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Civic Space Monitor

National Reports on Civic Space 2022

Sudan

Civic Space and Indicators of
Movement and Expression



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Civic Space and Indicators of Movement and Expression



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Introduction: Political and socio-economic context

In a stunning twist of events on October 25, 2021, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who was in charge of the transitional authority and served as the supreme commander of armed forces, staged a coup against his own leadership. It is suspected that some members of the Sovereignty Council and various armed factions that had signed the Juba Peace Agreement might have been involved in the scheme. This goes against the constitutional document that was ratified on August 4, 2019, establishing the transitional government. The coup invalidated the constitutional document that governed the transitional period and dismantled its governing structures, including the Sovereignty Council, which was later reassembled. Since the coup, authorities have initiated a wave of violence against peaceful civilians who opposed the coup and continued their resistance using peaceful means.

Since October 25, 2021, the coup regime has launched a widespread arrest campaign, detaining 63 government employees and several influential political figures. The arrest spree even targeted the Prime Minister and six of his cabinet members, cutting off all their communication with the outside world. Furthermore, the authorities have resorted to excessive violence against protestors and dissenters, with casualties (both fatalities and injuries) escalating almost every day, and the number of political detainees increasing rapidly. Despite the agreement signed between Al-Burhan and former Prime Minister Abdullah Hamdok on November 21, 2021, and Hamdok's subsequent resignation on January 2, 2022, the government's violent actions have persisted up to the present day. According to the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors, the death toll has reached 117, with

thousands injured and hundreds arbitrarily detained, since the day of the coup until August 31, 2022.

In the early weeks of February 2021, there were fresh arrests, which included a former minister from the transitional government and five members of the disbanded Empowerment Removal Committee (ERC). The ERC's mandate was to probe corruption allegations during the Al-Bashir regime. Unfortunately, there have been significant setbacks concerning the trials of key figures from the overthrown government, with files being put on hold and court sessions postponed. A report from the Ayin Network also revealed that there has been a growing trend of reinstating the sacked members by the ERC. Testimonies included in the report indicate that "all civil servants associated with the National Congress Party, totaling 135,000, have been rehired – even in the security services".¹

Since October 25, 2021, the state of civic space has been marked by mounting pressure on public liberties and the activities of non-governmental organizations, along with two significant trends:

the resistance committees have taken charge of the social and political landscape;

and the frequency of tribal violence has escalated, prompting the authorities to exploit ethnic tendencies.

While the frequency of tribal violence (or violence motivated by ethnic prejudices) was already a major issue during the transitional period, the situation has worsened considerably. The authorities have been criticized for their inadequate and slow response to prevent violence and save lives, which contrasts sharply with their swift use of armed force to suppress protests. Towards the end of April, there were violent clashes in Kreinik, West Darfur. Armed militia, equipped with heavy weaponry and four-wheel-drive vehicles, attacked the locals after two days of escalating security tensions in the region, resulting in dozens of fatalities. Despite reports of military reinforcements being deployed by the government forces to the region in response

to the escalating tensions, it appears that they failed to carry out their intended mission or were simply incapable of doing so. The conflict, which was characterized as being between pastoral groups and the residents of Kreinik town, led to the death of nearly 200 people, while another 130 sustained serious injuries. There were also reports of sexual assault, and tens of thousands were displaced, causing tension and a healthcare crisis. In July, the Blue Nile region witnessed similar acts of violence, leading to numerous casualties and the displacement of tens of thousands. According to the Ministry of Health in Blue Nile, the death toll from the violence was "105 dead and 291 wounded", as per the latest figures from the Emergency Committee.² By the end of August, the clashes resumed, resulting in more casualties, and broke out again in mid-October in a more violent manner, causing the death toll and injuries to double. There were also reports of violent incidents in Lagawa city in the Nuba Mountains (South Kordofan), resulting in numerous fatalities and thousands being displaced.³ Amidst all of this, the State authorities and their official forces were notably absent or had a negative presence, prompting many questions.

Economically, the country began 2022 without an officially approved budget. However, in January, the caretaker government appointed by the coup authority approved a budget that appeared promising at first glance. Unfortunately, its actual provisions fell short of addressing the economic challenges the country faced in the upcoming year. The absence of reliable data that accurately reflects Sudan's economic performance, coupled with the official institutions' lack of transparency in disclosing the economic situation, made it even more challenging to comprehend the country's economic situation. Notwithstanding, based on an assessment of prices, currency exchange rates, and economic conditions, it appears that the overall economic situation did not exhibit any improvement during the relevant period. It is worth noting that despite the increase in prices of essential commodities, the general inflation rate showed a decline, accompanied by a reduction in

the real GDP growth rate, as reported by the Central Bank of Sudan.⁴ However, on a positive note, the exchange rate of the pound remained relatively stable for a few months in 2022, subsequent to its notable increase post-coup, up until March of the same year.

