



SCARRED IN SILENCE:

THE SUDAN CONFLICT THROUGH THE EYES AND DRAWINGS OF CHILDREN



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACHPR	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NIAC	Non-International Armed Conflict
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPAC	Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
TRAID	Trauma Rescue Aid
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is produced by Trauma Rescue Aid (TRAID), a refugee-led grassroots and nonprofit organization working with displaced Sudanese communities and survivors of violence, with the support of Avaaz, a global civic movement operating across 193 nations. It documents the stories and experiences of 217 Sudanese children impacted by war, aged six to thirteen, who participated in a psychosocial support programme at the TRAIID center in Seeta, Mukono District, and Amdulu IDP camp in South Kordofan between January and March 2026.

The children in this report did not choose to be in it. They chose to draw. During facilitated sessions at the TRAIID center, they were given paper, colours, and the freedom to express whatever they needed to express. Some drew their homes. Some drew their schools. Some drew the moment soldiers arrived. Some drew their dead. Where children were willing, they spoke about what they had drawn. Those accounts were recorded by TRAIID facilitators and translated from Arabic to English where necessary. No child was interviewed. No child was prompted. All names in this report are pseudonyms.

The conflict that produced these drawings began on 15 April 2023, when fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It has since become one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in the world. More than 15.6 million children are currently affected.¹

Approximately 13 million of Sudan's 17 million school-age children are out of school.² Over 612,000 children were treated for severe acute malnutrition in 2025 alone.³

An estimated 15.7 million children and their families are at risk of mental health conditions arising directly from the conflict.⁴

What none of those numbers can carry is what the children in this report carry: the specific weight of a particular loss, in a particular place, on a particular day. A girl who watched her two best friends shot dead on the road home from school. A boy who lay on the ground at a checkpoint while the men around him were executed. A six-year-old who asked if she could take a green crayon home to her mother.

The Findings are organized across five thematic areas: witnessing death; violence and terror; soldiers, fear and hiding; loss of education and belonging; and home, hope and innocence. This report also includes a Legal Analysis section, which sets out the international humanitarian law and human rights framework applicable to the violations these children documented, and connects each child's testimony to a specific legal obligation. This report calls on governments, international bodies, civil society organizations, and the general public to act on what these children have documented. Recommendations are set out in Section 6.

¹UNICEF Sudan. Humanitarian Situation Report: October 2025. November 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/reports/unicef-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-october-2025>

²Save the Children International. More Than Three Quarters of Sudan's Children Out of School as New Academic Year Begins. September 2025. <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/more-three-quarters-sudans-children-out-school-new-academic-year-begins>

³UNICEF Sudan. Humanitarian Situation Report 2025 (Annual). February 2026. <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/reports/unicef-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-2025>

⁴International Rescue Committee. Sudan's Children Are Suffering: Here's How Conflict Is Destroying Their Future. February 2025. <https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/sudans-children-are-suffering-heres-how-conflict-destroying-their-future>

What the programme itself recorded

Figures below come only from TRAIID's own drawing and testimony programme — not from UNICEF, Save the Children, or other cited sources.

217

children (ages 6–13) took part in the psychosocial programme, Jan–Mar 2026

13

children's drawings and testimonies are featured in this report

2

programme sites: Seeta, Mukono District (Uganda) & Amdulu IDP camp (South Kordofan)

7

home regions represented among the 13 featured children

FIG. 1

Ages of the 13 featured children

Youngest participant was six years old (Leila); the oldest featured accounts came from thirteen-year-olds (Omar, Sara). Most cluster at ages 10–12.

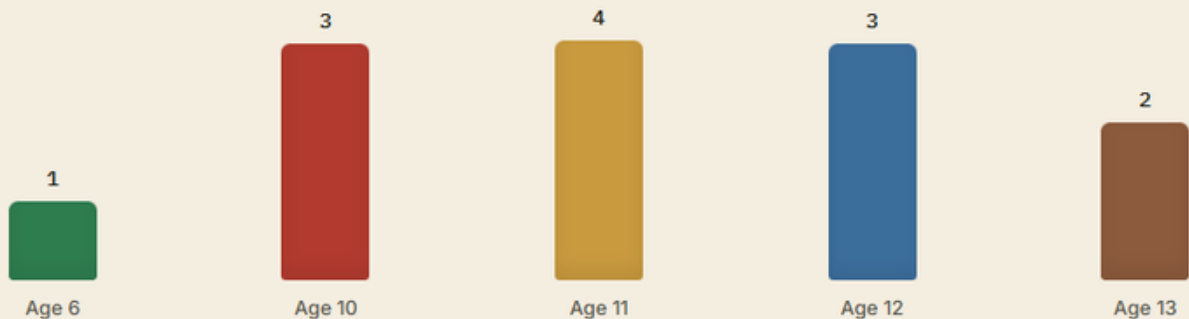


FIG. 2

Where the 13 children were displaced from

Khartoum and Madani each account for three of the thirteen accounts — the two most represented home regions.

