



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
25 November 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9-20 March 2020

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Independent Movement, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Independent Movement would like to commend the active and leading role of Sudanese women in the protests that led to the social and political change that ended 30 years of repression by the Albashir regime. We would like also to highlight the difficult situation that women in Sudan had during the last three decades. Women's participation during the protests has been unprecedented with female students, academics, housewives, street traders, and women from all sections of the Sudanese society actively demonstrating since December 2018. They were spearheading dissent at great personal risk to call for greater civil rights and an end to pervasive gender discrimination for decades.

Women and armed conflict

For decades, Sudanese women have been suffering from the violence of armed conflicts through loss of life, displacement, poverty, and psychosocial damage. Thousands of women were enforced and displaced to live in crowded camps in eastern Chad, south Sudan, and Ethiopia because of the armed conflict in Darfur, Blue Nile, and the Nuba mountains. For years, government forces, rebels, and other armed men have raped and assaulted women and girls without fear of any consequences across several conflict zones in the region.

Violation of Sudanese women's rights

Violation and violence against women was not only limited to armed conflict zones. The repressive and discriminatory laws imposed by the regime since June 1989 undermined women and girls across the country and diminished their ability to participate meaningfully in public life. Female human rights activists were systematically targeted by the notorious service Security of the Sudanese Government. Under the so-called Public Order Act, women and girls were arrested for their choice of dress, such as wearing trousers or exposing their hair, or for merely riding in a car with members of the opposite sex. Corporal punishments such as flogging and stoning for "morality crimes", including adultery, are used disproportionately on women and girls. More than 45,000 complaints were issued against women under Sudan's Public Order Act during 2016. Students, working women, and especially food and tea vendors have received the lion's share of physical and verbal violence. No to Women's Oppression, a women-led initiative, was established in 2009 in the aftermath of increased police and security harassment against women in Sudan. In particular, the initiative was sparked by the incident of police forces arresting a Sudanese female journalist for wearing trousers, and accusing her of a violation of the Sharia-based public order act. In response to that incident and several other women's rights violations, women activists in Sudan organized to fight against the Public Order Act and unlawful abuses against women in Sudan.

Violence against women: rape, floggings, and death sentences

Sudanese women face a barrage of threats, ranging from child marriage to domestic violence and rape. Many girls are married before the age of 18 and nearly all of them are subjected to female genital mutilation. Sudan is also one of a handful of countries not to have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, a key global treaty aimed at ending gender violence. On 3 June 2019, a dozen of young women were raped by the paramilitary unit that grew out of the Janjaweed militia responsible for atrocities in Darfur, where women are under constant threat of rape and sexual violence. Unfortunately, Sudan still has one of the highest rates of female genital mutilation in the world, with the majority

of women being subjected to the severest form, infibulation, which influences their sexual health throughout their lives and causes high rates of mortality among women under delivery.

Exclusion of women from peace negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives

Needless to say, Sudanese women were excluded from nearly all negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. A study by the Australian Institute of International Affairs has shown that excluding women from formal peace processes in Sudan creates serious consequences for the sustainability of peace post-settlement. Currently, despite being at the forefront of protests, women in Sudan have typically been excluded from negotiations. They were sidelined in the discussions ending the conflict between Sudan and south Sudan in 2005, and have had only marginal representation in the Darfur peace talks. Now, once again, women are being overlooked in the negotiations between the Transitional Military Council and the opposition Declaration of Freedom and Change. However, this time female protesters and women's rights activists are more prepared to make their demands heard than ever.

Recommendation to the transitional government of Sudan

We welcome the efforts of the transitional government that so far look promising by clearly calling and working to provide access for women to high positions of decision-making. It is crucial that women are given a seat at the table to ensure that their rights are central in the creation of a new political order in Sudan. They should be actively involved in shaping the future of women and equality in Sudan after 30 years of repression and violence against women.

The current transitional government should take meaningful and proactive measures to protect Sudanese women and address the existing legislative and institutional discrimination, disadvantages, and barriers to the enjoyment of women's rights, so as to combat gender discrimination.

The transitional government should adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination or equality laws. Any such initiative should embrace a holistic approach to substantive equality that looks beyond the surface to how discrimination may occur in the course of the implementation of laws and policies, and recognizes both the uniqueness of each different type of inequality and the overarching aspects of different inequalities.

The transitional government should enact and enforce effective laws against sexual violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. Public order laws that harm and discriminate against women and girls, and the repressive male guardianship system, should be abolished.

Finally, Sudanese women and girls have been working hard for a better Sudan, calling for rule of law, good governance, and enforcement of human rights. They need all your support and encouragement to have a peaceful and democratic Sudan that fully respect women's rights.

As a new dawn breaks over the country, we know a new era of women's rights is coming and that women's struggle for equality, which has been going for decades, unseen and unheard by many, is finally about to bear fruit.