These indicators, together with other relevant factors, allow for a better understanding of the overall picture. For example, the prolonged closure of Port Sudan - the major seaport of Sudan - has resulted in a notable slowdown in multiple industries and a decrease in imports, leading to a complete halt in trade. Furthermore, the absence of political stability has resulted in a reduction in both investment and development projects, including those aimed at supporting and expanding small businesses. As anticipated, the financial aid pledged by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, following their recommended policies, was suspended, causing the citizens significant economic hardship throughout the transitional phase. Overall, the economic downturn was widespread and all-encompassing, pushing Sudan back into the category of "low-income" countries, after it had moved up to the lower-middle-income bracket in 2018.⁵ It is worth mentioning that August 2022 experienced its usual seasonal torrents and floods, which typically lead to a reduction in cultivated areas, a rise in production and transportation costs, a decline in commodity offerings, as well as disasters that cause loss of life, homes, and productive assets. Sudan was not spared from these incidents, such as in Al-Manaqil, where floods engulfed agricultural regions, and authorities inadequately responded to the situation. All these events indicate a general economic and administrative frailty. Although the COVID-19 pandemic's exceptional circumstances have not entirely disappeared from the world, Sudan's policies relating to the pandemic have generally dissipated. Hence, this pandemic cannot be credited with causing a significant impact on disrupting the local economic performance.⁶ In summary, these circumstances manifested in a general decline in the majority of citizens' living

standards and a noticeable public anxiety regarding the foreseeable future's costs and availability of essential life necessities, particularly since international reports indicate an imminent food crisis.⁷

As for civil society, it faced a setback following the coup, after briefly improving during the transitional period from 2019 to 2021. This doesn't imply that it was in good shape before the coup, but significant efforts were being made to revive it. The reason for the decline was the issuance of regulations that restricted cultural and civil society activities. Nevertheless, there were some positive developments, such as the labor union's progress in restoring stability, following its fragmentation and abandonment during the National Salvation Front's rule from 1989 to 2019, and subsequent failure during the transitional period, when political conflicts hindered the opportunity to make significant progress in favor of labor laws and union organization. All in all, Sudanese society is confronted with numerous and significant challenges, but is making progress towards overcoming them and establishing a robust and thriving civil society, which has been disrupted and in conflict with the military coup.

As mentioned earlier, the Sudanese landscape has been marked by the rising influence of resistance committees and the revitalization of labor unions, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections of the report.

Resistance committees and their prominent role in the socio-political landscape

The Sudanese Resistance Committees (RCs) are a rally/group that has recently emerged in Sudanese society as a channel for expression and action against the central power and abuse of governments. They were formed according to residential regions (neighborhoods/districts), and their activities evolved from demands for basic services to becoming a form of public action that uses unarmed civil resistance tools against the government (protests, marches, political awareness campaigns, civil disobedience, and lobbying against authorities). The Committees also covered various parts of Sudan, including cities, villages, urban and rural areas. Following the October 25 coup, the RCs played a prominent role in the anti-coup socio-political landscape. They engaged in daily and periodic concrete forms of public resistance in the streets and neighborhoods against the new regime.

There is no absolute agreement on the emergence and development of Committees. There are inconsistent narratives in this regard, some of which are more common and plausible than others (particularly among the Committees). However, for the purposes of this report, what matters is the emergence of these committees and their genuine contribution to the revolution that broke out in December 2018 across Sudan, leading to the toppling of the First Salvation Regime of Field Marshal Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. At the time, the RCs clearly participated in protests, marches, street blockades, and sit-ins, putting the regime under enormous pressure not only in the capital of Khartoum, but also in all Sudanese cities and villages (and one of the characteristics of the December 18 movement was that it did not start in the capital,

but in various cities and villages across Sudan before its activity peaked in Khartoum).

In the post-April 2019 period, the RCs remained active during the transition period that followed the ousting of the regime, engaging in different activities (such as providing services to districts, disempowering the officials of the old regime, organizing rallies and marches, blocking streets, etc., to exert pressure on the transitional government and protest against the persisting repression that reminded them of the practices of the former regime).