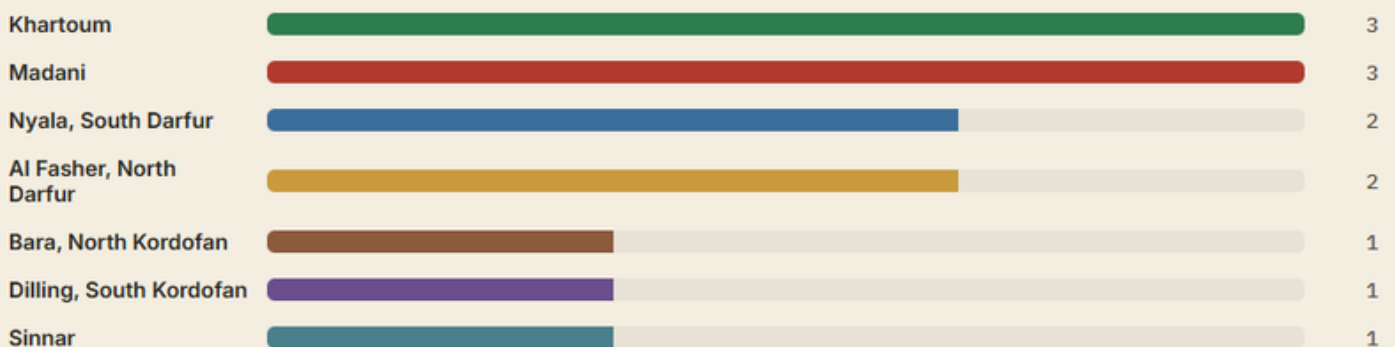


FIG. 3

Thematic distribution across accounts

TRAID grouped the 13 accounts into five themes. Violence and Terror is the largest, comprising over a third of all featured testimonies.

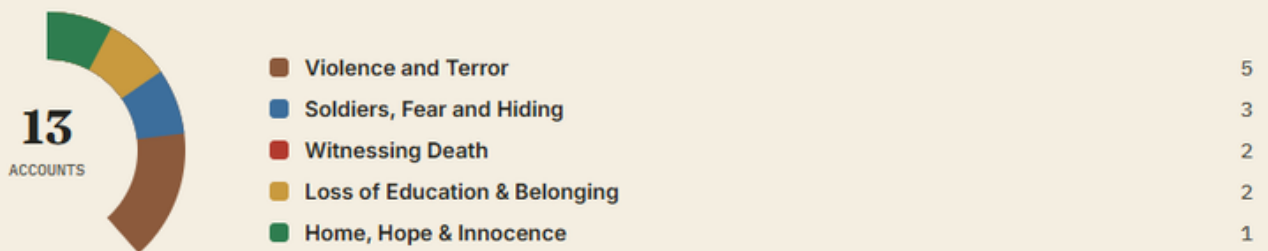


FIG. 4

All 13 featured children

Names are pseudonyms assigned by TRAID. Full accounts appear in Section 3 of the report.

CHILD	AGE	ORIGIN	THEME
Amira	10	Khartoum	Witnessing Death
Nour	12	Madani	Aerial Bombing
Hana	11	Madani	Violence and Terror
Kareem	11	Bara, North Kordofan	Violence and Terror
Samia	10	Nyala, South Darfur	Aerial Bombing
Omar	13	Nyala, South Darfur	Violence and Terror
Tariq	10	Dilling, South Kordofan	Violence and Terror
Zara	11	Sinnar	Aerial Bombing
Rania	11	Khartoum	Aerial Bombing
Yusuf	12	Al Fasher, North Darfur	Aerial Bombing
Dina	12	Al Fasher, North Darfur	Loss of Education & Belonging
Sara	13	Khartoum	Loss of Education & Belonging
Leila	6	Madani	Home, Hope & Innocence

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Sudan Conflict

On 15 April 2023, armed conflict broke out in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF had been formed from the Janjaweed militias that carried out mass atrocities in Darfur in the early 2000s and had grown into a parallel military structure with significant political and economic power. When negotiations over its integration into the national army collapsed, fighting began in Khartoum and spread rapidly to Darfur, Kordofan, Al Jazirah, Sennar, and other states. Within weeks, what had been a political dispute between two military factions had become a war being fought in hospitals, markets, schools, and residential streets.

By 2025, the crisis had grown into one of the largest humanitarian emergencies on earth. More than 30.4 million people, over half of Sudan's total population, required urgent humanitarian assistance, a 23 per cent increase from the previous year.⁵

Sudan now holds the world's largest and fastest-growing displacement crisis, with 12.8 million people forcibly displaced from their homes.⁶

In the first quarter of 2025 alone, verified child casualties increased by 83 per cent compared to the same period in 2024. In Al Fasher, North Darfur, more than 70 children were killed or maimed in under three months.⁷

The children whose drawings and accounts appear in this report came from Khartoum, Nyala, Al Fasher, Madani, Sennar, South Kordofan, and Bara. They did not leave because they wanted to. They left because staying had become impossible.

1.2 About TRAIID

Trauma Rescue Aid (TRAID) is a refugee-led, grassroots nonprofit organization founded on 15 April 2023, the day the Sudan conflict began. TRAID was not founded in response to a news report. It was founded by people who were watching the crisis happen to people they knew. The organization works directly with war-displaced communities, survivors of violence, and children affected by conflict, providing psychosocial support, trauma therapy, counseling, and art-based activities including drawing and storytelling.

TRAID operates in Seeta, Mukono District, Uganda and IDP camps in Sudan where it supports Sudanese refugees and displaced families through child-friendly spaces, gender-based violence prevention and response, peacebuilding, community empowerment, and livelihood training. It also documents the testimonies of survivors and children to support advocacy, raise awareness, and advance access to justice for those the war has harmed. The organization's vision is to build a society in which conflicts are resolved through dialogue rather than violence, and in which survivors and displaced communities have access to healing and justice.

