



## Women and girls hit hard by attacks on health in Sudan, UN agencies warn

**20 June 2023** - The World Health Organization and UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, today warned that the continuing attacks on healthcare facilities, equipment and workers in Sudan are depriving women and girls of life-saving healthcare, with pregnant women hardest hit.

Some 67% of hospitals in areas affected by fighting are closed, and several maternity hospitals are out of action, including Omdurman Hospital, the largest referral hospital in Sudan. Among the 11 million people in Sudan who need urgent health assistance are 2.64 million women and girls of reproductive age. Some 262 880 of them are pregnant and over 90 000 will give birth in the next three months. All of them need access to critical reproductive health services.

Since April, when the fighting began, WHO has verified 46 attacks on health workers and facilities which have killed eight people and injured 18 others. Facilities and health assets have also been looted, and health workers have been subjected to violence. A number of health facilities are being used by armed forces.

There are reports of a military occupation of the National Medical Supply Funds (NMSF) warehouses in the capital, Khartoum, where medicines for the entire country, including malaria medicines, are kept, and where the national pharmacy for chronic diseases is located. WHO's stock of emergency medical supplies and development products is kept at its warehouse on the premises. UNFPA's stocks of medicines and equipment for obstetric care, post-rape treatment, as well as a wide range of contraceptives, which are stored at warehouses in Khartoum, South Darfur, West Darfur and elsewhere are also inaccessible. Health facilities in several states, including the Darfurs, have warned that they are facing critical shortages of medical supplies.

In a worrying development, hospitals are running out of fuel to power generators that provide electricity. Six newborns died at a hospital in the city of Eld'aeen in East Darfur in the space of a week due to issues including a lack of oxygen amid electricity blackouts and local doctors estimated that more than 30 newborns have died at the hospital since the start of the fighting. In May, UNFPA and local partner, the CAFA Development Organization, provided fuel for seven maternity hospitals in Khartoum to ensure health services were available for women and newborns. In just one week, more than 1000 deliveries and caesarean sections were safely carried out. But more support is desperately needed to secure fuel and supplies for key hospitals to sustain essential services. Some 15% of pregnant women experience pregnancy- and birth-related complications and need access to emergency obstetric and newborn care.

UNFPA provides sexual and reproductive healthcare through health facilities and hospitals throughout Sudan. UNFPA-trained midwives continue to support women to give birth safely at home and at functioning health facilities. There are approximately 27 000 midwives working across Sudan; around 2330 in the capital. Most of them attend 3–4 births a day, according to the head of a UNFPA-supported midwife network. UNFPA is also setting up safe spaces for women to provide gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services, including post-rape treatment, counselling and case management; as well as providing remote services. UNFPA also trains service providers and community-based protection networks in GBV prevention and response.

WHO is working closely with the Ministry of Health and other partners to ensure provision of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal and paediatric care as well as emergency obstetric and neo-natal care in Khartoum and Gezira, and in states sheltering internally displaced people. WHO is providing life-saving medicines and supplies, and covering the running cost of health facilities that provide these services. WHO is also training health workers on first-line support, provision of post-rape treatment and mental health care to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), and is backing national NGOs that provide GBV services.

“Health workers are putting their lives at risk to provide emergency, maternity, paediatric and chronic disease treatment services and we stand with them,” said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. “We call on the warring parties to honour the commitments they made in Jeddah in May, including the restoration of essential services and the withdrawal of forces from hospitals and essential public facilities.”

“The conflict must stop, health facilities, health workers and patients must be protected, humanitarian and medical aid must be allowed through,” said UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem. “People who need urgent healthcare should not be afraid to step out of their homes for fear of their safety, and women’s right to reproductive healthcare must be upheld, conflict or no conflict,” she added.

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