Following the October 25, 2021 coup that put an end to the transition period, with all its structures and positive and negative legacy, and set the stage for a new period of repression and relinquishment of the revolution's objectives, the RCs intensified their opposition and were joined by the anti-coup movement in most Sudanese cities and districts; more and more protests and marches were staged, and more streets were blocked⁸. The RCs also stepped up their political activities, forming clusters first in the adjacent neighborhoods, before moving on to districts, cities, and states. According to surveys conducted since January 2022, more than 5,000 RCs were spread across Sudan⁹, and according to the latest surveys, this number has now increased or doubled. These committees collectively drafted charters and political declarations that served as a political commitment during the resistance to coup forces and post-coup. This is why RCs are considered the new creative phenomenon that is currently omnipresent in the Sudanese civic and political space.

Latest activities since October 25

Despite ongoing repression, the RCs carried on their protests and demonstrations. By late March 2022, protests and general civil disobedience escalated as the April 6 anniversary of the popular uprising against a former military regime in 1985 approached. On April 6 and 11, large-scale marches were organized across Sudan. The events were recorded by the Sudan Tribune newspaper in an article, which read (on the same date) as follows: "Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese took to the streets in at least 20 cities [where they were repressed and dispersed]. However, the violence of the state forces has not diminished the peaceful protesters' determination to call for an end to military rule... These demonstrations come in response to the calls of the RCs, the actual mobilizers of the anti-military protests, for effective participation." Centralized and decentralized demonstrations, orchestrated and led by the RCs against the post-coup authority, have been ongoing since in several Sudanese cities.

During the first months of 2022, two key charters were drafted by the RCs: the Revolutionary Charter for People's Power (RCPP)¹⁰ and the Charter for the Establishment of People's Authority (RPCA). The former was drafted, reviewed, and signed by RCs from 15 states, while the latter was produced and adopted by most RC Coordinators in Khartoum (given that Khartoum is the largest state in terms of population density and demographic diversity). Both charters conceptualize the structures of the transitional period after the foreseen toppling of the coup regime and provide a general stance on issues related to state-building in Sudan (such as democracy, local governance, social justice, peace, fighting corruption, etc.). In the last days of June 2022, RCs across the country announced their efforts to merge both charters into a single charter or a single set of principles that would bring together all RCs in Sudan. In early October, "the Revolutionary Charter for People's Power (RCPP)"¹¹ was announced. This was a step forward

for the RCs to organize their forces and amplify their weight among the revolutionary movement forces. They also promoted their media activity by issuing periodical publications. Hence, the bimonthly periodical newspaper "Ma al-Amal" (What is to be done?) was published based on the contributions from the RCs members to voice the opinions of the Committees. Among these publications, there was also "Al-Darb" magazine, which was created, along with a website, by a number of RCs members in southern Khartoum. It describes itself as "an attempt to draw on revolutionary work for revolutionary ideas and leverage revolutionary ideas for work improvement".¹² Relationships of solidarity and synergies also started to appear between the RCs and other forms of civil and community-based collective action groups. For example, the Alliance of Demand-Based Campaigns (TAM) signed the Revolutionary Charter for People's Power (RCPP), becoming the first entity besides the RCs to do so.

Attempts to understand and position the Sudanese Resistance Committees

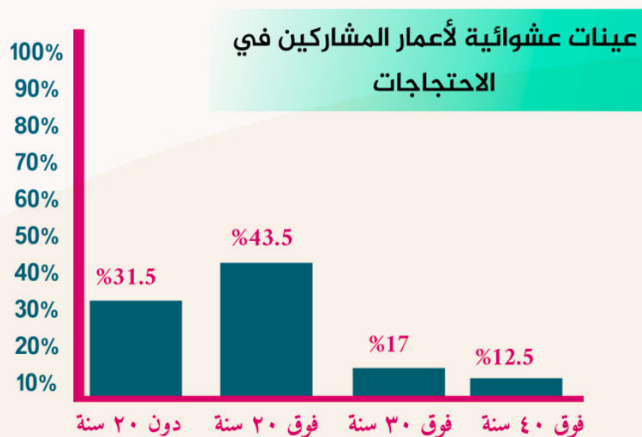
Numerous pens have addressed the RCs from various perspectives, and the audio-visual media has also taken interest in them. Evidently, these are journalists and media affiliated with the opposition to the coup power and those interested in building awareness and enhancing the capabilities of civil society components. For example, in August 2022, a group of authors presented a paper entitled "Sudanese Resistance Committees as Innovative Spaces for Citizenship: Comparisons and Extrapolations"¹³, which served as an attempt to understand the RCs from two angles: the first explores their evolution over the past years, while the second compares them with diverse experiences from around the world (especially in Africa and Latin America) where attempts have been made to organize new, popular, and democratic community organizations.

