by the Sudanese army.  
  
Mohamed Refaat, head of the International Organisation for Migration’s mission in Sudan, shared harrowing accounts from women in Khartoum.  
  
Some told him they had been sexually assaulted in front of their injured husbands and screaming children.  
  
“It is the first time in my life I have seen women who have been abused to that extent,” Mr Refaat said.  
  
Meanwhile, the UK is co-hosting a conference in London on Tuesday, aimed at improving coordination of the international response to the crisis.  
  
Sudan’s foreign minister has criticised the presence of the UAE and Kenya at the talks, saying Sudan should have been invited.  
  
(Reuters/NAN)