

Fighting in Sudan and the abandoned people.

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Tanja Schönwolff, Franz Schmidjell

The roundtable discussion in the Diplomatic Academy Vienna covered the current conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Sudan. The discussion format of the Afrika Club brought together experts with different background, from public institutions (ministries), Sudanese and African Diaspora and Austrian civil society.

Solidarity with Sudan.

At the beginning of the event, Franz Schmidjell welcomed all guests on behalf of the Africa Club and the Sudanese association Banat Mendy. Even though it was beyond our power to stop the war, this round should be seen as a symbolic sign of solidarity.

The current situation in Sudan is catastrophic. The power struggle between the military and the paramilitary forces has far-reaching consequences. The country is in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, accelerated by the fact that even before the war began, more than 15 million people suffered from food shortages. In addition, almost the entire health system has been paralysed, forcing most hospitals to close. Hundreds of thousands of people have already [fled within Sudan or to neighboring](#) because of the violence. While international aid organisations have reduced or stopped their support out of concern for the safety of their staff, local neighbourhood committees and diaspora networks provide assistance to the “abandoned” people with their limited resources.

Current humanitarian situation, conflict analysis and possible solutions.

Afterwards, the moderator, Melita Šunjić (Austrian journalist and migration researcher), took the floor. Three main points were to guide the entire discussion. Firstly, the panellists were asked to comment on the current humanitarian situation. The second round would analyse the actual conflict and the role of internal and external actors. Thirdly and finally, possible solutions and ways out of the crisis would be discussed.

The suffering civil society.

The first speaker, Ishraga M. Hamid (author, activist and founder of Banat Mendy), emphasised that it is very difficult to talk about the war in Sudan. After all, how can it be stopped? The war itself is the result of two opposing camps. The Sudanese army and the RSF (Rapid Support Forces) are fighting each other in the country. Who suffers the most is civil society. People in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, are struggling with hunger. Most shops are closed. What remains is the decision to flee or to stay. A really difficult decision, as Hamid described the situation. When asked what could be done, she replied that we should continue to try to work together. Women in particular play a crucial role. There are a lot of Sudanese women activists living in the diaspora. Networking with each other and providing information is enormously important. Austria could also provide humanitarian aid through such diaspora networks.

More and more people are fleeing.

Christoph Pinter (Head of UNHCR Austria) was then asked to speak in particular about the refugee situation in Sudan. As he said right away, he had never been to Sudan himself. Nevertheless, there was a strong UNHCR presence in the whole region so that he could provide information gathered by his colleagues. Pinter began with some current figures and at the same time pointed out that these were rather a fluid construct. Nevertheless, they are of great importance for the planning of further measures. In a nutshell, the situation on the ground is very unstable for security reasons and more and more people need humanitarian aid. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide this aid. Due to the war, large parts of the infrastructure have been destroyed. In addition, the shortages of water, food, electricity, etc. facilitate the outbreak of (water-borne) diseases. Regardless of this, new arrivals at the borders (often remote places without any infrastructure and services) still have to be accommodated, sometimes also in already overcrowded camps.

Origins of the war.

Mariam Wagialla (architect and urban planner) pointed out the causes of the war in Sudan. The two warring generals Al-Burhan and Hemedti worked together in the Darfur War and rose to political prominence after al-Bashir was overthrown in April 2019. However, the dispute between them began after the coup against the transitional government in October 2021. While al-Burhan tried to restore power to the ousted regime, Hemedti had a strong ambition to rule Sudan, drawing on his young soldiers from Sudan's most marginalized pastoral tribes. Nevertheless, the revolutionary movement continued to demand the restoration of the democratic path. Therefore, a political process was launched in December 2022 that would have handed over power to a civilian government, ending the coup and dismantling the deposed regime. The dispute escalated because Hemedti supported the agreement after his rapprochement with the Forces for Freedom and Change, while Al-Burhan retreated under pressure from the Islamists of the ousted regime. She stressed that women are the most affected by the ongoing war. Despite their leading role in the revolution, they were marginalized during the transitional period.

Projection surface for different interests.

Following on from the history of Sudan, Gerald Hainzl (researcher at the Institute for Peacekeeping and Conflict Management at the National Defence Academy) spoke up. In retrospect, the revolution had been stolen from the people twice and, against all hopes, the people had been confronted with a military dictatorship that violently suppressed their demands. In view of the current situation, the international community should therefore not simply accept the military regime that has usurped power. But it is precisely at this point that Hainzl also sees the complexity of the problem, because it is not just about Sudan. The whole Sahel zone and the neighbouring countries are unstable. A lot of international actors are interfering, who in turn are pursuing different interests. Therefore, it is very difficult to analyse the whole situation, let alone to solve it.

The role of Austria.

Walter-Maria Stojan, from the BMEIA-Department "Sub-Saharan Africa", referred to Austria's very limited influence on the crisis in Sudan. However, this forum was already a good example of what we

could do. The situation in Sudan was a disaster. Even the evacuation of Austrians would have been difficult, but it was the only thing that Austria could have actively done for now. Hence, the urgent appeal that the EU should continue its efforts to promote a ceasefire agreement and call for peace negotiations. Austria, too, should not cease to stand up for a halfway decent situation in Sudan.

Open discussion - What does the war mean?

One person stressed that the war did not start with the fighting in Khartoum on 15 April 2023 and wanted to know why something was not done about it earlier. In addition, the war is not limited to Sudan, but affects the stability in the whole region and should be seen as an international conflict because many different actors are involved. Another speaker referred to the conditions in the capital Khartoum. People were forced to flee. However, fleeing was extremely difficult because there was hardly any functioning infrastructure. The speaker referred to the sad fact that financial resources were often decisive for who could flee and who could not. Furthermore, there was a call to put pressure on the countries that still export weapons to the country. The EU and its member states should also reflect to what extent their foreign policies - like their anti-migration policy (Khartoum process) – contributed to the current crisis.

In view of the dramatic conditions and the lack of basic services in the country, local people are at least helping each other. The so-called “local resistance committees” and ordinary citizens are trying to share the few resources that are still available. They are supported by the Sudanese Diaspora in Europe and other parts of the world. In this context the demand was raised that donors should include the Diaspora in their humanitarian aid strategies. The question of how many followers the two generals have was hard to answer but Hemedti as well as the old regime have their supporters within the country and abroad.

And yet, even if one of the two parties to the conflict were to lose, would the people of Sudan actually win?

Further information

[Sudan: Auswirkungen des bewaffneten Konflikts in einem fragilen Land](#)

von Mariam Wagjalla, Zeitschrift International, 25. April 2023

[Sudan – Die zweimal gestohlene Revolution](#)

von Gerald Hainzl, IFK Monitor, Mai 2023

[The kandakas of Sudan speak up on the country's plight](#)

By Nesrein El-Bakhshawangy and with Ishraga Hamid, Al Majalla, May 2023

[As aid efforts ramp up in Sudan, local groups must take centre stage](#)

By Bashàir Ahmed, The New Humanitarian, May 15, 2023

[Men Fighting, Women Breaking-up: Sudanese Women's Movements, the Wing of the Patriarch?](#)

By Reem Abbas, African Arguments, April 13, 2023

[How the International Community Failed Sudan](#)

By George Clooney and John Prendergast, Time, April 28, 2023