The research relied on a theoretical approach based on urban and regional planning studies that provides a distinction between "invented spaces and invited spaces" for citizenship in the public sphere. This distinction relates to the forms of the social and planning movement of citizens in modern societies¹⁴. The study also relied on observing and investigating transitional features "from mobilization to organization"¹⁵ in examining the phased development of the RCs. Additionally, a report entitled "Al-Burhan and Hemedti Chose to Turn Against the Wrong Generation"¹⁶ was published in the Democrat newspaper, showcasing the results of a press survey of a random sample of protest participants (male and female). According to the report, the clear majority (about three-quarters) are young people under the age of 30, which is the case of RCs members (in addition to the great number of students and university graduates among them). Articles and surveys about the committees were also



Cover page of the first issue of "Ma al-Amal" newspaper

published in English¹⁷. The "Sudan Bukra" channel (which broadcasts from outside Sudan) conducted numerous interviews with members of the RCs, in which they discussed the charter drafting processes of the committees, as well as their strategies, visions, and differences. Recordings of some of the RCs¹⁸ activities and symposiums were also broadcasted.



Source: Mustapha Saied, "Al-Burhan and Hemedti Chose to Turn Against the Wrong Generation"- The Democrat newspaper, July 23, 2022.

In general, RCs are a phenomenon currently taking shape as an expression of a socio-political popular movement that has not found adequate representation within the common Sudanese landscape (such as political and sectarian groups, civil society organizations, armed movements, etc.). Perhaps it is per se a manifestation of the distrust in the ability of these familiar structures to bring about the desired change of the protesters (particularly the youth, as shown earlier). The work of RCs is based on popular democracy tools and the so-called grassroots building.

Developments of the Sudanese Union Movement

The Sudanese revolutionary movement that led to the fall of the Salvation Regime in April 2019 stands out from the other revolutions that took place in the neighboring regions, as it was led by a union body. The Sudanese Professionals Association was the most highly reputed body to have orchestrated and influenced the mass protests, sit-ins, and strikes, which progressively weakened and embarrassed the Salvation Regime rule until its downfall.¹⁹ However, this is not alien to modern Sudanese history. The Multi-Organizational Front and the Union Association were formed respectively in October 1964 and in 1985, both being bodies with an allied union background that had played an active and pivotal role in bringing about the political change effected by the popular protest movement.²⁰ However, after October 25, 2021, the protest movement was no longer led by the Professionals Association, but by RCs, as mentioned above.

The Sudanese union movement is one of the oldest movements in the region (since the 1940s) and of the most modernist organizations in Sudan (compared to political organizations and civil society)²¹, and although it faced repression and exclusion during the rule of the Islamic Front regime (1989-2019), it tried to rise up again and restore its balance with the outset of the revolutionary movement in late 2018, and continued its activity in the transitional period (Where the Labor Code and the re-formation of legitimate unions were subject to an intense conflict and a prolonged debate). Although the institutional disruption caused by the October 25, 2021 coup has clearly damaged the Union Movement, the latter moved on and tried in many ways to restore its balance and gains.

One example is the establishment of the union of Alzaeim Alazhari University professors in March

2022, the 6th elected union after 5 previous union bodies: the union body for Khartoum University professors; ICT syndicate - Khartoum branch; The union of company pharmacists - Khartoum; the union body for Nyala University professors; the union body for Red Sea University professors. In late August 2022, the initiative was launched for the establishment of the union of Al Neelain University professors.

In July 23, 2022, the General Assembly of the Sudanese Journalists Union (SJU) endorsed its articles of association and the Media Charter of Honor, and appointed the representatives of the Union's executive office elections commission. Altaghyeer online newspaper²² wrote: "the General Assembly was attended by representatives of the lawyers, engineers, doctors and teachers unions. The endorsement of the articles of association and the Media Charter of Honor and the appointment of the elections commission set the stage for the election of the president of the Journalists Union and its council, which was dissolved in the aftermath of the coup against the old regime (1989-2019) in 1089. An elections oversight committee was appointed." The voting started on Saturday, August 27, and the next day, the elections commission announced the Media Unity list candidate as president of the Union, and the names of the winners of the seats in the Union council (consisting of 39 members including 12 female journalists). Despite the satisfaction with the results of the elections among journalists (and among many of the civil society actors), the election processes were criticized by some entities, within and outside the media circle, particularly with respect to appeals and procedures related to the review of the articles of association.²³ Likewise, groups of community pharmacists in Khartoum managed to organize themselves and form elected bodies.

