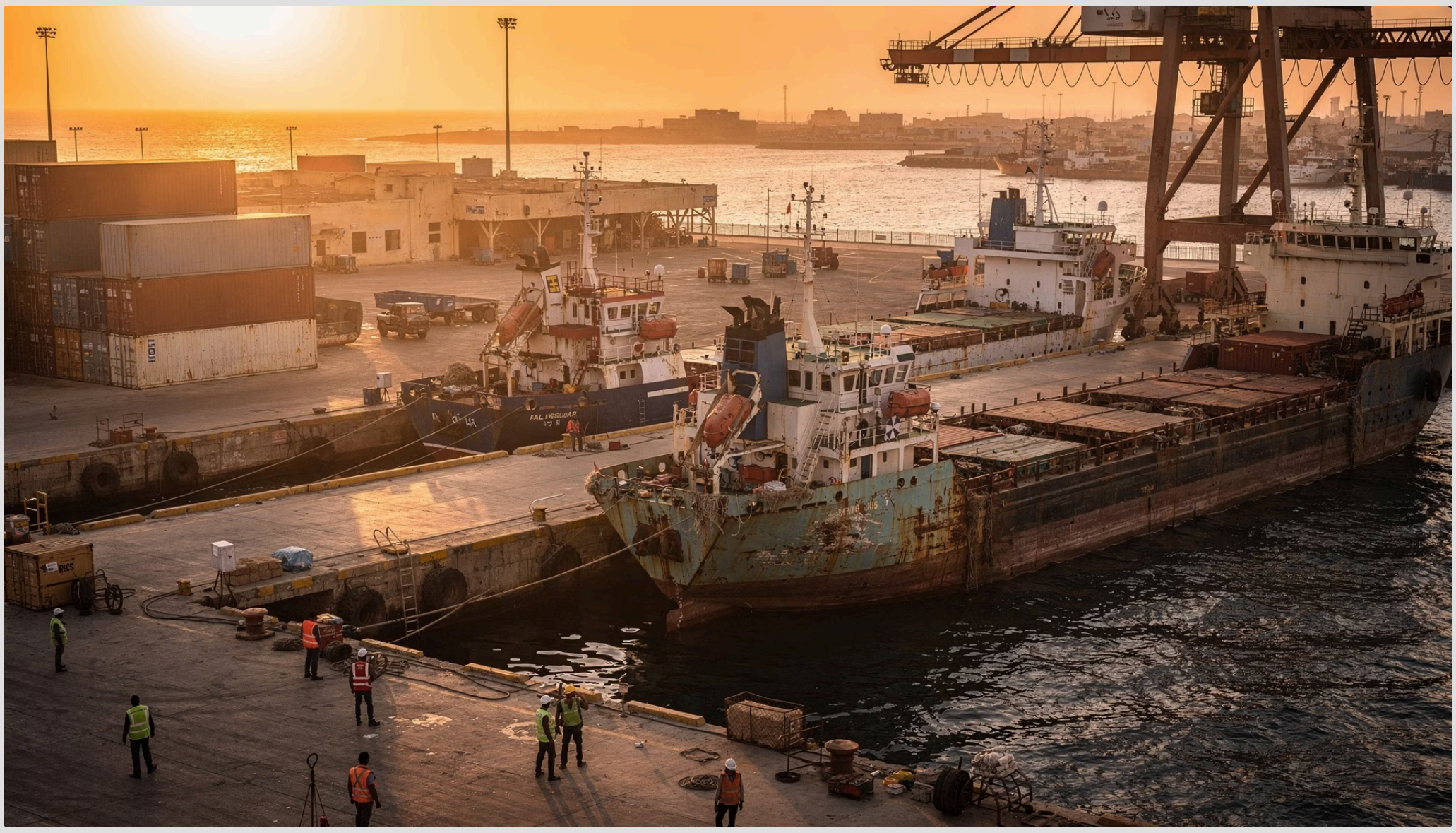
African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa)

Beyond a Civil War: Sudan's Proxy Insurgency and Its Devastating Impact on Workers and Communities

Sudan Mission Report

Location: Port Sudan, Sudan | Duration: Four (4) Days | Date: 12-16 January 2026



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Executive Summary

This report details the findings of a high-level solidarity mission undertaken by the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) to Port Sudan from 12–16 January 2026, pursuant to a resolution of the ITUC-Africa Peace and Security Meeting held in Kenya in November 2025. The mission aimed to express African workers' solidarity with Sudanese workers and assess the profound impact of the ongoing **insurgency/insurrection** on labour institutions and livelihoods. Crucially, framing this conflict as an insurgency/insurrection, rather than a civil war or mere power struggle, highlights the deliberate, systematic targeting of civilian life and infrastructure, which necessitates a distinct international response rooted in humanitarian intervention and accountability.

Evidence gathered during the mission unequivocally points to the systematic destruction of social and economic infrastructure—including electricity grids, schools, healthcare facilities, and water systems. Deliberate attacks on civilians, particularly vulnerable groups, were widespread, alongside disturbing patterns of ethnic cleansing and demographic engineering targeting Sudanese communities of African descent. The conflict is further exacerbated by its external dimensions, involving foreign fighters, mercenaries, and significant external financing, with specific findings indicating the critical role of the UAE in providing financial and logistical support to the perpetrators of these atrocities.

