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# Sudan is facing a devastating humanitarian crisis—the world must do more to protect the population's health

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It's been one year since war broke out in Sudan. The country is facing a devastating humanitarian crisis, which is not attracting sufficient attention from the international community or media headlines. Half of the population, or 25 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> Over 8.6 million people are displaced within Sudan and in neighbouring countries.<sup>2</sup> Many of them have been forced to move multiple times.

At the same time, 18 million people are facing acute food insecurity and 5 million are on the brink of famine.<sup>3</sup> One in seven children under the age of five are acutely malnourished.<sup>4</sup> With the lean season expected to start soon, and without assistance, the situation will only worsen in the coming months.

On top of this, the health system is collapsing, especially in hard-to-reach areas, with health facilities destroyed, looted, or struggling with acute shortages of staff, medicines, vaccines, equipment and supplies. Only some 30% of health facilities are still functioning, and at minimal levels.<sup>5</sup> Medical supplies in the country are estimated at about 25% of what is needed.<sup>5</sup> Some states, such as Darfur, have not received any medical supplies for the past year.

This means that in many areas pregnant women and newborn babies are not getting care, there is no vaccination for children, and patients living with diabetes, hypertension, cancer, or kidney failure are at risk of severe complications or even death from the lack of medication.

The situation is not much better in the neighbouring countries where refugees from Sudan are fleeing. Chad is currently hosting close to 40% of all Sudanese refugees in the region.<sup>2</sup> In Eastern Chad, refugees continue to arrive, many of them with severe conflict-related injuries and experiencing malnutrition and mental health trauma, putting a further strain on an already weak and fragile health system. Outbreaks of malaria, measles, dengue fever, and hepatitis E are also spreading.

Throughout this crisis, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and partners have been on the ground. WHO has reached close to 2.5 million people through direct support to services and delivery of emergency supplies. 3.3 million people received care in mobile clinics. We have also treated 433 000 Sudanese refugees in mobile clinics in eastern Chad.

In the past few months, WHO and partners' efforts have resulted in a decline in the number of cases of cholera, dengue, and malaria. 4.5 million people over one year of age received the Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV) in six high-risk states. 5.7 million people in seven states were vaccinated against measles/rubella. We have delivered supplies for the treatment of 115

000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition with medical complications.

Still, much more is needed to save lives and protect people's health.

Taking place today, The International Humanitarian Conference for Sudan and the neighbouring countries, should consider three priorities:

Firstly, we need humanitarian access across borders, and humanitarian corridors, especially in areas not controlled by the government, such as the Darfur and Kordofan states. Access through the Adré crossing with Chad is vital.

Secondly, we call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law and stop attacks on health. Health workers, patients, hospitals and other facilities must never be targets.

There have been over 60 attacks on health facilities in the past year.<sup>6</sup> Health workers, patients, hospitals and other facilities must never be targets.

Thirdly, we are ready to scale operations, but cannot do it without more support from donors: the health sector has less than 12% of the funding it needs.

Without a stop to the fighting and unhindered access for the delivery of humanitarian aid, Sudan's crisis will dramatically worsen in the months to come and could impact the whole region. The international community has not enough to help the people of Sudan. We must urgently do more.

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6 WHO surveillance system for attacks on health care (SSA) <https://extranet.who.int/ssa/Index.aspx>