

**Forum:** Historical Security Council

**Issue:** Western Sudan: The outbreak of armed rebellion in Darfur and the question of humanitarian concerns in Western Sudan (20 December 2002)

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## Introduction

The armed uprising in Darfur, a region in Western Sudan, was one of the most devastating conflicts in the past two decades. While tensions between ethnic communities and targeted violence had long characterised the Darfur region, the events occurring in 2002 represent a significant turning point.

For decades, Darfur has experienced a complex combination of environmental issues, government inefficiencies and social inequalities. The region, which is roughly the size of France, is home to around 80 different tribes and ethnic groups. The relations between them is often governed through tribal agreements and a rotating use of land. However, as Sudan experiences periods of drought and political turmoil, these systems are being eroded. By the early 2000s, Darfur has become one of the most marginalised regions in Sudan. The resulting feelings of discrimination and frustration provide the perfect environment for armed conflict.

On the 20 December 2002, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) have formally declared war on the Sudanese Government. They argue that years of political exclusion and deliberate underdevelopment have left them no option other than military retaliation. The declaration of war in Darfur has turned local conflicts into full-scale armed confrontation with immense humanitarian consequences.

This moment marks an important turning point. For years, humanitarian organisations operating in Sudan have long reported signs of mass displacement, increasing food insecurity and a growing presence of militias. The Janjaweed is one such militia, widely accused of orchestrating violent attacks on civilian populations. Their actions - often including food sources and mass intimidation - reflect a pattern of punishing communities they believe to be sympathetic to the rebels. As these tensions between the government and rebel groups have increased, civilians in Darfur are becoming increasingly more vulnerable.

The conflicts come at a time when Sudan is undergoing delicate negotiations with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in the South. While the government focuses its resources on ending the decade-long civil war, many Darfuris feel increasingly ignored, both politically and economically.

By late 2002, international awareness of the deteriorating situation in Darfur is still limited, but slowly increasing. Aid organisations have begun reporting an increase in displacement and violence, indicating that a more organised conflict is taking shape. The events of 20 December 2002 mark the moment when the crisis can no longer be simply characterised as a regional conflict.



*Map of Sudan, 2002 and its Position within the African Continent*

## Definition of Key Terms

### Janjaweed

In the context of Darfur, the term Janjaweed refers to armed Arab militias who operate primarily on horse or camelback. Although their organisation is highly decentralised, they are widely seen by the non-Arab communities as acting as paramilitary forces for the Sudanese government. While the Sudanese government has denied providing support, evidence suggests that it offered financial and tactical assistance to these militias. The Janjaweed have been associated with targeted violence against non-Arab communities, and their emergence is often traced from small defence groups that gradually expanded into large-scale offensive operations.

### Ethnic Cleansing

The term “ethnic cleansing” has no official legal definition, but in the context of the Darfur conflict, it has been used to describe alleged deliberate attempts to displace non-Arab ethnic groups, through violent coercion. As of 2002, these allegations were denied by the Sudanese government, and were not officially recognised internationally. The concept refers specifically to forced displacement motivated by ethnic identity, involving violence and intimidation that makes it impossible for targeted civilians to remain in their homes.

### Humanitarian Corridor

A humanitarian corridor refers to a negotiated geographic passage that allows for the safe movement of aid and other supplies, into conflict zones. In Darfur's case, the establishment of such corridors is becoming increasingly necessary as aid agencies face severe restrictions on movement without security guarantees. The concept can also apply to designated routes intended to allow civilians to flee safety.

## Arab and non-Arab

In Darfur, “Arab” or “non-Arab” identities are not strictly racial or linguistic categories but also social labels. “Arab” often refers to tribes associated with pastoralist cultures, while “non-Arab” generally refers to mainly sedentary farming communities. The division between two parties increased in importance due to perceptions of unequal government support and competition for land and resources.

## Hakura System

The Hakura System is an important local government structure in Darfur, in which Tribal leaders are responsible for distributing land and resolving disputes. Its erosion in the late twentieth century has weakened local mechanisms of conflict resolution, contributing to rising tensions between communities.