⁵UNICEF Sudan. Humanitarian Situation Report: October 2025. November 2025.

⁶Save the Children UK. Sudan's Zamzam Refugee Camp: Children's Lives on the Brink. March 2025. <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/2025/sudans-zamzam-refugee-camp-childrens-lives-brink-medical-and>

⁷UNICEF Press Release. 825,000 Children Trapped as Conflict Rages in Sudan's Al Fasher and Zamzam Camp. March 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/825000-children-trapped-conflict-rages-sudans-al-fasher-and-zamzam-internally>

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Programme Design

The drawing programme was conducted as part of TRAIID's broader psychosocial support activities for Sudanese children displaced in IDP camps. It ran from January to March 2026. Children attended sessions at the TRAIID center in Seeta, Mukono District and Amdulu IDP. They traveled to the center for activities and did not reside there.

The design of the programme reflected a well-established principle in trauma-informed work with children that direct verbal questioning about traumatic experiences can cause additional harm, particularly in formal or unfamiliar settings. Drawing offers a different kind of entry point. It is non-threatening. It allows a child to approach or avoid difficult material at their own pace, placing control firmly with the child. Sessions were facilitated in both English and Arabic, ensuring that language presented no barrier to participation. TRAIID staff were present throughout, maintaining a safe, child-friendly environment. No session was structured as an interview. Children were given drawing materials and time. What they produced was theirs.

2.2 Participant Selection

The thirteen children featured in this report ranged in age from six to thirteen years at the time of the programme. All participants were Sudanese children who had been displaced by the conflict and were living in or around Seeta, Mukono District at the time of the programme. They are presented not as a statistically representative sample but as individuals whose accounts collectively illuminate the breadth of what children have lived through in this conflict.

2.3 Consent and Ethical Considerations

Parental or guardian consent was obtained before any child participated in the programme. Consent covered participation in the drawing activities, the recording of any verbal account the child chose to share, and the use of the child's drawing and testimony in TRAIID's documentation and advocacy work. No child was asked to describe what they had drawn. Where a child voluntarily explained their drawing, a TRAIID facilitator recorded what was said. All names in this report are pseudonyms. The programme was conducted in accordance with TRAIID's trauma-informed care principles, which place the dignity, safety, and agency of the child at the center of every interaction. The organization acknowledges with gratitude the support of Avaaz, whose partnership made this programme possible.

2.4 Limitations

This report documents the accounts of children who chose to speak. It does not capture the experiences of those who drew but remained silent, and it should not be read as a complete picture of what the programme produced or what the children in it have lived through. Translation from Arabic to English was carried out by TRAIID staff. Every effort was made to preserve the meaning and tone of the original accounts. Where a child's words are quoted directly, they appear in italics. Minor grammatical adjustments have been made in some cases for readability, without altering the substance of what was said.

3. FINDINGS

The accounts that follow were not collected. They were offered. Each child who chose to speak did so voluntarily, in a setting designed to be safe, and about a drawing they had already made. The words are theirs. The analysis that accompanies each account is TRAIID's attempt to situate what each child said within the broader documented reality of the Sudan conflict, so that the testimony is understood not as an isolated story but as evidence of a pattern that has affected millions.

Five thematic areas emerged across the programme. They are not mutually exclusive. The same elements, soldiers, aircraft, flight, loss, appear across multiple sections because they recur inside the conflict itself: the same things happening to different children, in different places, repeatedly.

