Sexual violence rife in war-torn Sudan capital

Date: 2024-07-29

Source: https://punchng.com/sexual-violence-rife-in-war-torn-sudan-capital-hrw/

Armed men salute the governor of Sudan's Red Sea State Mustafa Mahmud in Port Sudan in the war-torn country on July 24, 2024. (Photo by AFP)  
  
Sudan’s warring parties have committed widespread sexual violence against women and girls aged between nine and 60, and prevented survivors from accessing healthcare in the capital, Human Rights Watch said on Monday.  
  
In a new report titled ‘Khartoum is Not Safe for Women’, the rights watchdog recorded testimonies from 42 healthcare workers and first responders on sexual violence and forced and child marriage since war erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.  
  
Between April and February 2024, 18 healthcare providers alone treated a total of 262 survivors of sexual violence in greater Khartoum, which includes the city of Omdurman just across the Nile River.  
  
But according to first responders, the number of reported cases is only a fraction of the real figure, with most survivors unable or unwilling to seek emergency care.  
  
The RSF “have raped, gang raped, and forced into marriage countless women and girls in residential areas in Sudan’s capital,” said Laetitia Bader, HRW’s deputy Africa director.  
  
“The armed group has terrorised women and girls and both warring parties have blocked them from getting aid and support services, compounding the harm they face and leaving them to feel that nowhere is safe.”  
  
The 88-page report also details “conditions that could amount to sexual slavery”.  
  
Though sexual violence has been primarily identified as a systematic weapon used by the RSF, there have also been reports of sexual violence at the hands of army soldiers.  
  
HRW says there has been “an uptick in cases” reported since the army “took control of Omdurman in early 2024”.  
  
– No access to care –  
  
Across Sudan, survivors have reported debilitating physical injuries as a result of sexual assault, including by several fighters at once.  
  
Among those treated by healthcare workers HRW spoke to, “at least four of the women died as a result” of their injuries.  
  
Women whose assault results in pregnancy have little to no access to abortion care and are at risk of further violence and social repercussions. Some have been abandoned by their families, HRW said.  
  
With the army imposing an effective siege on RSF-controlled areas — restricting even medical and humanitarian relief supplies for over a year — local volunteers in emergency response rooms have played “the leading role in responding to sexual violence”.  
  
Volunteers themselves have been routinely targeted by both sides, with RSF fighters even committing “sexual violence against the service providers”, HRW reported.  
  
The rights group said the RSF’s widespread sexual violence constitutes “war crimes and crimes against humanity”, while both sides’ attacks on healthcare are considered “war crimes”.  
  
They called on the African Union and the United Nations to “urgently deploy a civilian protection force” in the northeast African country.  
  
The war has killed tens of thousands of people across the country, with some estimating the toll to be as high as 150,000.  
  
It has also caused the world’s largest displacement crisis, with over 10.7 million people displaced within Sudan — currently on the brink of famine — while over 2 million more have fled across borders.  
  
AFP.