As the Sudanese union movement continued to organize itself and restore its status, Mr Kerr Kun, an expert in international standards and decent work visited ILO office in Cairo, in mid-August 2022. In one of his articles, the union secretary of the Sudanese

Professionals Association (SPA) stated that the visit came "after a series of complaints that have been filed to ILO as follows: 1) A complaint filed by the trade union of the old regime contesting the decisions of the Empowerment Removal Committee to dismiss a number of civil servants under the Empowerment Removal Law; 2) a complaint against the decision of the coup authority to dismiss a number of civil servants filed in December 2021 by the alliance of independent unions (Nasaq) [which is composed of the independent union cluster and the Sudanese Workers Alliance for the Restoration of Trade Unions]; and 3) a complaint along with a protest, submitted by a number of trade unions and ILO steering committees in June 2022 about Sudan's absence from the International Labor Conference and the demand to protect workers from trade union violations." The article adds that at the direction of the coup authority, "the trade union of the old regime protested against the acceptance of complaints filed by Nasaq and the group of union bodies in December 2021 and June 2022, considering them as political rather than union bodies, and themselves as the only legitimate trade union body in Sudan." Accordingly, the aim of the expert "Kun's" visit was to investigate such complaints in general. During this visit, a controversy arose about ILO's powers to grant any legitimacy or accreditation to any trade union body in Sudan. The visit is considered by some as a recognition of the union bodies submitting the complaint (specifically the Alliance of Independent Unions). According to others, ILO is not a union registrar and is not empowered to grant international protection to any union body. In its complaint of November 18, 2021, the Alliance of Independent Unions called on the Director-General of the International Labor Organization (ILO) "1) to support and protect the right of independent unions to express the views of their members, to defend their common interests and represent them regionally and internationally according to their own will in collective negotiations; 2) to put immediate and prompt pressure on the coup authority and demand the release of all detainees, in particular unionists, activists and, workers; and

3) to immediately and without delay exert pressure on the coup authority to stop excessive violence, murder, and torture, and to hold those involved in such inhumane practices accountable."

While the news of professional unions prevailed over all other union news, labor committees pursued their attempts to recover and organize their unions, with significant absence of media coverage (even among civil society platforms). For example, on September 29, 2022, the committees of laborers working in factories of the Sudanese Sugar Co. Ltd (Al-Junaid, Asalaya, Halfa, and Sennar) announced an open strike, starting from the first week of October, due to non-payment of salaries to workers for the months of August and September. The Sudanese Workers Alliance for the Restoration of Trade Unions transmitted letters from the laborer committees of said factories addressed to the chairman and members of the Workers' Demands Committee, announcing the start of the strike, during which the factories ceased to operate. Although of significant importance, the event was poorly covered by the media and among union activists, indicating a gap that needs to be addressed in including the trade union movement within the solidarity and synergy networks of civic space actors.

Civil society organizations and networks and relations with the regime

In the wake of the October 25 coup, there was a general disconnect between civil society organizations and networks and the coup regime. After civil society had witnessed a relative breakthrough during the 2019-2021 transitional period, the coup negatively impacted several civil society organizations by obstructing their work, leading to the restriction or cancellation of their activities. The confrontation between civil society and pro-coup forces generally happened through resistance committees, political organizations, and trade union and demand bodies. However, 5 months after the coup, the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) issued a decision to restrict the activity of civil society organizations. The disruption of state apparatus after the coup also contributed to increasing the burden on NGOs to fill the vacuum (e.g., respond to floods and torrents). The coup also led to the cut-off or suspension of a large part of the funding received by civil society organizations from international entities.

