

PRAY FOR SUDAN

Briefing for the Leeds Diocese

Summer 2023

What's going on

Sudan For three months now, the people of Sudan have endured unspeakable suffering amid violence that is tearing their country apart. The UN says "**Sudan is now one of the world's most difficult places for humanitarian workers to operate.**"

Fighting started in mid-April. The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) are fighting their paramilitary wing, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It is not a civil war: it is two armies trying to blow each other to smithereens over the bodies of the civilian population. For over 30 years the country was governed by a military dictatorship, and the military factions have controlled large sections of Sudan's commerce and industrial production. In 2019 there were big pro-democracy demonstrations which the army seemed to support, but in 2021 they overthrew the civilian government. Now the SAF and the RSF have fallen out, with each trying to eradicate the other in order to have complete control over the country and its resources. It is all about the struggles over power and wealth.

The war has created an immense need for humanitarian aid. There have been peace talks, but this

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Bishop Ismail of El Obeid, incl Darfur

is an existential struggle with neither side ready to give tactical concessions when they think that they might lose ground or might forgo opportunity for winning. There are no signs yet of the battle ending. The people of Sudan say this isn't their war: they are powerless and are focused on simply surviving. Because of the intense danger, international aid agencies are severely restricted in their reach inside the country.

A lot of the fighting is concentrated in and around the capital Khartoum/Omdurman. The SAF has heavy weapons and planes, whereas the RSF has more agile vehicles enabling them to manoeuvre in the streets and hide amongst housing. SAF tries to flush them out with bombs and shelling. The ongoing fighting has damaged and destroyed much infrastructure, especially for drinking water and power. The RSF has been widely denounced for looting hospitals, universities, and homes, and terrorizing ordinary people. Mosques and churches have been severely damaged. Two million people have fled the capital, but millions more are trapped there. The city is barely functioning: banks and most businesses are shut, and many destroyed.

Fighting between SAF and the RSF has taken place in many urban areas across Sudan as the RSF tries to gain control of them. In Darfur, western Sudan, it has taken on a genocidal dimension, with the RSF working with Darfurian Arab militias killing people of African ethnicity.

THE CHURCH IN SUDAN

Fundamentally, the fighting is not ideologically based, so Christians are not particularly targeted. The church is simply suffering like all other citizens in Sudan, except that the church is already the poorest of the poor, with very few resources of food, medicine and ability to flee. However, the church is Sudanese and, unlike international aid agencies, is ideally placed to respond in humanitarian ways to the needs of people.

Leeds Link is with the Episcopal Church (ECS), which has five dioceses covering Sudan.

The biggest concentration of Christians is in southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains – **Kadugli Diocese**. A third force has materialised there, as local freedom fighters, the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) have now mobilised and are shelling SAF positions in Kadugli town. The town is cut off from the rest of Sudan, beyond reach of UN aid, as the RSF controls the roads. **Bishop Hassan** writes **El Obeid Diocese** covering western Sudan has the smallest number of Christian communities, but they have suffered severe damage. El Obeid town is described as under siege. SAF has control of it but it is encircled by RSF forces, and a major offensive is feared. It is a strategic location, the centre of roads connecting western and southern Sudan, the largest trading centre for Sudan's agricultural exports, and has an airport used by SAF. **Bishop Ismail** writes, "Killing has become normal, and hunger. No place is secure within the cities, cars are being looted by lawless forces. We continue our prayers at home, sometimes in the church when we are allowed by the soldiers. Of other cities, most people fled west to camps in Chad, and church centres and schools have been destroyed. In places there is no news of my people there."