These findings underscore the devastating impact on Sudanese workers and trade unions, including the widespread destruction of labour institutions and unprecedented displacement and job losses.

In response, the mission calls for a permanent and verifiable ceasefire, immediate justice and accountability for all crimes, including compensation for victims, scaled-up humanitarian access to all affected areas, and an urgent international summit focused on Sudan's reconstruction and rehabilitation.

The delegation was led by the ITUC-Africa General Secretary and supported by the ITUC-Africa Human & Trade Union Rights, Migration and Peace & Security Coordinator, who provided political, technical, and programme leadership throughout. The delegation also included the President of the Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions (HAK-İŞ) and his assistant.

Methodology

The mission adopted a qualitative, engagement-based methodology combining political dialogue, institutional meetings, and worker-level consultations. Methods included:

- High-level meetings with government, justice, and security institutions
- Structured engagements with national and sectoral trade unions
- Consultations with women workers, students, and public utility institutions
- Review of testimonies, institutional briefings, and preliminary documentation
- Cross-validation of findings through multi-sectoral discussions

The approach prioritised first-hand worker testimony, contextual political and security analysis, and alignment with international labour and post-conflict recovery frameworks, ensuring that findings are grounded in lived realities and credible institutional perspectives.

Key Findings

The mission documented severe and systemic impacts of the war on workers and trade union institutions. These include large-scale job losses, prolonged non-payment of wages, employment termination linked to displacement, destruction of trade union offices and worker facilities, collapse of grievance-handling and social dialogue mechanisms, and widespread psychosocial distress. Strategic sectors—including electricity, ports, transport, manufacturing, health, education, and water supply—have been paralysed, accelerating informalisation of work and undermining livelihoods. More than 11,000 union members were reported to be directly affected through displacement, unemployment, injury, or loss of income.

Women's testimonies revealed the deeply gendered nature of the conflict, including systematic sexual violence, terror tactics, forced displacement, and profound trauma affecting children. Survivors repeatedly described perpetrators perceived as foreign to Sudanese social and cultural norms, reinforcing the perception of proxy-enabled aggression and underscoring the urgent need for justice and survivor-centred support.

11,000+

Union members directly affected through displacement, unemployment, injury, or loss of income

Strategic Sectors

Electricity, ports, transport, manufacturing, health, education, and water supply paralysed

Labour Institutions

Trade union offices, equipment, records, and infrastructure destroyed

Mission Conclusions: The Nature of the Conflict

1. Deliberate Destruction and Insurgency

The conflict's disproportionate impact on Sudanese workers, with livelihoods, labour institutions, and social dialogue mechanisms systematically destroyed, points to a deliberate strategy to dismantle the state and societal fabric. This systematic targeting of economic and social foundations is characteristic of an externally supported insurgency aiming for long-term destabilization, rather than a conventional internal power struggle.

2. Evident External Support

The conflict's scale and systematic patterns of violence, including widespread displacement and infrastructure destruction, cannot be credibly framed as a purely internal power struggle. Consistent and compelling testimonies from workers, unions, women survivors, and state institutions unequivocally point to extensive external logistical, financial, and military support sustaining the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), enabling an insurgency that far exceeds internal capabilities.

3. UAE as a Primary Actor

Reputable international reporting, corroborated by consistent mission findings, identifies the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a key external actor of concern. Allegations of sustained logistical, financial, and military assistance linked to the UAE are consistent with the sophisticated, coordinated, and systematic nature of attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure. Such operations, including the deliberate destruction of electricity networks, schools, healthcare facilities, and water systems, surpass the capacity of locally sustained militia operations and are indicative of a well-resourced, externally orchestrated insurgency.

4. Systematic Destruction and Civilian Targeting

External backing has enabled a systematic campaign of destruction and deliberate attacks on civilians. Evidence points to the systematic dismantling of essential infrastructure, including electricity substations, hospitals, water systems, ports, and trade union facilities, explicitly intended to cripple the nation. Furthermore, there is extensive documentation of deliberate attacks on vulnerable civilian populations, including pregnant women, children, and displaced persons, a pattern consistent with terror tactics designed to achieve strategic objectives.

5. Patterns of Ethnic Cleansing and Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is a central and strategic component of this externally enabled insurgency. Documented systematic sexual violence (use of rape as a weapon of war), forced displacement, and terror tactics against women and children are not incidental but reflect a deliberate strategy of intimidation, domination, and demographic engineering. These abhorrent practices are incompatible with Sudanese social norms and bear the hallmarks of externally enabled militia operations, strongly indicating an intent towards ethnic cleansing and altering demographic realities.

6. Continental Insurgency Threat

The war in Sudan, framed as an externally supported insurgency, constitutes a profound continental peace and security threat. The systematic proliferation of weapons, foreign mercenaries, and illicit financial flows linked to this conflict is actively destabilising neighbouring regions, fuelling extremist networks, and undermining regional security frameworks. This is not merely an internal crisis but a strategically driven regional destabilisation effort.

External Dimensions of the Conflict

The conflict in Sudan, while devastating for its internal population, is demonstrably not a purely indigenous power struggle. A systematic analysis of the ongoing hostilities reveals significant external dimensions, including the pervasive presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries, substantial external financing, and sophisticated logistical and arms support. These elements collectively underscore a deliberate manipulation of the conflict by external actors, transforming it into a complex proxy war with profound regional implications.

