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Unite Sudan Initiative

Dignity, Justice, and Peace

Transitional Justice in Sudan

How to Hold Perpetrators Accountable While Healing the Nation

A Comprehensive Framework for Justice, Reconciliation, and National Healing

February 15, 2026

Classification: For Official Use - Government Leadership and International Partners
Prepared by: Unite Sudan Initiative

02.26

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
AU	African Union
ICC	International Criminal Court
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
CSO	Civil Society Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
NCP	National Congress Party
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice

Executive Summary

Sudan stands at a critical juncture in its history. After decades of authoritarian rule under Omar al-Bashir, the popular uprising of 2019, and the subsequent political transitions marred by ongoing conflict, the nation faces the urgent challenge of addressing systematic human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. This proposal presents a comprehensive framework for transitional justice that balances the imperative of accountability with the necessity of national healing and reconciliation.

The Sudanese context is uniquely complex, characterized by multiple concurrent and historical conflicts including the Darfur genocide, violence in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the ongoing civil war between SAF and RSF, and the legacy of authoritarian repression. This proposal recognizes that justice cannot be achieved through punitive measures alone, but must be accompanied by truth-seeking, reparations, institutional reform, and genuine efforts at societal reconciliation.

Key Objectives:

- Establish credible accountability mechanisms for perpetrators of serious crimes
- Create space for truth-telling and acknowledgment of victims' suffering
- Provide meaningful reparations to victims and affected communities
- Reform security institutions to prevent future violations
- Foster national dialogue and reconciliation across ethnic and political divides
- Build sustainable peace through inclusive governance and economic opportunity

This framework proposes a hybrid approach combining domestic and international mechanisms, recognizing that both local ownership and international expertise are essential for success. It emphasizes victim-centered justice, women's participation, youth engagement, and the critical role of civil society in all transitional justice processes.

1. Background and Context

1.1 Historical Overview of Conflict in Sudan

Sudan's modern history has been marked by cyclical violence, authoritarianism, and systematic human rights abuses. From independence in 1956, the country has experienced prolonged civil wars, military coups, and ethnic cleansing campaigns that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and displaced millions.

The Darfur Genocide (2003-present): Beginning in 2003, the Sudanese government, under President Omar al-Bashir, orchestrated a campaign of ethnic cleansing against non-Arab populations in Darfur. Government forces and allied Janjaweed militias systematically targeted the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa ethnic groups, resulting in an estimated 300,000 deaths and 2.7 million displaced persons. The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for al-Bashir in 2009 and 2010 for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

South Kordofan and Blue Nile Conflicts: Following South Sudan's independence in 2011, violence erupted in these border regions as the government sought to suppress populations allied with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. Indiscriminate aerial bombardments, forced displacement, and restrictions on humanitarian access characterized these conflicts.

The 2019 Revolution and Democratic Transition: Popular protests beginning in December 2018 culminated in the ousting of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. However, the transitional period was marked by instability, including the June 3, 2019 massacre at the sit-in protest in Khartoum, where security forces killed over 100 civilians. A power-sharing agreement between military and civilian leaders was ultimately undermined by the October 2021 military coup.

The Current Civil War (2023-present): Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces under Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo has devastated the country, with widespread atrocities including mass killings, sexual violence, and ethnic targeting, particularly in Darfur and Khartoum.

1.2 Scale and Nature of Human Rights Violations

The violations documented in Sudan constitute some of the most serious crimes under international law:

- **Crimes Against Humanity:** Systematic attacks against civilian populations, including murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, sexual violence, persecution, and enforced disappearances
- **War Crimes:** Intentional attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, pillage, destruction of property, recruitment of child soldiers, and denial of humanitarian access

- **Genocide:** Systematic destruction of ethnic groups in Darfur through killing, causing serious bodily and mental harm, and deliberately inflicting conditions calculated to bring about physical destruction
- **Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:** Widespread use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war, affecting tens of thousands of women and girls

1.3 Current Political and Security Situation

As of early 2026, Sudan remains embroiled in civil war with no clear path to resolution. The conflict has created a humanitarian catastrophe, with over 10 million people displaced, famine conditions in multiple regions, and collapsed state institutions. The fragmentation of armed groups, proliferation of weapons, and intervention by regional actors complicate peace efforts.