Khartoum Diocese is in central and northern Sudan, and is the second largest concentration of Christians. The churches are almost entirely situated in townships, away from the Khartoum and Omdurman city centres where fighting has been concentrated, but is spreading. There is little direct church news as the cities are largely cut off, without power. People who have got out have reported the Diocesan Offices and other church property as looted and destroyed. Everything is gone or damaged. Vehicles, cash, laptops, Jesus Film equipment and all valuable things. The Cathedral has been used by the RSF as a barracks. The team and staff and their families are

scattered. Some families are separated. "We thank God that we are safe but in great need to keep ourselves and our families. Thank you for your prayer and encouragement." One pastor has been fatally shot, and another, who received shrapnel wounds had to travel for days to Cairo to get medical care. **Archbishop Ezekiel** is homeless, his house commandeered by the RSF, and his family scattered widely. He has set up a new base in Port Sudan for the central church organization.

Port Sudan and Wad Medani Dioceses serve eastern and south-eastern Sudan.

"The situation has become seriously more dangerous now. There's much fear. The soldiers are very close to us, so we ask for your prayers and support."
BISHOP HASSAN, KADUGLI

Archbishop Ezekiel asks Leeds Diocese to pray for the country of Sudan in this desperate time:

- ✚ for the war to stop now
- ✚ let the warring parties talk peace.
- ✚ peace to Sudan
- ✚ let displaced and refugees return to their homes.
- ✚ let our children go back to school.
- ✚ let the armed forces leave worship places so that believers can pray.
- ✚ may humanitarian assistance be given the hungry.
- ✚ people of Sudan deserve peace, security and stability.

They have seen little fighting but are trying to minister to large numbers of displaced people. Photos show families camped out in the cathedral grounds, which have extensive puddles as it is the rainy season. In Wad Medani, staff have also been distributing help in centres up to 80 miles away, all of which are receiving people seeking a place of safety. The World Food Programme say they will supply food only to people in the large camps they have organised, miles further south. In Port Sudan **Bishop Abdu** is attempting to set in motion their annual agricultural project which in previous years has been one of their financial lifelines. This contrasts with other places where all normal living and planning is destroyed.

Archbishop Ezekiel is in contact with our Diocese regularly. He messaged us in July: *'Greetings from hot Port Sudan. We are doing well here though no change of the situation on the ground. Pastors and their families were so happy to receive financial relief support which were sent out by you. 207 clergy, staff and workers across the Province benefited from these Funds. Thank you so much.'*

HOW THE DIOCESE OF LEEDS IS RESPONDING

Leeds Diocese has been in the forefront of channelling humanitarian aid into Sudan to ECS front line clergy, and the first to respond. Funds are reaching each of the five dioceses, using transfers via banks, Western Union, and a Sudanese banking app.

207 clergy and their families have been supported with emergency food parcels, medicines and sleeping materials and help with office equipment. Congregations and inter refugees are being helped through the cathedrals in Sudan. As well as emergency supplies, the Bishops of Sudan have asked us to keep praying.

Bp Nick Baines is active in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sudan which seeks to influence the UK government's policy and practice by promoting the cause of peace, human rights, justice, and development regarding Sudan.

Leeds Link Working Group, working alongside Christians in our churches of Sudanese heritage, have organised a series of prayer meetings across our diocese, and, through an Emergency Motion to Diocesan Synod in July, sought to encourage every church and cathedral to pray, encouraging us to be faithful in intercession for our companions in Sudan.

For more information and parish resources please contact: sudanlinkcontact@gmail.com

Archbishop Ezekiel asks Leeds Diocese to pray for the Church and Christians in Sudan:

- ✝ I give thanks to God for the Bishops and clergy who are with their flock and continue to encourage them to remain faithful and trust God at this difficult time.
- ✝ I pray that all Christians in Sudan would be safe in the mighty hand of God and that they would not think too much about the things they have lost including Church property.
- ✝ Giving thanks to God for our friends and partners in the United Kingdom who give financial support as relief aid and who are praying for the Church and Christians in the Sudan to be safe.
- ✝ Giving thanks and praise to God for all the Primates and Bishops of the Anglican Communion who have been in contact to make sure the Church and Christians are safe.
- ✝ I pray and believe that God will make a way where seems there is no way and bring peace to Sudan.