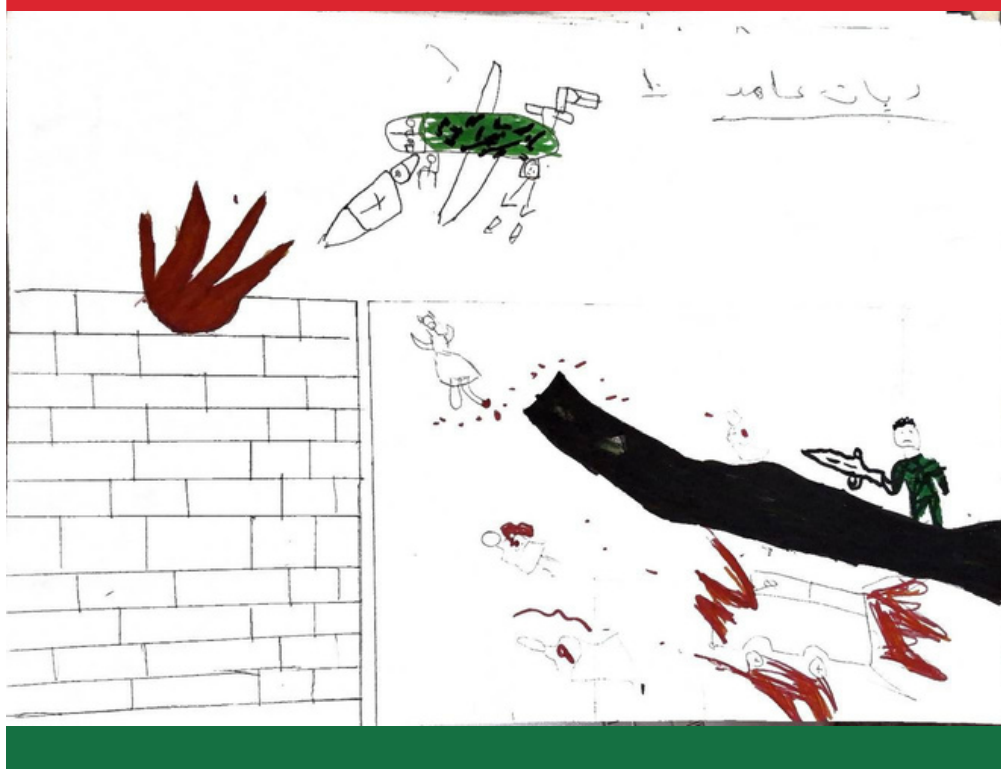
3.1 Witnessing Death

There is a particular kind of damage done to a child who watches someone die. It does not matter whether the child understands what they have seen. The image lodges. It returns at night, in dreams that cannot be controlled. It restructures the child's understanding of what the world is capable of. The two children in this section were not told about death from a distance. They were standing beside it or running from it. They were present in their bodies at the moment it happened, and they have carried that presence with them into displacement.

According to the World Health Organization, 22 per cent of people affected by conflict develop a mental disorder such as PTSD, depression, or anxiety. Among children with direct exposure to violence, that risk is significantly higher.⁸

⁸World Health Organization. Mental Health and Conflict. 2022. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement>

Pseudonym: **Amira** | Age: **10 years** | Originally from: **Khartoum**



We were going home from school together, me and my friends Ruqaya, Malaz, and Mawada. Our school is called Tibyan School in Arkawit, in Khartoum. We were just walking like we always do.

On the road, we saw many soldiers. At first, we did not understand what was happening. Then they started shooting. There was also an airplane flying in the sky. It was very loud and very scary.

We all started crying and running. I did not know where to go. Everything was full of smoke and looked black. My friends Ruqaya and Malaz were shot and they died. Many people were running everywhere.

Now, every day when I sleep, I see my friends in my dreams. It makes me cry and feel very scared.

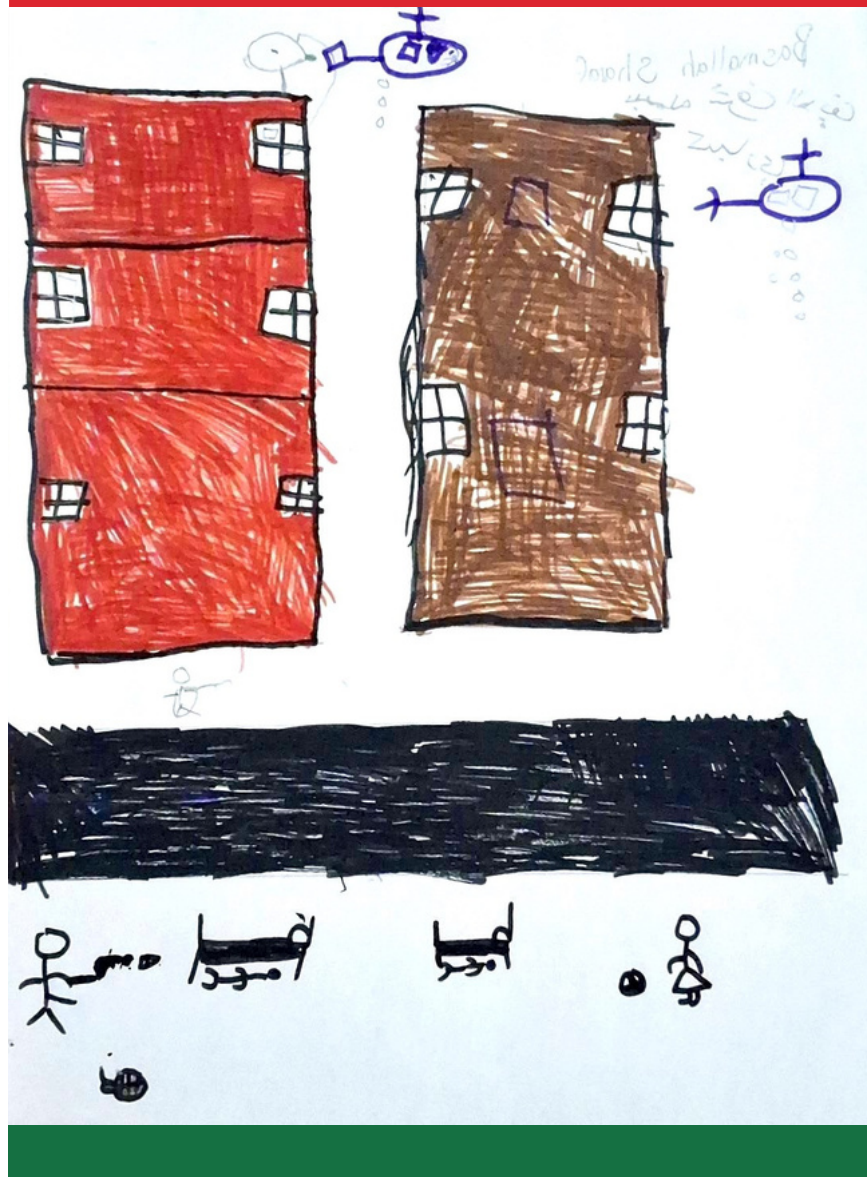
Amira was walking home from school. That is the most important sentence in her account, not because it is the most dramatic, but because of what it establishes. She was doing something children do everywhere, every day. The ordinariness of that walk is what the violence shattered. Ruqaya and Malaz were not lost in battle.