However, in a distinct case of intersection between civil society and issues related to the regime, the Steering Committee of the Bar Association submitted a draft for a transitional constitution. The draft was put forward and widely circulated on Sudanese platforms and media as a subject of discussion. The Bar Association's Steering Committee said that the draft was the result of a workshop it held in August 2022, "in which political and societal forces participated", and international and regional representatives were present. The Committee also submitted a copy of the draft to the trilateral mechanism that mediates between Sudanese

components (comprising the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNTAMS), the African Union, and IGAD). Following the announcement of the draft, political, civil, and community organizations - most notably the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) - announced their support for the proposed transitional constitution. The embassies of Western countries welcomed the document as well. According to Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, these entities saw the draft as a framework for a transitional constitution "with a view to forming a government that is widely accepted... and that can put Sudan on the path to democracy and elections".²⁴ The draft took center stage throughout the month of September, along with the unification of resistance committee charters, and was subject to heavy criticism from multiple entities. Legal experts believed that the draft, which was based on the Juba Agreement, contained the same mistakes as the constitutional framework of the previous transitional period, noting that all its main articles were not dissimilar to those of its predecessor. They also added that the draft's emphasis on private property rights came at the expense of the general economic rights of the people. In any case, the discussion regarding the draft is still ongoing.

A great example of the regime's involvement in regulating civic space is the news published on March 29, 2022 by the Sudan News Agency (SUNA), which reported the decision of the President of the Sovereignty Council (leader of the coup) to dissolve the boards of state-owned universities. Although these universities officially belong to the public sector, state laws and customs consider universities independent from the executive branch in general, with the exception of some intersections and procedures. Therefore, the aforementioned decision was not supported by any legal articles, but it was nonetheless enforced by the coup regime. Since then, a group of jurists and professors have resorted to bringing actions against and appealing the said-decision. In June, the judge of the National Supreme Court in charge of the Administrative

Appeals Tribunal denied the issuance of any such decisions by the President of the Sovereignty Council, according to statements made by the Sovereignty Council (despite the fact that the Sovereignty Council's page on social media and the Sudanese News Agency (SUNA) published the news and the "decision" was practically in force). Accordingly, the indictment was quashed, which meant that the University of Khartoum's Council was not legally dissolved (the same applies to the boards of other universities). However, matters remained in a pending state because the boards were indeed already dissolved, reflecting the chaotic situation that affected academic spaces as well as other areas of civic space.

In an attempt by civil society to restore some of its precedent gains from the transitional period, on May 23, 2022, the Darfur Bar Association and its partners issued a statement denouncing the practices of HAC, which restrict the activities of voluntary organizations. The statement read that this escalating level of restriction on organizations is similar to practices adopted during the defunct ruling of NAS, adding that the Association will inform "the OHCHR and all international entities concerned with the protection of human rights." In response, HAC issued a statement claiming that it had not issued any directives to restrict the organizations' activities.

One of the most prominent features of the work of civil society coalitions in the post-coup period was the withdrawal of the Civil Forces Assembly (CFA) faction from the FFC coalition, which was made official on January 26, 2022 in a statement issued by CFA.²⁵ Some civil society activists believe that the participation of the CFA in the transitional civilian government undermined its efforts to expand civic space during the period of civilian rule, as well as its role in opposing the coup later on. However, others believe that it was a historically prominent experience in which forces from civil society organizations and networks participated in the transitional authority coalition (except for unions, which have a longer history of participating in transitional authorities

in Sudan). Some members of those forces even held executive positions for some time. All in all, it seems that Sudanese civil society needs to collectively review and reflect on this experience. The intersection between political power and civil society organizations has multiple consequences, including civil society gaining a greater say in power, while also risking the loss of its independent voice and its ability to play an important role in modern societies as an observer, critic, and advisor to the ruling authority and decision-makers.

Nevertheless, civil society took some noteworthy actions. For example, actors conducted a voluntary review of the steps taken by Sudan to meet the sustainable development goals. This voluntary review was carried out by representatives of civil society in parallel to the VNR report issued by official authorities. Additionally, several entities continued to support cooperative work (cooperative societies) despite the coup, but their support was limited to awareness and training.

General conditions of freedom of expression and assembly

As stated in the introduction to this report, and in previous paragraphs, the period from October 25, 2021 until August 2021 was marked by a long list of violations of the freedom of expression and assembly and human rights in general. On its official Facebook page, according to the latest update on July 27, 2022, CCSD stated that the number of confirmed martyrs since the start of the coup had reached 116 (increasing by at least 4 martyrs by the end of October 2022).²⁶ Furthermore, the number of wounded has exceeded thousands, including hundreds of children, in addition to hundreds of arbitrary arrests. Many deaths were due to the regime's violations, from fatal injuries caused by tear gas, to protesters being run over by the regime's vehicles, to gunshot wounds. CCSD reported troops infiltrating hospitals in Khartoum and pursuing protesters. The regime also blocked internet access across the country (all telecom companies) during days of mass protests, in order to limit communication and live documentation. This method was employed by the former totalitarian regime, as well as the Transitional Military Council, several times in mid-2019 and then after the October 25 coup (as usual, protesters devised countermeasures and were able to communicate and document the protests nonetheless).