Any transitional justice process must account for this ongoing instability and recognize that accountability mechanisms may need to be implemented in phases as security conditions permit. However, delaying all accountability measures until complete peace is achieved risks perpetuating impunity and undermining future stability.

2. Transitional Justice Framework: Four Pillars

This proposal advocates for a comprehensive transitional justice approach built on four interconnected pillars. Each pillar is essential, and their integration ensures that justice serves both individual victims and the broader society.

2.1 Pillar One: Criminal Accountability

2.1.1 Hybrid Special Court for Sudan

The creation of a Hybrid Special Court combining Sudanese and international judges, prosecutors, and staff offers the most promising path forward. This model, inspired by successful examples in Sierra Leone, Cambodia, and Kosovo, provides:

- **Local Legitimacy:** Sudanese ownership and public engagement with the process
- **International Expertise:** Technical capacity, international law knowledge, and protection from local political interference
- **Capacity Building:** Training for Sudanese legal professionals to strengthen domestic justice institutions
- **Credibility:** Independence and expertise that enhance public trust in verdicts

Proposed Structure:

- **Composition:** Chambers with majority Sudanese judges, complemented by international judges with expertise in international criminal law
- **Jurisdiction:** Crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide committed in Sudan since 2003
- **Location:** Primary seat in Sudan with potential for regional hearings to increase accessibility

- Legal Framework: Blend of Sudanese criminal law and international humanitarian law
- Funding: International donor support with African Union and UN involvement

2.1.2 Complementarity with the International Criminal Court

The ICC maintains jurisdiction over crimes in Darfur following UN Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005). Sudan should cooperate with existing ICC proceedings, including:

- Surrendering individuals under ICC arrest warrants, including former President al-Bashir
- Providing access to crime sites and evidence
- Facilitating witness testimony and victim participation
- Establishing cooperation agreements between the Hybrid Court and ICC to avoid jurisdictional conflicts

The principle of complementarity means the ICC should defer to credible domestic or hybrid proceedings. A well-functioning Hybrid Court could handle many cases, allowing the ICC to focus on the most senior perpetrators.

2.1.3 Prosecutorial Strategy

Given the scale of atrocities and limited resources, prosecutors must adopt a strategic approach:

1. **Focus on Senior Leaders:** Prioritize those with greatest responsibility, including political leaders, military commanders, and militia organizers
2. **Representative Cases:** Select cases representing the full geographic and temporal scope of crimes
3. **Gravity and Impact:** Emphasize cases with significant victim numbers or particularly egregious conduct
4. **Evidence Sufficiency:** Only proceed where evidence meets international standards for conviction

2.1.4 Witness Protection and Victim Support

Robust witness protection is essential for successful prosecutions. The Court must establish:

- Comprehensive security assessments and risk management
- Safe houses, relocation options, and identity protection measures
- Psychosocial support for witnesses testifying about traumatic events
- Long-term monitoring and support for witnesses post-testimony
- Special protection measures for vulnerable witnesses, including women and children
- Community protection strategies to safeguard witness families and communities

2.2 Pillar Two: Truth-Seeking and Documentation

2.2.1 National Truth and Reconciliation Commission

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) serves complementary purposes to criminal prosecutions by providing:

- **Comprehensive Historical Record:** Documentation of patterns of abuse across decades, not just individual criminal cases
- **Voice for Victims:** Platform for victims to share their experiences and have suffering acknowledged publicly
- **Societal Understanding:** Education about root causes of conflict and patterns of violence
- **Forward-Looking Recommendations:** Proposals for institutional reform and non-recurrence guarantees

Mandate and Scope:

- **Timeline:** Investigate human rights violations from 1989 (the al-Bashir coup) to the present
- **Geographic Scope:** All regions of Sudan, with particular focus on conflict-affected areas
- **Thematic Areas:** Political violence, ethnic violence, SGBV, economic crimes, and systemic discrimination
- **Duration:** Three-year mandate with possibility of extension

2.2.2 Commission Composition and Operations

Composition:

- 11-15 commissioners representing diverse ethnic, regional, gender, and professional backgrounds
- Minimum 40% women commissioners
- Selection through transparent, consultative process involving civil society
- Integrity requirements: No perpetrators or individuals credibly accused of human rights violations
- International advisors to provide technical support

Operational Principles:

- Victim-centered approach prioritizing safety, dignity, and agency of survivors
- Gender-sensitive methodologies recognizing specific impacts on women and girls
- Regional accessibility through mobile hearings in communities
- Public hearings for willing participants, confidential statement-taking for others
- Collaboration with documentation organizations, academic institutions, and CSOs
- Protection for statement-givers and commission staff

2.2.3 Relationship Between TRC and Criminal Prosecutions

The TRC and criminal prosecutions must operate in complementary, not competing, ways:

- **Information Sharing:** TRC findings can inform prosecutorial strategy without violating confidentiality
- **No Amnesty for Serious Crimes:** TRC participation does not provide immunity for genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes
- **Limited Amnesty Possibility:** For lower-level perpetrators who make full disclosure, conditional amnesty may be considered for lesser crimes
- **Use Immunity:** Statements to TRC cannot be used as evidence in criminal proceedings to encourage participation

2.3 Pillar Three: Reparations and Victim Support

2.3.1 Reparations Program

Reparations acknowledge harm, recognize victims' dignity, and provide tangible assistance. A comprehensive reparations program should include multiple forms:

5. **Individual Monetary Compensation:** Direct payments to documented victims based on severity of harm
6. **Collective Reparations:** Community-level projects in affected areas (schools, health clinics, water systems)
7. **Symbolic Reparations:** Memorials, commemorations, public apologies, and official acknowledgment
8. **Service-Based Reparations:** Healthcare, psychosocial support, legal assistance, education, and vocational training
9. **Restitution:** Return of property, land rights restoration, and assistance with IDP/refugee return

2.3.2 Victim Identification and Registration

Given Sudan's fragmented documentation and ongoing conflict, establishing a victim registry requires:

- Broad eligibility criteria recognizing direct victims and family members of deceased/disappeared
- Accessible registration process with mobile teams reaching remote and displaced populations
- Low evidentiary burden acknowledging difficulty of documentation in conflict
- Flexible documentation accepting community attestation, CSO records, and oral testimony
- Special outreach to marginalized groups and women

2.3.3 Funding Mechanisms

Sustainable reparations funding requires diversified sources:

- **National Budget Allocation:** Dedicated percentage of government revenue for reparations

- **International Assistance:** Bilateral and multilateral donor contributions through trust fund
- **Asset Recovery:** Seizure and liquidation of assets stolen by perpetrators
- **Court-Ordered Payments:** Fines and forfeitures from convicted perpetrators
- **Economic Development Dividends:** Percentage of natural resource revenues allocated to affected regions

2.4 Pillar Four: Institutional Reform and Non-Recurrence Guarantees

2.4.1 Security Sector Reform

Sudan's security forces have been primary perpetrators of human rights violations. Comprehensive SSR is essential:

- **Vetting and Purging:** Remove individuals credibly implicated in serious crimes from security forces
- **Integration and Restructuring:** Merge fragmented armed groups into unified, professional military and police forces
- **DDR Programs:** Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for excess combatants
- **Training and Professionalization:** Human rights training, civilian-military relations, and professional standards
- **Civilian Oversight:** Effective civilian control and parliamentary oversight of security forces
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Military justice reform to ensure perpetrators face consequences

2.4.2 Judicial and Legal Reform

Sudan's justice system requires fundamental transformation:

- **Judicial Independence:** Constitutional guarantees and practical protections for judicial autonomy
- **Legal Framework:** Repeal repressive laws and adopt legislation compliant with international human rights standards
- **Capacity Building:** Training for judges, prosecutors, and lawyers on international law and fair trial standards
- **Access to Justice:** Expand legal aid, strengthen public defense, and improve court infrastructure
- **Traditional Justice Integration:** Recognize and regulate customary and traditional dispute resolution where consistent with human rights

2.4.3 Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures

Corruption and poor governance have fueled conflict and impunity:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Strengthen financial oversight, audit mechanisms, and public procurement systems
- **Anti-Corruption Commission:** Independent body with investigative and prosecutorial authority
- **Revenue Management:** Transparent systems for natural resource revenues, particularly oil and gold

- Public Service Reform: Meritocratic recruitment, fair compensation, and ethics codes for civil servants
- Media Freedom: Protect independent journalism and information access to enable public accountability

2.4.4 Memorialization and Historical Memory

Preserving historical memory helps prevent recurrence and honors victims:

- National Memorial Sites: Museums, monuments, and commemorative spaces in affected regions
- Educational Curricula: Incorporate accurate conflict history and human rights education in schools
- Documentation Centers: Archive testimony, evidence, and historical materials for future generations
- Annual Commemorations: National days of remembrance for victims
- Arts and Culture: Support literature, film, theater, and visual arts addressing the conflict

3. Cross-Cutting Themes and Considerations

3.1 Gender Justice and Women's Participation

Women and girls have borne unique burdens in Sudan's conflicts, facing systematic sexual violence, displacement hardship, and exclusion from peace processes. Gender justice must be central:

- **Meaningful Participation:** Ensure women's representation in all transitional justice mechanisms (minimum 40% in decision-making roles)
- **SGBV Prioritization:** Dedicated investigative capacity, specialized prosecutors, and trauma-informed approaches to sexual violence cases
- **Gender-Sensitive Procedures:** Protect privacy, offer testimony alternatives, and provide psychosocial support for women participants
- **Economic Empowerment:** Reparations and development programs addressing women's economic vulnerability
- **Legal Reform:** Eliminate discriminatory laws and strengthen protections for women's rights

3.2 Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Justice

Sudan has a predominantly young population that has known only conflict. Youth must be central to building peace:

- Youth Representation: Include young people in transitional justice institutions and consultative processes
- Education and Opportunity: Expand educational access and economic opportunities for young people
- Youth Leadership Development: Programs cultivating next-generation leaders committed to peace and human rights
- Technology and Innovation: Leverage youth expertise in technology for documentation, awareness, and accountability

- Ex-Combatant Reintegration: Specialized DDR programs helping former child soldiers and young fighters rebuild lives

3.3 Ethnic Reconciliation and Social Cohesion

Sudan's conflicts have been heavily ethnicized, creating deep divisions. Reconciliation efforts must:

- Address Root Causes: Tackle marginalization, resource inequity, and political exclusion driving ethnic conflict
- Inter-Communal Dialogue: Facilitate local-level dialogue between communities in conflict
- Traditional Reconciliation: Support indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms like judiyya and ajaweed where appropriate
- Counter Hate Speech: Media regulation and education combating ethnic stereotyping and incitement
- Inclusive Governance: Power-sharing arrangements ensuring representation for all ethnic groups
- Regional Development: Targeted investment in historically marginalized regions

3.4 Diaspora and Refugee Participation

Millions of Sudanese live in exile, many as refugees. Their participation is essential:

- Remote Participation: Enable diaspora engagement through virtual hearings, online submissions, and testimony from abroad
- Regional Outreach: Hold sessions in major refugee-hosting countries
- Diaspora Contributions: Facilitate diaspora investment in peace-building and development
- Return Support: Assistance for refugees and IDPs choosing to return, including land rights, documentation, and reintegration support
- Transnational Justice: Coordinate with countries hosting Sudanese refugees on witness protection and evidence gathering