Foreign Fighters and Mercenaries

Reports and testimonies consistently highlight the involvement of a diverse array of foreign fighters and mercenaries, significantly bolstering the capabilities of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). These combatants, drawn from various nationalities, often possess specialized skills and equipment, enabling operations far beyond what a local militia could achieve. Groups from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Nigeria have been documented operating within Sudan, frequently lured by financial incentives. More controversially, allegations persist regarding the presence of individuals with links to Colombian mercenary groups, suggesting a broader, global recruitment network indicative of substantial external backing.

Sustained External Financing

The protracted nature and sheer scale of the conflict necessitate immense financial resources, far exceeding the RSF's ostensible internal capabilities. This points to robust external financing streams. A significant portion of this funding is believed to originate from illicit gold mining, plunder of valuable assets and artefacts and trade, facilitated by regional networks.

Furthermore, intelligence reports and corroborated findings suggest direct financial injections from external state actors. This continuous flow of capital ensures the procurement of advanced weaponry- which include drones used to destroy power stations- sustains mercenary payments, and facilitates the logistical networks required to maintain prolonged military operations, fundamentally preventing a swift resolution to the conflict.

Logistical Support and Arms Flows

The sophistication of military hardware deployed and the sustainability of combat operations indicate extensive logistical support and arms flows from external sources. Evidence suggests complex supply chains for weaponry, including advanced drones, sophisticated anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems, and specialized small arms. These munitions are not typically available on local black markets and require organized international procurement and transport. Such logistical lifelines, often operating through neighboring countries and circumventing international sanctions, provide the RSF with a strategic advantage and demonstrate a level of external engagement inconsistent with a purely internal dispute.

The cumulative impact of foreign mercenary presence, sustained external financing, and sophisticated arms flows unequivocally refutes the characterization of the Sudanese crisis as merely an internal power struggle. Instead, it reveals a complex geopolitical entanglement where external actors leverage and exacerbate internal tensions for their own strategic and economic interests, thereby prolonging humanitarian suffering and destabilizing the broader Horn of Africa region. Addressing the conflict effectively requires a concerted international effort to identify and sever these external lifelines.

Ethnic Cleansing: Targeted Communities

The conflict in Sudan has been characterized by systematic campaigns that amount to ethnic cleansing, primarily targeting Sudanese communities of African descent. This is not a tangential outcome but a central pillar of the externally enabled insurgency, designed to achieve profound demographic and political shifts through calculated violence and terror.

Systematic Targeting of African Communities

Evidence unequivocally points to the disproportionate and brutal targeting of specific non-Arab Sudanese communities, notably the **Masalit, Zaghawa, and Fur**, as well as other African ethnic groups. This targeting is most pronounced in regions like **Darfur (including cities such as El Geneina, Kutum, and Zalingei), Kordofan, and parts of Blue Nile State**. These communities, historically marginalized and dispossessed, now face existential threats as their ancestral lands are systematically depopulated and seized. This pattern of violence echoes historical grievances and indicates a deliberate strategy to alter the demographic composition of these fertile and resource-rich areas.

Patterns of Mass Violence and Displacement

Specific incidents against these communities include mass killings, such as those documented in **El Geneina, West Darfur**, where thousands of Masalit civilians were systematically executed. Villages belonging to the Zaghawa and Fur people have been extensively burned and looted, with essential infrastructure like water sources and markets destroyed to render areas uninhabitable. Survivors, predominantly from these African ethnic groups, are subjected to forced displacement, driving hundreds of thousands from their homes and creating a vast internal refugee crisis. This deliberate destruction of livelihoods and cultural heritage is designed to ensure that displaced populations cannot return, facilitating permanent demographic change and land appropriation.

Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon

As noted previously, gender-based violence, including systematic rape and sexual assault, is not an incidental byproduct but a strategic tool of terror and ethnic cleansing employed specifically against women and girls from the targeted **Masalit, Zaghawa, Fur, and other non-Arab communities**. Testimonies from survivors consistently describe these atrocities, perpetrated as a means to break community resolve, inflict deep psychological trauma, and discourage reproduction within targeted groups, thereby furthering demographic engineering objectives aimed at their eradication.

Demographic Engineering Objectives

The cumulative effect of these targeted attacks, mass displacements, and acts of gender-based violence is the forced removal and suppression of specific ethnic groups like the **Masalit, Zaghawa, and Fur**. This deliberate reshaping of the population aims to establish new demographic realities, solidify control over strategic territories in regions like **Darfur and Kordofan**, and eliminate resistance to the external agendas driving the conflict. The systematic nature leaves no speck doubt that these actions are orchestrated to achieve a specific, abhorrent outcome: the eradication or permanent displacement of these communities.

Recognizing and explicitly naming these acts as ethnic cleansing is crucial for formulating effective international responses. This brutal strategy, aimed at erasing entire communities and their heritage, demands immediate and robust intervention to protect vulnerable populations and hold perpetrators accountable.

The Role of the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as a particularly influential external actor in the Sudanese conflict, with numerous reports and analyses pointing to its significant and multifaceted involvement. This engagement transcends mere diplomatic interest, extending into crucial financial, logistical, and strategic support that has demonstrably impacted the conflict's trajectory and severity. A comprehensive understanding of the crisis in Sudan requires a detailed examination of the UAE's role, particularly its alleged backing of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and the broader implications for regional stability.

