



# **BESIEGED, ATTACKED, STARVED**

## **MASS ATROCITIES IN EL FASHER AND ZAMZAM, SUDAN**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In April and May 2024, fighting between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on one side and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) allied with the Joint Forces on the other, escalated in El Fasher, the last of Darfur's five state capitals that was not under the control of the RSF. As the conflict has intensified, civilians have continued to be the main victims: their neighbourhoods and infrastructure have been repeatedly shelled, bombed and attacked by the warring parties.

The RSF and their allies have deliberately targeted non-Arab communities. Survivors of ground operations have reported systematic looting, the random or deliberate killing of civilians, and the burning of civilian buildings including private houses and markets. Sexual violence has been perpetrated on a large scale, while reports of numerous abductions of men and women suggest that disappearances have been a source of income for the RSF and their affiliates.

As this report goes to press, widespread violence against civilians continues on a daily basis. On April 11, 2025, the RSF and their allies launched a large-scale ground offensive on Zamzam camp, located around seventeen kilometres south of El Fasher and estimated to host over 500,000 people. The number of people killed and injured is unknown, but with no functional hospital within the camp, most of the wounded had no access to life-saving medical assistance. In less than three weeks, over 400,000 people were displaced according to the International Organization for Migration. A large proportion of the population fled to El Fasher, where they remained trapped, out of reach of humanitarian aid and exposed to attacks and further mass violence. On April 16, the RSF launched an operation on the capital of North Darfur, leading to dozens being wounded and killed. Between April 13 and May 10, a total of 528 wounded people received care at the MSF-supported hospital in Tawila, a town located around 60 kilometres from Zamzam.

Numerous interviewees reported that they had been targeted for being non-Arabs, and many stated that the Zaghawa were particularly at risk. The Zaghawa community constitutes the core of the Joint Forces, who were neutral until late 2023 and began fighting alongside the SAF in the defence of El Fasher and Zamzam in early 2024. Self-defence forces, largely recruited from the Zaghawa community, also began to support the Joint Forces and the SAF. Many of the villages and neighbourhoods that the RSF and their allies targeted during their ground operations were well-known to be home to the Zaghawa. In light of the ethnically motivated mass atrocities committed on the Masalit in West Darfur, and of the recent ethnic violence and massacres perpetrated in Zamzam camp in North Darfur, MSF fears such a scenario will be repeated in El Fasher – notably because witnesses report that RSF soldiers spoke of plans to 'clean El Fasher' of its non-Arab, and especially Zaghawa, community.

Aside from the direct violence exerted on civilians, residents from El Fasher and surrounding areas have been prevented from meeting their basic needs. Access to healthcare has been rendered near impossible, as most healthcare infrastructure has been partially or completely damaged. When fighting intensified in El Fasher in May 2024, health facilities supported by MSF endured at least seven incidents of shelling, bombing or shooting from both sides. In June 2024, no less than four such incidents were reported. Attacks on healthcare facilities continued and, as a consequence, in August 2024, MSF was forced to end its support to Saudi Hospital, which was the last remaining public hospital in the city with the capacity to treat the wounded and perform surgery. In December 2024 and January 2025, MSF ambulances were targeted on two occasions. As of mid-April 2025, only one hospital with surgical capacity remained partially functioning, for an estimated catchment population of over one million. Over the past year, many patients and their caretakers have been killed while inside a medical facility supported by MSF. Humanitarian workers have been repeatedly threatened, sometimes murdered. On April 11, the last international aid organisation still operating in Zamzam camp, Relief International, confirmed that nine staff were killed in a health clinic in the camp during the ground operation carried out by the RSF. Two additional staff later died from the injuries they sustained during the attack.

Civilians have been deprived of food and water, one of the deadly consequences being the spread of famine, confirmed in August 2024 by the Integrated Food Security Phase (IPC) Famine Review Committee. Markets have been repeatedly targeted by the warring parties. A rapid needs assessment conducted by various non-governmental organisations – including MSF – and government institutions in IDP gathering sites located in El Fasher in March 2025 provided catastrophic figures: about 38 per cent of children under five were found to be suffering from acute malnutrition, with 11 per cent having severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 27 per cent having moderate acute malnutrition (MAM). Additionally, over the past year, the majority of water towers and water pumps in El Fasher and Zamzam IDP camp have either been destroyed or become non-functional due to the lack of maintenance and fuel to run the generators. This lack of access to water coupled with low vaccination coverage has increased the risk of outbreaks and is a major cause of the deterioration of people's health.

This report is based on quantitative and qualitative data collected between May 2024 and May 2025. It includes direct observation, MSF quantitative data, and over eighty interviews with people who were displaced from El Fasher and Zamzam, conducted in North Darfur and in refugee camps in eastern Chad. Through first-hand testimonies of patients who reached our medical facilities, MSF is uniquely positioned to document the suffering and atrocities committed against the population to whom it provides care.

As MSF continues to respond to urgent medical needs and to the consequences of the ongoing violence in North Darfur, **MSF calls urgently for the warring parties and international actors, including UN agencies, to prevent further mass atrocities – both indiscriminate and ethnically motivated. MSF additionally urges the UN and its member states to use their leverage in order to ensure that the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2736 demanding that the RSF end the siege of El Fasher and calling for an immediate halt to the fighting in and around the city is implemented. Lastly, MSF is making an urgent call for a large-scale humanitarian response to be launched, as the lean and rainy seasons start, with the priority given to areas where famine has been confirmed.**

#### **To the warring parties**

- Cease attacks on civilians, uphold commitments made in Jeddah in May 2023 – that have been restated on numerous occasions – and respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law, in particular to protect civilians, enable humanitarian access, and protect the medical mission.
- The RSF and their allies must immediately stop ethnic violence perpetrated against non-Arab communities, and especially the Zaghawa.
- The RSF and their allies must lift the siege of El Fasher and guarantee safe routes for civilians fleeing violence. Humanitarian agencies must be granted unrestricted access to El Fasher immediately, ensuring life-saving aid reaches civilians.

#### **To states with influence over the warring parties**

- End their military, economic and diplomatic support to the warring parties and exert pressure on them to stop violence against civilians. Civilian safety must be at the core of any engagement with the warring parties.
- Engage with the warring parties to enforce mechanisms enabling people who wish to flee combat zones to safely do so.

#### **To the United Nations, African Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and other relevant international actors**

- Support bodies and mechanisms to monitor violations of human rights and effectively protect civilians, holding parties to the conflict accountable for the violence perpetrated against civilians.
- Ensure civilians are protected and able to access humanitarian assistance.

#### **To donors, humanitarian actors and UN agencies**

- Expand their presence in relevant hubs to ensure the effective delivery of aid. At least 150,000 tons of food are needed per month for the nine million people in an Emergency or Famine situation in Sudan. For North Darfur, 19,000 tons of food are needed per month for the 1,116,000 people in Emergency and Famine situations.
- Deploy all possible means to provide urgently needed aid. Complementary to road access or when roads are impassable, airbridge and airdropping operations for food and medical supplies need to be launched.