3.5 Civil Society and Community Engagement

Sudanese civil society has been at the forefront of the struggle for justice. CSOs must be partners:

- Consultative Processes: Regular consultation with human rights organizations, victim associations, and community groups
- Capacity Support: Funding and technical assistance for CSOs engaged in transitional justice work
- Protection Space: Ensure enabling environment for civil society, including protection from reprisals
- Outreach Partnership: Collaborate with CSOs on public education and community outreach
- Monitoring Role: Enable civil society monitoring of transitional justice implementation

4. Implementation Strategy and Timeline

4.1 Phased Approach

Given ongoing conflict and institutional weakness, implementation must be phased:

Phase 1: Foundation Building (Months 1-12)

- Negotiate and adopt legal framework for transitional justice institutions
- Select commissioners, judges, and key personnel through transparent processes
- Establish institutional infrastructure, offices, and operational systems
- Launch nationwide public education and outreach campaign
- Begin documentation and evidence preservation
- Initiate victim registration process

Phase 2: Initial Operations (Months 13-36)

- Commence TRC hearings and statement-taking
- Begin initial prosecutions of high-priority cases
- Implement early reparations programs, prioritizing urgent needs
- Launch initial SSR vetting processes
- Pilot community reconciliation programs
- Develop institutional reform blueprints

Phase 3: Full Implementation (Months 37-72)

- Complete TRC mandate and produce final report
- Conclude significant number of prosecutions
- Scale up reparations delivery across all categories
- Complete security sector vetting and restructuring
- Implement legal and judicial reforms
- Establish memorialization sites and programs

Phase 4: Consolidation and Sustainability (Months 73+)

- Complete remaining court cases
- Finalize reparations disbursement
- Transition functions to permanent domestic institutions
- Conduct comprehensive evaluation of transitional justice impact
- Ensure ongoing victim support systems
- Maintain long-term monitoring and follow-up mechanisms

4.2 Resource Requirements and Budget

Comprehensive transitional justice requires significant but achievable resources:

Estimated Budget (10-Year Period):

Component	Estimated Cost (USD)
Hybrid Special Court	\$400-500 million
Truth and Reconciliation Commission	\$50-75 million
Reparations Program	\$2-3 billion
Security Sector Reform	\$500-700 million
Judicial and Legal Reform	\$150-200 million
Memorialization and Archives	\$75-100 million
Civil Society Support and Outreach	\$100-150 million
Total Estimated Cost	\$3.3-4.7 billion

4.3 Coordination and Oversight Mechanisms

Effective coordination is essential to avoid duplication and ensure coherence:

- **National Transitional Justice Commission:** High-level body providing strategic guidance and coordination across all mechanisms
- **Regular Coordination Meetings:** Structured dialogue between different institutions
- **Information Management:** Shared databases and documentation systems (with appropriate confidentiality protections)
- **International Partnership Group:** Coordination forum for international partners supporting transitional justice
- **Independent Monitoring:** Civil society and international monitoring of implementation progress

5. Anticipated Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

5.1 Political Resistance and Spoilers

Challenge: Those who benefited from or perpetrated violations will resist accountability measures, potentially undermining transitional justice through violence, political obstruction, or spoiling peace processes.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Build broad political consensus for transitional justice during peace negotiations
- Ensure international community applies consistent pressure and consequences for obstruction
- Mobilize public support through education and outreach to create political costs for resistance
- Design institutions with sufficient independence to withstand political interference
- Implement security measures protecting personnel, witnesses, and operations
- Provide safe exit pathways for mid-level perpetrators who cooperate, while maintaining accountability for leaders

5.2 Ongoing Insecurity

Challenge: Active conflict limits access to affected areas, endangers participants, and prevents normal functioning of institutions.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Begin with activities possible in secure areas while preparing for expanded operations
- Establish safe corridors and negotiate access with all parties
- Use technology for remote participation and documentation
- Collect testimony from displaced populations and refugees outside conflict zones
- Coordinate with peacekeeping forces where present to ensure security for operations
- Accept that full implementation requires eventual peace settlement while not postponing all action