The anti-coup popular and civil movement and related forces remained strong despite the abuse of power. For example, similar protests to those held on June 30, 2019 were ignited after the sit-in massacre outside the army's General Command in Khartoum on June 3, 2019.²⁷ According to surveys, the said protests were huge and exceeded expectations. Despite the shots, live ammunition, and tear gas fired by regime forces at the protestors during the demonstrations that took place in

around 42 cities and towns, according to statistics, the message behind these demonstrations was too powerful to be suppressed. Protests of the same magnitude arose on October 25, 2022 (one year after the coup) and emphasized the same message. Several sit-ins were also held in Khartoum following the June 30 protests. Among the most prominent sit-ins during this period was the one at Zamzam camp, which started in August 2022. Zamzam camp was established in 2003, in response to the escalation of the armed conflict in Darfur. The influx of displaced persons from various regions of Darfur hasn't stopped since. Today, the number of displaced persons is estimated at half a million. A statement issued by the Kush Conference regarding the Zamzam camp sit-in stated that the sit-in was triggered by "the death and injury of a number of the camp's citizens after they were attacked by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) while farming. They consequently declared an open sit-in until their legitimate demands of security, food, and justice to their martyrs were fulfilled." The statement added, "Despite the large number of protesters in Zamzam camp, their voices are hardly being heard at the level of the Sudanese political landscape. None of the official, popular, or partisan media platforms are relaying their demands, which confirms the centrality of both political discourse and political practice in Sudan and their alienation from real issues faced by the Sudanese people, particularly in the countryside and in displacement camps".²⁸

In response to the shutdown of the internet and communications on the first day of the October 25 coup and on the days that followed, the SCPS and a group of citizens filed an action against telecom companies. On May 10, 2022, the court issued a decision affirming that all telecom companies had violated their contracts with consumers. The judiciary reserved the right to claim compensation for consumers, according to damages incurred.²⁹ The Democrat newspaper and Al-Hadatha newspaper (launched during the rule of the transitional civilian government) were no longer issued in print for reasons related to the coup.³⁰ During the coup, shortwave radio broadcasts were stopped and

then resumed two weeks later, except for Hala 96 FM, Monte Carlo Doualiya, and BBC. Hala 96 FM was back in operation after 6 weeks. However, Monte Carlo Doualiya's license renewal request was refused, and BBC Arabic was banned.³¹ In January 2022, Al-Jazeera live TV unit was closed, according to a decision issued by the Acting Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information.³²

As expected, reports on human rights violations quickly came to a halt again in Sudan. Between February 20-24, 2022, the United Nations human rights expert in Sudan made an official visit and met with officials in the coup government and representatives of Sudanese civil society. He also met with a number of human rights defenders and several families that fell victim to human rights violations, according to his statement on February 24.³³ On March 7, 2022, the OHCHR submitted its report, which mentioned the ongoing protests of thousands of Sudanese against the coup and the violation of their civil and human rights. The report also mentioned the accumulated number of victims since the start of the coup (based on CCSD reports). In its report, the OHCHR indicated that hospitals and medical facilities were not spared from the attacks and added that, since the coup, regime forces have been granted extensive powers and temporary immunity from prosecution. The Commissioner stated that the Human Rights Office documented around 1,000 arrests of members of the opposition between October 25 and March 3, including 144 women and 148 children, and 3 detainees whose whereabouts are unknown.

Independent regional reports also documented the deterioration of public freedoms and human rights in Sudan. On April 25, 2022, the Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum (HOACSF) issued a report on civic space in several countries, including Sudan. The report stated that the great positive developments that were implemented in 2019, after the revolutionary civil movement in 2018 and 2019, were reversed in October 2021, due to the coup and the revocation of the constitutional document. Although the condition of civic space

was not good during the first half of 2021, it further deteriorated afterwards. The HOACSF called on the Sudanese government to: restore full civilian rule; respect human rights; immediately release political prisoners and respect the rights of legal detainees, in accordance with international laws on the treatment of prisoners. In March 2022, a legal analysis was published by REDRESS, in partnership with Emergency Lawyers, the People's Legal Aid Center, and the Darfur Bar Association. The analysis documented the regime's exploitation of the imposed state of emergency and widespread violations and abuses of human rights. The analysis also called for the immediate lifting of the state of emergency and urged the Sudanese authorities to direct all their forces to stop the implementation of Emergency Decree 3/2021, which was used as a pretext for the aforementioned violations.