Financial Underpinnings

The UAE's financial engagement in Sudan is multifaceted, primarily highlighted by its deep involvement in the lucrative gold mining sector. Reports indicate that vast quantities of Sudanese gold are funneled through UAE-based entities, providing a critical revenue stream for the RSF, which controls significant mining operations. This trade, often conducted with minimal oversight, has been identified as a key mechanism for the RSF to sustain its operations, acquire weaponry, and pay its extensive mercenary networks. Furthermore, allegations suggest direct financial transfers and investment flows from the UAE to entities linked to the RSF, contributing substantially to their financial resilience and military capacity.

Logistical Support and Arms Supply

Evidence points to the UAE providing significant logistical support, including the transfer of military hardware and strategic supplies, to the RSF. Numerous air bridge operations have been reported, originating from UAE territory or via UAE-allied states, delivering arms, ammunition, and other essential equipment. This support is crucial for maintaining the RSF's combat readiness and enabling its offensive capabilities across Sudan. The sophistication of some weaponry observed on the battlefield suggests procurement through international channels that would typically be inaccessible to a non-state militia, strongly indicating state-level backing and facilitation.

Direct Links to Armed Actors (RSF)

The relationship between the UAE and the RSF extends beyond mere financial and logistical provisions, encompassing a strategic alignment that positions the RSF as a key proxy in Sudan. This connection is not new; the RSF, under Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, has previously provided fighters for UAE-backed operations in other regional conflicts. This historical cooperation has fostered a strong operational partnership, wherein the UAE allegedly provides strategic guidance, intelligence, and diplomatic cover, enabling the RSF to advance its objectives with reduced international scrutiny. This deep-seated link transforms the internal Sudanese conflict into a proxy battleground for broader geopolitical interests. Reputable institutions working in the area such as the United Nations Human Rights have also described the conflict as a proxy.

Regional and Geopolitical Repercussions

The UAE's active role in Sudan carries profound regional and geopolitical implications. By supporting one faction in the conflict, the UAE contributes to the prolonged instability of Sudan, exacerbating humanitarian crises and fueling refugee flows across borders. This engagement is viewed by some as part of a wider strategy by the UAE to expand its influence in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region, securing economic interests and countering rival regional powers. However, this strategy risks destabilizing the entire region, empowering non-state actors, and undermining international efforts to establish peace and democratic governance in Sudan and beyond.

In conclusion, the documented financial, logistical, and strategic support from the United Arab Emirates has played a pivotal role in shaping the ongoing conflict in Sudan. This external involvement transforms what might otherwise be an internal power struggle into a complex proxy conflict with significant regional implications, demanding concerted international attention and action to mitigate its devastating consequences and foster a path towards sustainable peace.

Mission Conclusions: Pathways Forward

01

Demand a Permanent, Verifiable Ceasefire

An immediate, permanent, and verifiable ceasefire is paramount to halt the devastating conflict. This is not merely a cessation of hostilities but a fundamental prerequisite for any meaningful progress towards peace and stability, protecting civilians and enabling life-saving aid.

02

Ensure Unimpeded Humanitarian Access

Immediate and scaled-up humanitarian access and assistance are critically needed. All parties to the conflict must guarantee safe, unhindered, and sustained delivery of aid to all affected populations across Sudan, addressing the catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

03

Prioritize Justice, Accountability, and Victim Compensation

Sustainable peace demands comprehensive justice and accountability. This must include holding all perpetrators – domestic and external enablers – fully accountable for atrocities. Crucially, mechanisms for victim compensation and survivor-centered recovery must be established immediately.

04

Empower Trade Unions as Strategic Peace Actors

Trade unions are indispensable strategic actors in peacebuilding and recovery. Their grassroots reach, institutional legitimacy, and capacity to document worker-level impacts must be leveraged for early warning, conflict resolution, accountability, and the socio-economic reconstruction of Sudan.

05

Urgent ILO System Engagement

The grave situation in Sudan warrants urgent and prominent consideration within the International Labour Organization (ILO) system. The crisis should be a key agenda item at the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June, providing a vital platform for Sudanese workers and their representative organizations to share their experiences and guide a worker-centred application of ILO Recommendation No. 205.

06

Convene an International Summit for Sudan's Future

An international summit is urgently needed to coordinate a comprehensive plan for Sudan's reconstruction and rehabilitation. This summit must be anchored in the principles of justice, survivor-centered recovery, and long-term stability, fostering a unified approach to rebuild the nation.

END OF SUMMARY

Background and Purpose of the Visit

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a devastating armed conflict that has fundamentally altered the country's political, economic, and social landscape. What initially emerged as a power struggle rapidly degenerated into a protracted war characterised by the breakdown of state authority, fragmentation of armed actors, and widespread violence against civilians. The conflict has disproportionately affected workers, students, women, and vulnerable communities, transforming places of work, learning, and care into sites of fear, displacement, and destruction.

The war has resulted in the loss of a significant portion of Sudan's labour force through death, injury, displacement, and forced migration. Productive sectors—including ports, transport, power generation, public services, and education—have been severely disrupted, undermining livelihoods and eroding institutional capacity.