## Background Information

Darfur is a region located in Western Sudan, and is home to a diverse population of both people of Arab and non-Arab ethnicity. Many of these groups have traditionally been either pastoral or subsistence farmers. Tensions in this region are not new; resource scarcity and political marginalisation have long shaped local tensions.

For centuries, Darfur had been an autonomous sultanate with its own political laws and taxation systems. It was incorporated into Sudan in the early twentieth century, which saw its autonomy gradually lessened. Despite this, the region continued to rely on local leadership structures that had effectively managed disputes over natural resources. This balance began to break down as environmental pressures pushed communities into increased competition.

Darfur’s geographic location has also played an important role in shaping its modern identity. Situated at the crossroads of trade and migration routes, its ethnic groups interacted frequently with other communities, creating a highly mobile population. During the 1980s and 1990s, cross-border conflict with Chad introduced new weapons into the area, altering the scale and intensity of local violence. Furthermore, the spread of automatic weapons allowed small disputes to escalate rapidly.

### Subtopic A: Historical Marginalisation:

Sudan's government was based in Khartoum, where its economic and political power was centralised, leaving rural areas such as Darfur underdeveloped despite their large populations. Darfur lacked secure infrastructure, healthcare, and most importantly, political representation.

From the 1980s onwards, competition for scarce natural resources intensified between Arab and sedentary non-Arab groups. The Sudanese government failed to address the emerging violence within the communities, which provided an environment in which local militias flourished. As communities began arming themselves, tensions escalated, ultimately contributing to the formation of rebel groups.

The global political environment also played a role in the marginalisation experienced within Sudan. Sudan faced international isolation and sanctions due to its policies and allegations of supporting extremist groups. This led to a reduction in international engagement, which allowed internal issues to escalate with no pressure for the government to reform.

### Subtopic B: Emergence of Rebel Groups:

By the early 2000s, a peace process began between the Sudanese Government and Southern Rebels. Marginalised groups in Darfur viewed this process as excluding their interests, leading to the formation of two main rebel groups: the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

On the 20 December 2002, the conflict has escalated dramatically when Darfur rebels publicly declared war on the Sudanese Government. They claim that the negotiations have failed, and that in order to defend their communities, armed resistance is required. The government is responding by arming militia groups, known as Janjaweed, to try and suppress the rebellion. The conflict is spiralling, with widespread attacks on villages.

Before their formal emergence, these groups developed a loyal following through underground networks. Their early manifestos placed an emphasis on their right to self-defence and the need to challenge the power based in Khartoum. Both groups drew heavily on the frustrations of the younger generations who had experienced government neglect throughout their whole lives. JEM, in particular, developed an ideology rooted in a critique of Sudan's authoritarian political system.

## Major Parties Involved

### Government of Sudan

The Government of Sudan claims that its actions are aimed at restoring national security, and combatting the rebel groups. While officials deny supporting the Janjaweed, they do admit to efforts to combat the insurgency. Their main claim is that the conflict was exacerbated by Western governments and NGOs, and therefore strongly opposes their involvement in conflict mediation.

In addition, the Sudanese Government, which is dominated by the National Congress Party (NCP), view the rebellion as a direct threat to national stability as it clashed with the peace negotiation with Southern rebel groups. Officials have often characterized the Darfur conflict as a foreign-inspired movement, alleging support from Eritrea. They also argue that the cause of the uprising was resource shortages, not the policy of the state.

### Rebel Group Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A):

The SLM/A are fighting for political inclusion within the Sudanese Government. They are accusing the government of discrimination towards non-Arabs and failing to protect or advocate for non-Arab communities. In addition to these core claims, the SLM/A emphasize that their uprisings are part of a broader struggle against authoritarianism, with many of the movement's founders being university-educated activists.

### Rebel Group Justice and Equality Movement (JEM):

JEM's main focus is on political reforms within Sudan and ending the authoritarian rule. Like the SLM, it accuses the government of excluding non-Arabs from political representation and committing various human rights abuses.