Among noteworthy events in this context is the official decree issued on the evening of May 29 to lift the state of emergency in the country. By the end of the evening, Emergency Lawyers had issued a statement saying that 63 political detainees, male and female, had been released from the prisons of Port Sudan, Dabak, and Kosti, while others were still detained in other prisons.³⁴ However, this decree and these measures - which came at a time when the coup regime was under temporary pressure - did not prevent the series of violations that were committed during the months of June, July, and August, as mentioned above.

Takeaways

Upon examining the straightforward fundamental trends in the reporting period, one can't help but question the state and potential of civic space in Sudan, given the prevailing circumstances and imminent opportunities. It is evident that the October 25, 2021 coup has had a far-reaching impact on all civil society organizations and networks, with various forms of threat persisting to this day. Without significant changes taking place at the political level, the prospects for any concrete progress or accomplishments by civil society in the near future remain uncertain, as the state of civic space is closely tied to the political landscape of the nation.

The RCs' leadership in the political-social sphere could bring about significant changes in both the near and distant future. However, this depends on the evolution of the RCs' formation and operations in the upcoming political shifts. Notably, there are endeavors, backed by international support, to bridge the rift between the freedom and change forces (and others) and the coup leaders. Moreover, the coup authorities bear immense hostility towards the RCs, and this could escalate into more intense retaliatory measures. The surge in tribal conflicts and those with ethnic overtones is among the most perilous threats to any contemporary state's stability. Despite the complexities of the state authorities' ties to these incidents, civic space actors are troubled by the issue and may need to explore ways to alleviate or tackle the conflicts through civil society elements. This is not an entirely novel concept, as civil society organizations and networks now find themselves obligated to take on some duties and services that are ordinarily the state's responsibility, given the disruption of numerous familiar tasks of such organizations.

The trade union movement in Sudan is evidently still active, and we might expect to see it still gather strength in the future. Nonetheless, trade unions, which are distinct from social movements, cannot

realize their goals or their members' resolutions without legal recognition and labor laws that create a favorable political climate in the civic space, granting their decisions the requisite legitimacy to be effective. Consequently, unions have a considerable stake in not just economic stability but political stability as well. It is noteworthy that the trade union movement encompasses both professional and labor unions, given that the bulk of the attention paid to the trade union movement primarily revolves around trade union issues.

Lessons learned

Given the current political instability and the coup in Sudan, civil society organizations and networks face a hard battle in terms of mobility and effective operation. It is in their best interest to prioritize efforts towards achieving political stability, which may help them align with other stakeholders to bring about meaningful change towards stability and constitutional conditions.

It would be prudent to regard the resistance committees as a persistent reality, rather than a temporary phenomenon, and acknowledge them as a fresh entrant in the civic space. This step should be taken by civil society organizations and networks as a priority measure.

Regardless of the timing and direction of the political changes that lie ahead, civil society groups such as trade unions, advocacy groups, resistance committees, academia, NGOs, and others must enhance their organizational capabilities and forge stronger connections between one another. This collective strength and network are crucial for creating a potent civil society sphere that caters to the interests and desires of all these groups.

Given the complex nature of the current public landscape and the numerous options available, civil society actors must operate on a broad strategic and structural level, setting realistic objectives while refraining from rigid, time-bound plans.

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33 It should be noted that on September 2019 ,25, an agreement was signed between the Sudanese Transitional Government and the OHCHR Office to pave the way for the establishment of a UN Human Rights Office in Sudan (a main branch in Khartoum and 4 branches in Darfur, Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Eastern Sudan). On June 2020 ,3, the Security Council put an end to the tasks of the UNAMID and established a new mission - UNITAMS - to assist Sudan in the transition process. The situation in Sudan and the work of the mission became complicated after the October 25 coup.

34 Nevertheless, on May 29, the first court session was held against: Mohamed Adam, Musab al-Sharif, Ahmed al-Fatih and Mohamed al-Fatih, after they were accused of the murder of a police brigadier general during a protest. The session was attended by an overwhelming number of supporters who stood in solidarity with the accused, as the masses and resistance committees were convinced that these charges were fabricated for political motives. The trial is still ongoing.