Critical infrastructure such as electricity networks, water supply systems, hospitals, and student accommodation facilities have been destroyed or rendered non-functional, compounding humanitarian suffering and weakening prospects for early recovery and making the reconstruction process costlier.

> The high-level solidarity visit to Sudan by the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation **(ITUC-Africa)** was undertaken pursuant to a resolution of the Peace and Security Meeting held in Kenya in November 2025.

That resolution affirmed the responsibility of African workers, through their continental organisation, to demonstrate practical solidarity with Sudanese workers, assess the impact of the war on labour institutions, and contribute to shaping advocacy, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts.

The visit was also informed by growing concern within the African trade union movement regarding the protracted nature of the conflict, its human cost, and its broader implications for peace, security, and development on the continent.

The objectives of the visit were to:

- Express solidarity from African workers to Sudanese workers and their institutions
- Engage directly with trade unions, workers, and allied institutions
- Assess the impact of the conflict on workers' livelihoods and trade union structures
- Inform future advocacy and recovery interventions aligned with International Labour Organization Recommendation 205

Official Status and Composition of the Delegation

The General Secretary of ITUC-Africa, Akhator Joel Odigie led the delegation. He was supported by the ITUC-Africa Human and Trade Union Rights Coordinator.

The delegation included the President of **Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions** (HAK-İŞ) and his assistant, whose physical participation was instrumental to the success of the mission.

The Sudanese Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF) President and his team coordinated all local meetings and logistics. Throughout the visit, the ITUC-Africa and HAK-IS team were accorded VIP status, reflecting the political and symbolic importance of the mission and the value attached to African and international trade union solidarity with Sudanese workers.

Role of SWTUF

The mission commends the Sudanese Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF) for its exceptional organisational leadership throughout the visit.

Despite operating under severe conflict-related constraints, SWTUF coordinated the programme, mobilised sectoral unions, and provided internal logistics, including food and local arrangements.

Solidarity Messages and Strategic Framing

Throughout the mission, the General Secretary of ITUC-Africa provided a clear political and moral framing of the conflict. Central messages included:

Rejection of False Narratives

Rejection of the narrative that the conflict is merely a "war between two generals"

Recognition of Victims

Recognition that civilians, workers, and communities are the primary victims

Justice as Foundation

Emphasis that justice is foundational to peace, not an optional add-on

External Actors

Recognition of the role of external actors in sustaining instability

Workers' Voice

Affirmation that African workers cannot remain silent in the face of mass suffering

The framing consistently positioned trade unions as actors for justice, peace, and reconstruction, not neutral observers.

Meetings and Engagements Held

Joint Press Conference

A joint press conference was held between ITUC-Africa and the Executive bureau of the Sudanese Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF).

The engagement addressed:

- The destruction of trade union infrastructure
- Loss of representation and institutional capacity
- The need to counter distorted international narratives

The Press Conference was covered by the national broadcasting station and was also live on Facebook.

Sectoral and Institutional Engagements

The delegation held engagements with:

- Sea and Ports Workers' Unions
- Transport, loading, and unloading workers
- Craft workers in the Red Sea State (largely informal but organising)
- National Students Welfare Fund
- Sudanese Bar Association and Arab Lawyers Union (reports pending)
- Women representatives from various sectors (14)

Women's participation was visible across these engagements.

Meeting with the Sudanese Minister of Justice

As part of the Day 2 official engagements, the delegation held a meeting with the Sudanese Minister of Justice. The discussion focused on the role of justice in conflict resolution and national recovery, with particular attention to the systematic targeting of civilians, the collapse of judicial institutions, and the absence of effective redress mechanisms for victims of the conflict.

The Minister underscored that **justice is central to any sustainable peace process in Sudan**. He emphasised that the scale and nature of violations committed during the conflict have fundamentally undermined the rule of law and eroded public trust in state institutions.

Key Issues Raised by the Minister

According to the Minister of Justice, the prevailing international narrative of the war is deeply flawed and does not adequately reflect material evidence indicating foreign involvement and aggression. He stated that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have acquired advanced military technology, including drones, which have been deployed to destroy critical infrastructure and deliberately target civilian populations.

The Minister further alleged that there is evidence of the recruitment of foreign mercenaries, including individuals reportedly drawn from as far as Colombia. He claimed that these actors are involved in targeted killings, particularly against people of African descent, with the objective of depopulating certain areas and replacing communities along ethnic and racial lines. He argued that such actions point to an intent that goes beyond conventional armed conflict.

The targeting of civilians, according to the Minister, fundamentally calls into question the nature and objectives of the war, particularly with regard to the RSF. He noted that in regions such as Darfur, militias are alleged to have established linkages with extremist groups, including Al-Shabaab, and that these areas have witnessed brutal and systematic killings of civilians. He stated that these acts have been characterised as genocidal in nature, as they are directed at specific ethnic and social groups.

> The Minister informed the delegation that the Government of Sudan has submitted documented evidence of crimes against humanity to the United Nations Security Council. However, he expressed concern that, to date, there has been no tangible or meaningful international response.

He described the silence of the international community—particularly in the face of evidence pointing to foreign aggression—as a form of complicity that has deepened civilian suffering and undermined respect for international law.

He further stressed that the intentional targeting of civilian populations negates the characterisation of the conflict as a mere civil war or a power struggle between two military leaders. Rather, he argued, the pattern of violence demonstrates deliberate and systematic attacks on civilians.