JEM distinguishes itself from the SLM/A mainly through its ideological foundation. JEM sees the Darfur conflict as a part of the nationwide struggle in Sudan for equal power.

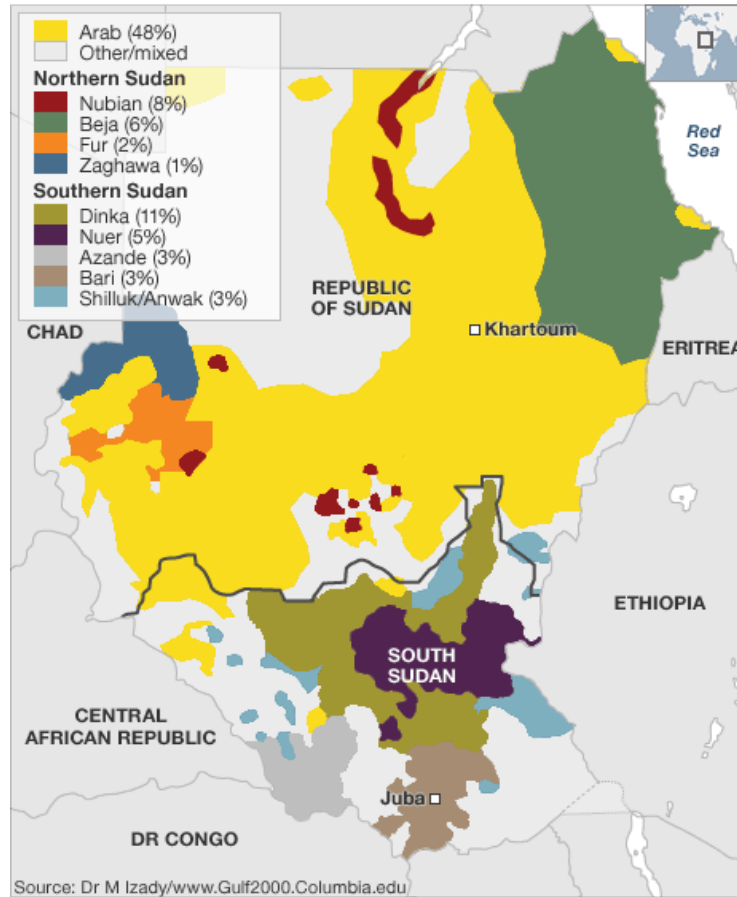
### Jajaweed Militias:

The Janjaweed militias claim that they are protecting the communities of pastoralist farmers who were Arab. They are alleged to have received supplies and munitions from the Sudanese government, however this was denied. They are accused of targeted violence towards non-Arab people, as well as sexual violence.

In 2002, the Janjaweed does not constitute a single unified militia, rather a group of armed Arab groups that are loosely connected. Their mission is to defend communities against what they saw as growing militarisation amongst non-Arab groups.

However, reports from humanitarian observers indicate that raids by Janjaweed militias increased over the following two years, often involving coordinated assaults aimed at targeting specific ethnic groups and depopulating their areas. The government denies supporting the group; however, the timing and pattern of attacks align with their counterinsurgency efforts now underway.

### Distribution of ethnic groups



*Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Sudan, 2002*

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1980s-1990s	Minor clashes between Arab Nomads and non-Arab farmers over natural resources such as water. The reoccurring droughts intensify this competition. During these decades, Darfur experiences a series of droughts, which pushed nomadic groups further south towards farming areas. This triggered disputes over land rights, which then turned into more violent confrontations.
1999-2001	Resistance groups form as dissatisfaction within the Darfur region grows. Complaints about the government grows, and criticism of marginalisation increases. The early organisational groundwork for groups such as the JEM and SLM/A began during this period. The frustration with the government also increased as the people saw the government enter peace negotiations in the south while ignoring the west.
Early 2002	SLM/A and JEM conduct their initial attacks on isolated police stations and military posts. This demonstrates the group's power to challenge the governmental authority, serving both a strategic and symbolic purpose.