They were walking home. Amira survived, and now she sleeps and sees them, and wakes up crying. She has been carrying this without access to sustained professional psychological support.

Her testimony is consistent with findings documented by Save the Children in their June 2025 consultation with displaced children from Zamzam Camp, where children described recurring nightmares, profound grief, and a permanent loss of the sense of safety they once had.⁹

⁹Save the Children. Children Caught in Conflict: Listening to Displaced Voices from Zamzam Camp, North Darfur. June 2025.

Pseudonym: Nour | Age: 12 years | Originally from: Madani



We used to sleep outside in our compound when it is hot. One day, very early in the morning, my mother woke up and started screaming, "Wake up, wake up." I woke up fast. Everything was confusing and loud. We heard airplanes in the sky, and it started dropping bombs. I ran and hid under the bed with my brother. My sister Sara was outside and they shot her in the stomach and she died.

Nour returned to the same memory later in the programme, this time describing the drawing of her home:

This is our home. We used to sleep outside in the compound because it was too hot inside the room. These are my beds, and my sister Sara used to sleep outside too. One day, an airplane came. It killed my sister Sara when she was with her friends at our neighbor's house. She was cut in her stomach. She died. I still think about her. I miss my sister a lot.

Nour shared two accounts of the same event at different points during the programme. That she returned to it is significant. The detail she added the second time, that Sara was with friends at the neighbor's house, that she was cut in her stomach, suggests that the memory was not releasing her.

It was precise. It had the kind of specificity that does not dull over time. Sleeping outside in the compound during Sudan's hot season is a familiar routine, not a hardship. Sara died in the space that was supposed to be the safest in the world for her. Nour is twelve years old. She drew her home, and her sister's bed, and the place where Sara was.

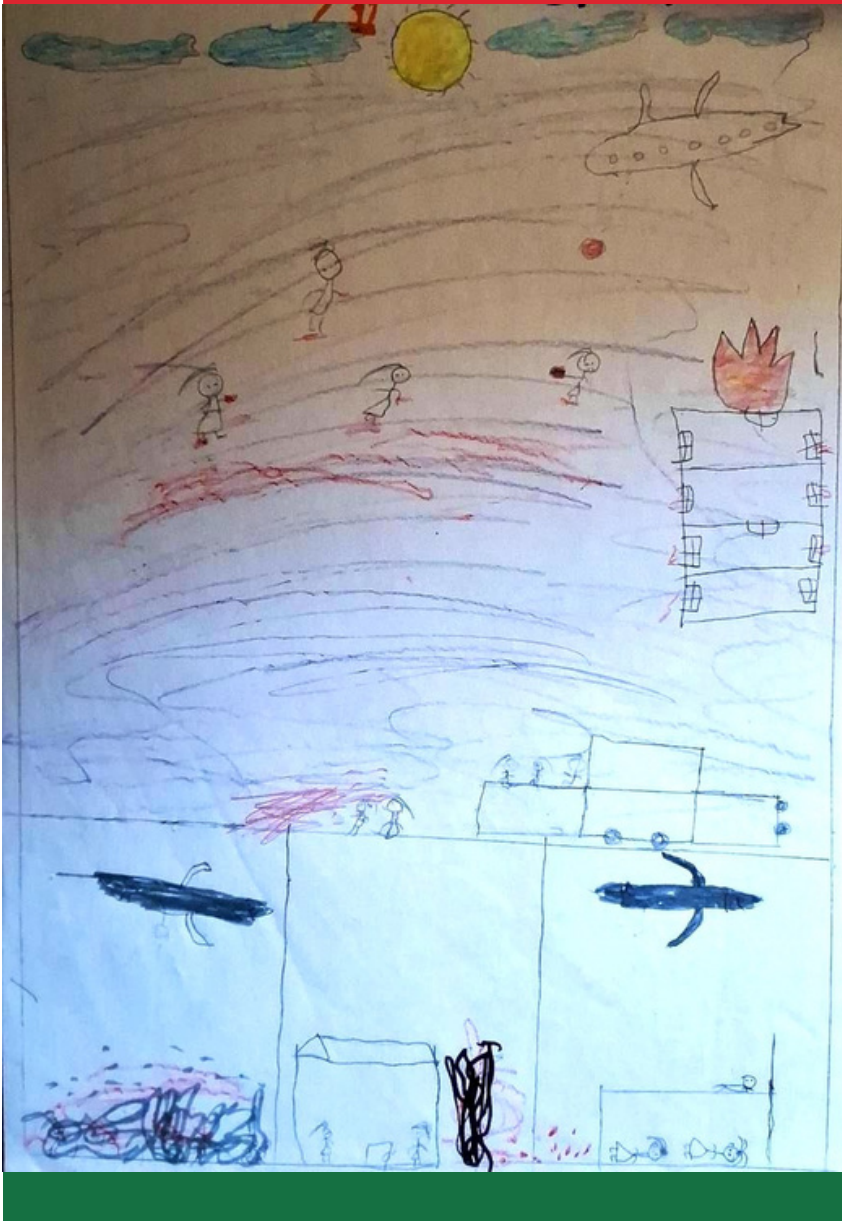
3.2 Violence and Terror

The accounts in this section describe children placed inside scenes of mass violence: a checkpoint execution, a grandmother dying on a road, a brother tied to a tree and beaten while soldiers laughed, boys taken from a football field, a mosque broken. These are not accounts of violence witnessed from a window or heard from another room. The children were in the middle of it, on the ground, present in their bodies, making decisions about whether to run, whether to cry, whether to look.