In conclusion, the Minister appealed for solidarity from international actors, particularly actions that would present a more accurate and balanced understanding of the conflict and draw sustained global attention to the suffering endured by the Sudanese people.

The engagement reaffirmed the delegation's shared understanding that there can be no lasting peace without justice. Accountability for violations must be pursued at national, regional, and international levels as an essential pillar of Sudan's recovery and reconciliation process.

Meeting with the Deputy Director of the General Intelligence Service

The delegation also held a meeting with the Deputy Director of the General Intelligence Service (GIS), which provided critical security, political, and geopolitical insights into the evolving dynamics of the conflict and its broader regional implications.

The Deputy Director emphasised that the conflict has been characterised by exceptionally brutal tactics employed by armed militias, particularly the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Beyond widespread loss of life, he stated that militias have deliberately targeted critical national infrastructure and sites of historical and cultural significance.

Security and Conflict Dynamics

According to the Deputy Director, militias have engaged in the looting of historical artefacts and cultural heritage sites, actions he described as an attempt to erase the collective memory and identity of the Sudanese people. He further noted that the conflict has resulted in the displacement of more than 14 million Sudanese men, women, and children, many of whom are now living as internally displaced persons (IDPs). He added that, in some instances, IDP populations themselves have been directly attacked by militias.

14M

Displaced

Sudanese men, women, and children displaced by the conflict

2023

External Support

Year RSF external support was established by Government

The Deputy Director stated that since 2023, the Government of Sudan has established that the RSF has been largely supported by external powers with strategic interests in controlling Sudan's natural and mineral resources. He warned that these dynamics significantly internationalise the conflict and complicate prospects for peace.

He further cautioned that the implications of the war extend far beyond Sudan's borders. The increased presence and circulation of sophisticated military hardware, he noted, has resulted in weapons falling into the wrong hands, fuelling militant and extremist networks across the region. This, he argued, poses a serious threat to Africa's peace and security architecture and risks intensifying terrorism and instability in neighbouring countries.

Political and Diplomatic Developments

While acknowledging that the security situation remains fragile, the Deputy Director noted signs of gradual stabilisation, including the resumption of some critical government operations in Khartoum. He referenced diplomatic interventions led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which resulted in the Jeddah Agreement aimed at de-escalating the conflict. However, he stated that the agreement has been rendered ineffective due to the failure of the RSF to comply with withdrawal commitments.

He further indicated that Sudan has expressed willingness to engage diplomatically with the United Arab Emirates to address concerns regarding alleged military and financial support to the RSF. Attempts by the Turkish and Egyptian governments to mediate relations between Sudan and the UAE, he noted, have so far not been accepted by the Emirati side.

Despite these challenges, the Deputy Director stressed that the Government of Sudan continues to extend an olive branch through support for inclusive national dialogue as a pathway to ending the conflict. He stated that the current governing authorities are open to a political transition and that the Sovereign Council has begun planning processes towards future elections, contingent on the restoration of peace and stability.

Role of Trade Unions in Peace and Recovery

In this context, the General Secretary of ITUC-Africa outlined plans to develop an **African Trade Union Peace and Security Barometer**, conceived as part of an African workers' early warning and response mechanism. The proposed Barometer aims to monitor peace and security trends from a workers' perspective, identify early signs of conflict escalation and social breakdown, and support preventive action, advocacy, and timely engagement by trade unions.

The Deputy Director commended the role of trade unions in Sudan, acknowledging both the severe impact of the war on workers and the resilience of their organisations. He encouraged unions to remain committed to democratic principles and to actively promote democratic processes, including elections when peace returns, as a means of rebuilding institutions and fostering a democratic political culture.

Meeting with the Director of the Sudanese Electricity Holding Company

The Director confirmed and expanded on these findings, noting that Sudan's power sector—established in 1908—has suffered its most severe setbacks during the current war. He stated that the RSF militias have intentionally targeted power infrastructure as part of their military strategy.

According to the Director, more than 1,000 megawatts of hydroelectric capacity has been lost. Transformers have been dismantled and stolen for copper, with an estimated 500 tonnes of copper wire looted; some of this stolen material, he noted, has been traced as far as Chad. In addition, drone attacks have destroyed more than ten power substations, further crippling the grid. Oil supplies have also been systematically looted.

1,000+ MW Lost

Hydroelectric capacity destroyed

500 Tonnes

Copper wire looted, traced to Chad

10+ Substations

Destroyed by drone attacks

50% Damaged

National grid severely compromised

He estimated that the value of destroyed power infrastructure runs into billions of US dollars and warned that full replacement and rehabilitation will take many years. The collapse of the power sector has had cascading effects across the economy, particularly in manufacturing, where production has declined sharply and workers in multiple sectors have been laid off.

Impact on Workers and Public Services

The Director emphasised that the electricity crisis has severely undermined the delivery of essential public services. Hospitals and health facilities have been particularly affected by unreliable power, compromising service delivery and emergency care. Schools have also suffered prolonged disruptions, further deepening the social impact of the conflict.

Water supply systems, which depend heavily on electricity for pumping and treatment, have been significantly affected. Load shedding and intermittent power supply have reduced access to safe water, raising the risk of public health outbreaks, especially in densely populated urban centres hosting large numbers of displaced people.

