



## Refugee Council of Australia

9 May 2023

Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Foreign Affairs  
The Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs  
The Hon Pat Conroy MP, Minister for International Development and the Pacific  
The Hon Tim Watts MP, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs

### **Re: Response to humanitarian crisis in Sudan**

Dear Ministers,

The Refugee Council of Australia appreciates the Australian Government's announcement on Saturday of \$6 million in initial humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis in Sudan and the efforts of Australian officials to assist Australian citizens and their family members to leave Sudan. These commitments indicate clearly that the Australian Government recognises the serious impacts on people in Sudan since long-running tension and instability erupted into warfare on 15 April 2023.

In its update on the situation in Sudan released late last week, UNHCR reports that the new conflict has already displaced 330,000 people within Sudan and forced around 128,000 people across the borders of Egypt, Chad, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Eritrea. This exacerbates the existing serious displacement of 3.7 million people within Sudan and 800,000 Sudanese in neighbouring countries. When the conflict began, Sudan was hosting 1.1 million refugees from South Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Chad and Yemen. Some refugees have already returned to their countries of origin and UNHCR expects this movement to increase in coming months despite the very adverse conditions and protection risks facing returnees.

Members of the Sudanese diaspora in Australia have been sharing with us their detailed knowledge and analysis of the situation in Sudan, expressing the deep distress of Sudanese Australians and the compelling need for continued action by the governments of Australia and other nations. This distress is being shared by other communities in Australia with relatives living as refugees from other countries, particularly those from South Sudan and Eritrea. In our discussions with Sudanese diaspora representatives, we have heard about the impacts of the conflict being felt across Sudan – of the indiscriminate killing of hundreds of people, the serious injuries sustained by many thousands, the breakdown of functioning government and the private sector (including banking and health systems) and escalating prices. Medical organisations are reporting that, within Sudan, over 60% of hospitals are no longer functioning and more than 10 million people need urgent health assistance. People with acute health needs can no longer access medical care, including people who have recently contracted malaria, hepatitis E and dengue fever. A widely-held concern is that the recent open warfare between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces will not be brief, given the years of long-running tension and instability which preceded it. We note that, in its emergency response planning, UNHCR is anticipating significant increases in displacement in coming months.

Australia's Sudanese diaspora organisations are expressing the need for urgent and increased action from the Australian Government and the international community to put more pressure on the parties to the conflict to bring a swift end to fighting, to allow humanitarian aid to reach people in affected areas, and to create a safe corridor for those wishing to travel out of Khartoum and other affected areas (including Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Northern State). In addition, a concerted and coordinated humanitarian response must be mobilised to assist refugees who are fleeing to neighbouring countries, including facilitating safe access to cross borders and to ensure basic needs are met.

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The Refugee Council of Australia  
is the national umbrella body  
for refugees, people seeking asylum  
and the organisations and individuals  
who support them • Founded 1981

The Refugee Council of Australia supports this advocacy of the Sudanese community in Australia and **calls on the Australian Government to:**

1. Use all diplomatic channels available to support the international community's efforts to bring about peace as quickly as possible.
2. Build on Saturday's announcement of an initial financial commitment of humanitarian assistance by making further contributions to the international humanitarian response effort, both within Sudan and in countries where refugees are seeking safety, to ensure basic needs are met.
3. Provide an immediate guarantee that anyone from Sudan who is currently in Australia can remain, in line with the [UNHCR position on returns to Sudan](#) issued last week, with a clear process established for Sudanese nationals on temporary, bridging and visitor visas to extend their stay.
4. Allow Sudanese nationals who have previously had asylum claims rejected to reapply in light of the changed circumstances in Sudan, again in line with UNHCR's updated advice on returns. Country information used to assess protection claims should be updated to reflect the current situation.
5. Establish priority processing of visas for Sudanese nationals to enable timely exits to safety. This includes pending Family, Skilled, Refugee and Humanitarian visas as well as visitor visas. Processing of temporary visas should allow a clear pathway to a permanent visa, and consideration must be given to ensure visa-holders have access to rights on arrival (education for children, access to Medicare, and waiver of waiting periods for social security) as there is no indication that Sudan's crisis will be resolved quickly.
6. Prioritise processing of on-hand Refugee and Humanitarian visas for refugees currently residing in Sudan and those of Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.
7. Include Sudanese nationals as a priority group in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to enable fast processing of those with most urgent needs. This includes working with UNHCR to issue emergency visas for people fleeing the recent fighting and at greatest risk.
8. Abolish the eligibility criteria for the Community Support Program to ensure that Sudanese nationals and refugees of other nationalities currently in Sudan have full access, in line with the Government's commitment to a non-discriminatory Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

We urgently and strongly encourage the Government to continue and expand its constructive engagement with members of Australia's Sudanese community and would welcome every opportunity to discuss the points raised in this letter further with Government representatives.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Power  
Chief Executive Officer  
Refugee Council of Australia