Amnesty International's 2024 annual report on Sudan documented widespread extrajudicial killings of civilians, systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, and collective punishment of communities in Darfur and Kordofan. The children in this section did not read that report. They lived what it describes.¹⁰

¹⁰Amnesty International. Sudan Annual Report 2024. 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/sudan/report-sudan/>

Pseudonym: Hana | Age: 11 years | Originally from: Madani



When we left home, we walked for many hours on the road. My grandmother became very weak and died. We had to leave her behind with my father. When we reached Madani, my younger brother was injured in the head. He also died. I do not want to go back to Sudan.

Hana lost two people on a single journey: her grandmother on the road, her younger brother after they arrived. Her father stayed behind with her grandmother's body, which means Hana continued without him.

She was eleven years old, walking with whatever remained of her family toward wherever safety might be. Her final sentence, that she does not want to go back to Sudan, is the only instance in this collection where a child expressed an outright rejection of return. It is not a political statement. It is what eleven years old looks like after watching two people you love die within days of each other, and having to keep walking anyway.

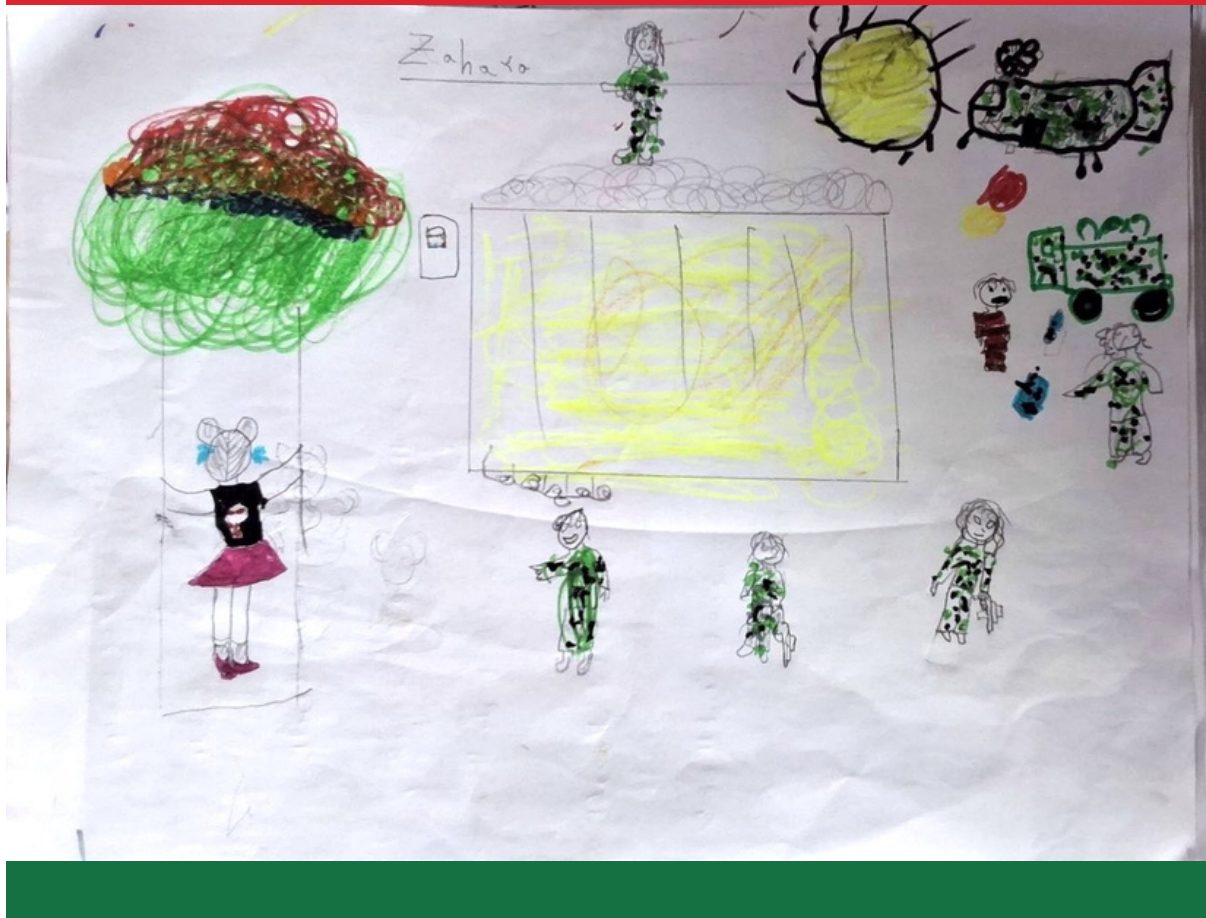
Pseudonym: Kareem | Age: 11 years | Originally from: Bara, North Kordofan



This is our village, Bara. My mom put us on a bus to go to El Obied. At the checkpoint, soldiers came. They told everyone to come out. Men were put one side. Women and children on another side. They told us to lie down on the ground. I was so scared I wanted to disappear. They started shooting the men and people were screaming. Then they said to us to go. The driver was dead. My mom carried my little brother on her back. We left our bag of clothes. Many people were walking on the road. I was crying. I wanted to go back home, but my mom kept pulling me.