Financing and External Support Challenges

The Director expressed deep concern about the prospects for financing power sector recovery. Due to the ongoing war, investors have withdrawn, and Sudan has received little to no meaningful external support for power restoration. While international actors and agencies have made public commitments, he stated that these have largely not translated into concrete assistance.

As a result, Sudan has been forced to rely almost entirely on its own limited resources to address urgent power sector challenges. He noted with frustration that, despite repeated assurances, tangible international support has not materialised.

He further observed that Sudan was previously able to export electricity to neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia and Egypt, a capability that has now been lost. An estimated 50 percent of the national grid has been damaged, making regional power supply impossible under current conditions.

Meetings with Sudanese Workers and Women Representatives

Impact on Employment and Livelihoods

Trade union representatives reported widespread job losses across multiple sectors as a direct consequence of the conflict, compounded by persistent insecurity and the destruction of productive infrastructure. Rising unemployment has become a defining feature of the crisis, with many formal enterprises shutting down or operating far below capacity. The destruction of key sectors—particularly energy, transport, and manufacturing—has resulted in mass layoffs, leaving thousands of workers without stable sources of income.

As formal employment opportunities have collapsed, a growing number of workers have been pushed into informal and precarious forms of work. This rapid informalisation of the labour market has eroded labour protections, wages, and social security coverage, exposing workers to heightened exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and income instability. Union representatives stressed that many workers who previously held formal jobs are now engaged in survivalist activities with no legal or social protection.

Financial Losses and Institutional Destruction

Unions reported that the Workers' Bank was directly targeted during the conflict, resulting in the loss of lifetime savings and accrued benefits for many workers. In addition to financial institutions, trade union assets were also deliberately targeted. Union offices, equipment, records, and physical infrastructure were damaged or destroyed, severely undermining unions' operational capacity.

Notably, the office complex of the Sudanese Workers' Trade Union Federation (SWTUF) sustained damage during the conflict. The targeting of union buildings was described by representatives as an attack not only on physical assets but on workers' collective voice, organisation, and institutional memory.

According to trade union leaders, **more than 11,000 union members have been directly affected by the war** through displacement, unemployment, injury, or loss of income. The systematic destruction of infrastructure—particularly in strategic sectors such as power and transport—has reinforced the perception among workers that the conflict represents a form of external aggression rather than an internal political dispute.

Meeting with Women Representatives

The delegation met with women representatives drawn from various trades and sectors, comprising more than sixteen women of different age groups. The engagement provided a deeply personal and gendered perspective on the impact of the war, highlighting the disproportionate burden borne by women and children since the outbreak of hostilities on 15 April 2023.

The women reported that since the start of the conflict, thousands of women have been widowed and left as sole providers for their families under extremely precarious conditions. They described how the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have used rape, sexual violence, and intimidation as deliberate weapons of war. Women recounted incidents in which women were subjected to hanging and other grotesque acts of violence, intended not only to harm individuals but to terrorise entire communities.

Several participants explained that many survivors remain silent due to shame, stigma, and fear following the sexual violence they endured. The absence of protection, justice, and survivor-centred support mechanisms has compounded their trauma and deepened their isolation.

> "The war was not against the army; it was against the citizens."

The women reflected on how, in the early stages of the conflict, some communities initially perceived the RSF as part of the national fabric and offered them support. However, this perception shifted dramatically as the war unfolded. Participants described how individuals who appeared unfamiliar, could not understand local dialects or languages, and exhibited behaviours alien to Sudanese social norms gradually replaced those initially present.

Based on their lived experiences, the women concluded that many perpetrators of violence were not Sudanese. They maintained that the war has been wrongly framed as Sudanese fighting Sudanese, whereas their suffering points to foreign actors invading and subjugating the country. They repeatedly stressed that the acts committed—particularly against women and children—were unimaginable within Sudanese culture and values.

Children, Trauma, and Social Breakdown

The women highlighted the devastating impact of the war on children. They reported cases of children being taken by militias and used as porters, mules, or captives. The psychological trauma inflicted on children was described as profound and visible. Participants noted that whereas children once drew ordinary scenes associated with childhood, they now draw images of militias, guns, and drones—an indication of how violence has overtaken their imaginations.

Some young people, particularly adolescents, have turned to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. The women emphasised that post-war recovery must include targeted investment in psychosocial support and drug and substance abuse awareness programmes to address this emerging crisis.

Despite the depth of suffering described, the women spoke with remarkable resilience. They praised the endurance of Sudanese soldiers and expressed optimism that the militias would ultimately be defeated, regardless of the external support they receive. They underscored the importance of reintegration as part of post-war rebuilding, noting that recovery would need to begin with small, practical steps to restore trust, dignity, and livelihoods.