5.3 Resource Constraints

Challenge: Limited domestic resources and competing development needs may restrict transitional justice funding.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Secure sustained international donor commitments through multi-year pledging conferences
- Establish dedicated trust funds with transparent governance
- Prioritize cost-effective approaches that maximize impact per dollar spent
- Leverage existing infrastructure and local capacity where possible
- Recover stolen assets from perpetrators to supplement funding
- Frame transitional justice as investment in long-term stability and development, not competing expenditure

5.4 Institutional Capacity Gaps

Challenge: Decades of repression have weakened judicial and state institutions, limiting capacity for complex transitional justice work.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Hybrid mechanisms combining international expertise with domestic ownership
- Intensive training programs for Sudanese legal professionals

- Mentoring and peer-learning arrangements pairing international and domestic staff
- Engagement of diaspora professionals with relevant expertise
- Partnerships with academic institutions for research and analysis support
- View capacity-building as integral outcome, not just means to end

5.5 Victim Expectations and Disappointment

Challenge: Victims may have unrealistic expectations about what transitional justice can deliver, leading to disappointment and loss of faith in the process.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Honest communication about limitations, timelines, and realistic outcomes
- Manage expectations early regarding number of prosecutions possible
- Emphasize multiple justice pathways beyond prosecutions
- Deliver early tangible benefits where possible (interim reparations, victim support services)
- Maintain regular communication with victim communities about progress
- Acknowledge that full justice is impossible but meaningful justice is achievable

5.6 Regional Dynamics and External Interference

Challenge: Regional powers and neighboring states may have interests in Sudan that conflict with accountability objectives.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Engage regional actors early to build support for transitional justice
- Leverage African Union and regional organizations as champions
- Coordinate with neighboring countries on witness protection and fugitive apprehension
- Counter spoiling narratives through public diplomacy
- Ensure international backing makes interference costly
- Frame transitional justice as contributing to regional stability

6. Conclusion

Sudan faces profound challenges in addressing decades of atrocities and building sustainable peace. This proposal recognizes that transitional justice is not a panacea, but it is an essential component of any effort to break cycles of violence and create a foundation for democratic governance and respect for human rights.

The framework presented here balances competing imperatives: accountability and reconciliation, justice and peace, international standards and local realities. It recognizes that victims must be at the center of transitional justice, not simply subjects of institutional processes. It acknowledges that meaningful change requires not just dealing with past crimes, but transforming institutions and social relations that enabled those crimes.

Success will require sustained commitment from multiple actors: Sudanese political leaders must demonstrate courage in confronting the past rather than perpetuating impunity; civil society must remain vigilant in advocating for justice while building bridges across communities; international partners must provide patient, long-term support rather than moving to the next crisis; and most importantly, victims and survivors must be empowered as agents of change, not passive recipients of processes designed by others.

The path forward will be difficult, with inevitable setbacks and compromises. However, the alternative—allowing impunity to persist—virtually guarantees future atrocities. By holding perpetrators accountable while creating space for healing and reconciliation, Sudan can begin to build a future where respect for human dignity and the rule of law are fundamental values, not distant aspirations.

This proposal is offered not as a rigid blueprint, but as a framework for dialogue and planning. It must be adapted through inclusive consultation with Sudanese stakeholders, particularly victims and affected communities. The Sudanese people have repeatedly demonstrated their desire for justice, dignity, and democratic governance. With appropriate support and commitment, transitional justice can contribute to realizing that vision.

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Note on Sources: *This proposal draws on extensive documentation of human rights violations in Sudan, international legal frameworks for transitional justice, comparative experiences from other post-conflict contexts, and best practices developed by international organizations and civil society. Given the ongoing nature of the conflict and political transitions, information sources are continuously updated. Readers are encouraged to consult the latest reports from UN mechanisms, international human rights organizations, and Sudanese civil society for the most current information.*

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