December 20, 2002

Rebel groups SLM/A and JEM formally declare war against the Sudanese government, marking the official outbreak of armed conflict. This follows months of escalating violence and represents the shift from scattered clashes to open confrontation. At this stage, the international community has not yet focused on the Darfur region, with global attention focussed on the North-South civil war.

## UN Involvement and Relevant Treaties

### Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) - 1989

Before the conflict fully emerged in 2002, UN involvement was indirect and limited, as resources were already stretched across other parts of Sudan. The UN had been monitoring the situation in Sudan due to the North-South. Through Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) in 1989, the UN coordinated aid to conflict zones, however Darfur was not a central focus. UN agencies had warned of food insecurity since 2001 due to drought and localised violence.

### International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) obligated Sudan to protect civilians against militia violence. Sudan was a signatory since 1986, however throughout 2001-2002, humanitarian rights observers raised concerns that Sudan was violating these obligations – both through alleged support to certain militia groups through its failure to prevent attacks. Although no formal condemnation has emerged, discussions are beginning in legal circles.

### African Charter on Human and People's Rights

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights ensures signatories commitment to non-discrimination and protecting civilians from communal violence. Groups such as the African Commission on Human and People's Rights have expressed concern about recurring violence in Darfur, especially in regard to restrictions on humanitarian access. However, in 2002 they lack the capacity to intervene directly, which limited its influence.

## Previous Solutions

### Tribal Reconciliation Conferences (1989-1997)

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, there were numerous Tribal Reconciliation Conferences held in the Darfur region, in an effort to reconcile clashes between Arab and non-Arab groups. These efforts often collapsed due to a lack of support from the central government and the increasing availability of firearms. As these local disputes became more militarised, the agreements reached at this conference proved to be ineffective.



## Administrative Restructuring

The Sudanese Government tried implementing policies in an effort to reduce tensions, which would divide Darfur into additional administrative units. The reforms intended to increase political representation, but instead increased tensions between the different ethnic groups for administrative control. By politicising these leadership roles, the Sudanese Government deepened the divides between people.

## Local Ceasefire Attempts (2001-2002)

As violence increased, there were multiple attempts made by local leaders to negotiate ceasefires between armed groups. Sadly, they were often short-lived due to the proliferation of weapons and a lack of an enforcement system. During this period, tribal elders attempted to intervene as violence between militias increased, creating local ceasefires. However, these agreements were frequently violated within weeks, mostly due to the rise of armed groups outside traditional authority structures. Furthermore, rebel leaders often rejected proposals that did not address structural issues, resulting in the peace efforts failing.

## Possible Solutions

### Inclusive Political Negotiations

For peace to be sustainable, the voices of Darfurian communities must be included in national political processes. The current exclusion of Darfur from the government institutions has only increased the tensions in the region. Establishing platforms or forums that allow representatives to voice their concerns would help address long-standing issues and reduce the appeal of armed militias.

### Demilitarisation of Local Militias

A crucial step in the peace process is the Demilitarisation of Local Militias, particularly the Janjaweed. The Sudanese Government would need to halt any support of paramilitary actors, and rebel groups would need to stop attacking government institutions.

### Immediate Humanitarian Monitoring

An urgent priority is the establishment of Humanitarian corridors to enable aid organisations to reach the vulnerable people in Darfur. Given the instability in the region, these organisations would require firm guarantees from both the Sudanese Government and the rebel groups, that they would be able to deliver aid and food safely.

### Long-Term Development Investment

If peace is to be long-standing, it is critical to address Darfur's chronic underdevelopment. If competition over scarce resources is to be decreased, then infrastructure such as water sources and

improved living standards will have to be improved. In addition to this, land reforms would create formal land-use-rights, and reduce future disputes between nomadic and farming communities.

## Questions to Consider

1. How can the Sudanese Government effectively include Darfurian representatives in national decision-making processes?
2. Would decentralization of power help address regional tensions in Darfur?
3. What role could neutral mediators play in facilitating dialogue between the two parties?
4. What immediate interventions could prevent the further escalation of sexual violence and attacks on civilians?
5. How can development initiatives ensure they do not unintentionally deepen inequalities or reinforce ethnic divisions?

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