Impact, Recovery, and the Path Forward

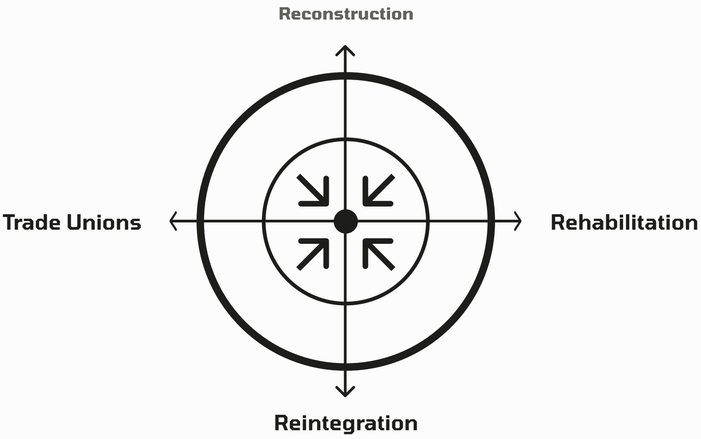
General Impacts of the War

The mission documented extensive and systemic impacts of the war on workers, trade unions, and labour institutions. These include:

- Large-scale job losses and prolonged non-payment of wages
- Employment terminations linked to displacement and insecurity
- Destruction and looting of trade union offices, buildings, and worker facilities
- Collapse of grievance-handling, dispute-resolution, and collective bargaining mechanisms
- Severe psychosocial stress affecting workers, families, and communities
- Overwhelmed health facilities, alongside the destruction of student accommodation, some of which has been repurposed as shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Beyond immediate job losses and wage disruptions, the war has hollowed out Sudan's labour ecosystem. Skilled and semi-skilled workers have been displaced internally or forced into exile, resulting in acute labour shortages across essential services and productive sectors. The rapid informalisation of work has left large numbers of workers without contracts, income security, or social protection.

3 Rs to Peace Pathway: Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration



Despite the scale of destruction, the mission observed early signs of recovery and institutional resilience. Initiatives such as those undertaken by the National Students Welfare Fund—including the reconstruction of destroyed student hostels and the provision of scholarships and support to conflict-affected university students—represent critical investments in human capital, social stability, and long-term recovery.

While militia groups have not been fully eliminated, security briefings indicated that their operational capacity has been significantly degraded. The Deputy Director of the National Intelligence Service informed the mission that militia structures have been analysed, disrupted, and rendered incapable of sustaining coordinated insurgency at previous levels. This assessment suggests a gradual reassertion of state control and creates limited but important space for reconstruction, institutional recovery, and social healing.

Key Advocacy Priorities

African Union Engagement

Coordinated engagement through the African Union peace and security architecture

ILO Escalation

Escalation of Sudan-related concerns within the International Labour Organization (ILO), including at the International Labour Conference

Global Mobilisation

Movement-wide mobilisation by African and global trade unions to sustain international attention, solidarity, and pressure for accountability

Overall Conclusion

The ITUC-Africa solidarity mission concludes that Sudan's war is best understood as a proxy-enabled and externally sustained conflict, with credible international reporting repeatedly identifying the United Arab Emirates as a key external actor of concern. The systematic destruction of labour institutions, targeting of civilians and workers, erosion of livelihoods, and large-scale extraction of national resources cannot be separated from this external dimension of the conflict.

Sudanese workers have borne a disproportionate share of the costs of the war—through job losses, displacement, informalisation of work, destruction of union assets, and the collapse of labour relations and social dialogue. Despite these conditions, trade unions remain among the most resilient and legitimate institutions in the country, continuing to organise, document abuses, support displaced communities, and articulate pathways for recovery.

The mission further concludes that this situation warrants urgent consideration within the International Labour Organization (ILO) system, particularly at the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June. The ILC represents the world's highest tripartite forum on labour, peace, and social justice, and provides an essential platform to examine the impact of armed conflict on workers, labour institutions, and decent work.

It would be imperative to create space at the International Labour Conference for Sudanese workers and their representative organisations to tell their own story—to present first-hand accounts of how the war has dismantled labour markets, destroyed trade union institutions, undermined social dialogue, and violated fundamental principles of decent work, freedom of association, and human dignity. Such direct worker testimony is critical to counter distorted international narratives and to ensure that policy responses are grounded in lived realities.

For African and global trade unions, neutrality in the face of mass worker suffering is neither possible nor acceptable. Peace in Sudan requires justice, accountability—including for external enablers of the conflict—and the full recognition of workers as central actors in recovery and democratic renewal. The International Labour Conference offers a critical and legitimate global space to advance this agenda and to ensure that Sudanese workers are not spoken about, but are heard directly.

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1

Our Esteemed Hosts and Partners

We extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated host organizations and local partners. Their exceptional facilitation, logistical support, and active physical participation were absolutely crucial, embodying the spirit of solidarity essential for the mission's successful execution.

2

Sudanese Workers and Trade Union Representatives

Our profound appreciation goes to the courageous Sudanese workers and their resilient trade union representatives who met with our delegation. Their powerful testimonies, unwavering commitment to justice, and remarkable endurance amidst adversity served as the vital heartbeat of this mission.

3

Supporting Stakeholders

We acknowledge the essential contributions of various regional and international stakeholders, including government liaisons, civil society organizations, and academic experts. Their collaborative spirit, insightful perspectives, and readiness to assist significantly enriched our understanding and enabled the smooth execution of this mission.

4

Special Acknowledgement to HAK-IS

We extend our profound gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to HAK-IS for their steadfast solidarity and crucial physical presence in Sudan during the mission. Their partnership with the Sudanese Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF) and their broader commitment to African workers at large were instrumental, embodying the true spirit of international trade union unity and support.

This collective effort underscores the strength of partnership in advocating for labour rights and peace. We are truly grateful for every contribution that helped bring this report to fruition.