At a checkpoint on the road from Bara to El Obeid, Kareem lay on the ground as soldiers shot the men who had been separated from the group. He was eleven. The bus driver was among those killed. His mother, with Kareem's younger brother on her back and no vehicle remaining, walked. She kept pulling Kareem because Kareem wanted to go back, the way a child wants to return to a place that no longer exists as he knew it. The separation of men from women and children at checkpoints, followed by killings, is a pattern documented across Kordofan and Darfur throughout the conflict. Kareem was not in the wrong place. He was on a bus his mother put him on because she was trying to keep him safe.

Pseudonym: Samia | Age: 10 years | Originally from: Nyala, South Darfur



The army cars always come and park near our house. I do not like it when they come. One day, when my mother was not at home, one of the soldiers called my older brother. They went behind the house. I did not know what they were talking about. After some time, I heard my brother crying. I went to see. They were beating him and tying him to a tree. I started crying and they were laughing while they were beating him and asking him to speak.

The laughter is the detail that does not leave this account.

Soldiers beating a young man and laughing while they do it, in front of his ten-year-old sister, because his ten-year-old sister is not a reason to stop. Samia's account also describes a neighborhood that had been militarized long before this incident: army vehicles parking near the house was routine. The violence of the day her brother was beaten was not an interruption of normality. It was where a sustained, normalized military presence eventually arrived. Samia was alone with it. Her mother was not there. She watched.

Pseudonym: Omar | Age: 13 years | Originally from: Nyala, South Darfur



We were playing football on the field. Then a vehicle came with soldiers, it stopped under the tree. They called us. We were scared, one boy tried to run away and they shot him, and told us if anyone run, they will shoot him again. They told us to come together. They took four of the older boys and put them in the vehicle. Then they told us to go back home.

Omar also described his village and his family: This is our village in Nyala. Our house was near the river we used to see water moving.

My mother planted maize in the garden near the river. In the evening, we go to the field to play football with other children in the village. It was my favorite time of the day. One day my mother said we must leave the village. My father did not come with us. I miss my father very much.

A child was shot for trying to run from soldiers on a football field in Nyala. Four older boys were taken away in a military vehicle. Omar was told to go home. He does not know where the four boys went. His father did not come with the family when they left. Omar is thirteen years old. He misses him.

A child's drawing of a busy street scene. At the top, there is a blue sky with a yellow sun. Below the sky, there is a white ground. On the left, there is a small brown building with a brown roof. Next to it is a red car. In the center, there is a large blue rectangular object, possibly a truck or a building. To its right is a green tree. Further right is a black car. Below the blue object, there is a green car with a person sitting in it. To the right of the green car is a black car. At the bottom, there is a red car. On the far right, there is a black car. In the top left corner, there is some text in Arabic script: 'أولاد' and '40'.

Soldiers took a man from Tariq's community, beat him, and destroyed the mosque near his home. Tariq was ten years old.

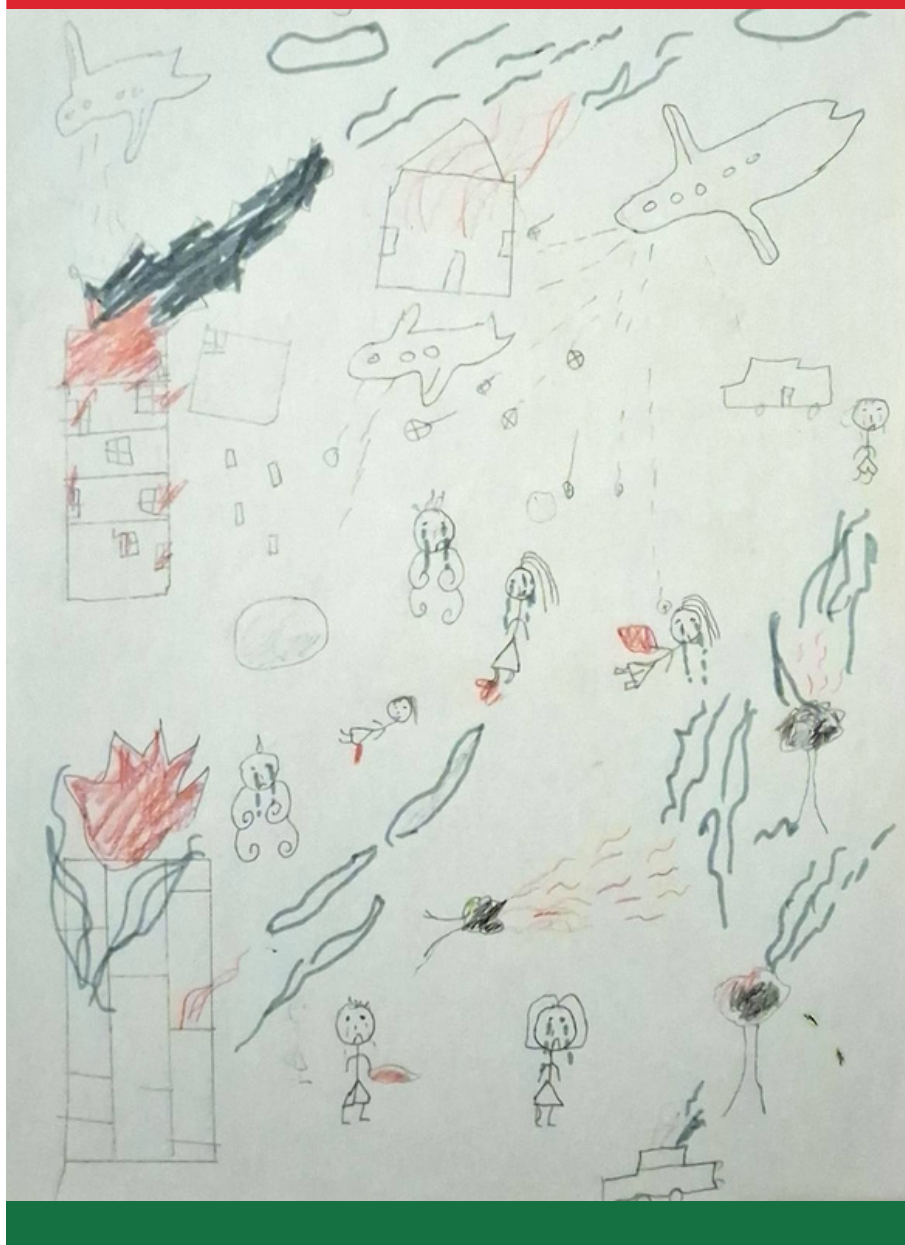
He drew the mosque carefully. He did not understand why they were doing that. The deliberate destruction of places of worship is prohibited under international humanitarian law, specifically Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, which Sudan ratified in 2006. Tariq did not know this. He only knew that something that had always been there, in the same place, part of the shape of his neighbourhood, had been broken.

3.3 Soldiers, Fear and Hiding

For the children in this section, the presence of armed men was not a single event. It was a condition. Soldiers parked outside the house. They arrived at the door. They appeared in the street. The psychological weight of sustained, ambient threat is distinct from the shock of a single violent incident.

It produces a state of chronic alertness that children are not equipped to maintain and that, over time, reshapes how they experience their own homes, their own streets, their own bodies.

Pseudonym: Zara | Age: 11 years | Originally from: Sinnar

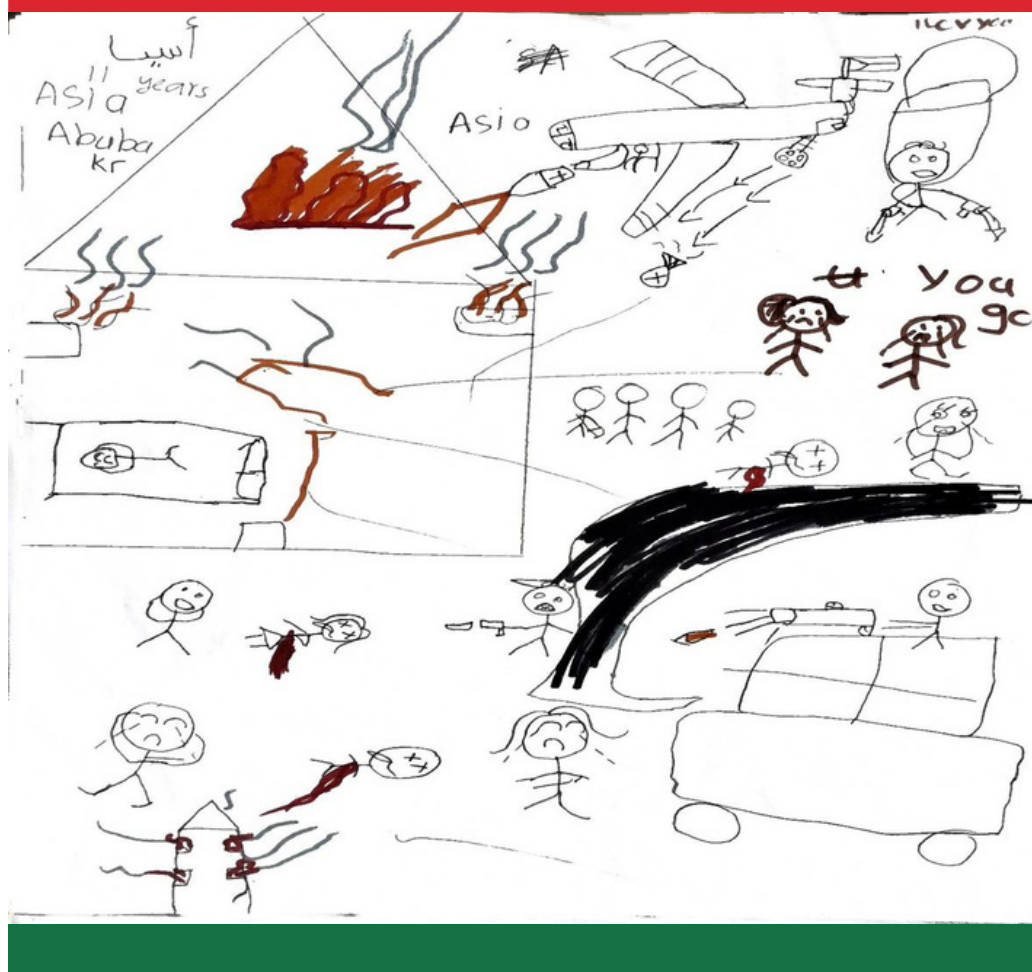


An airplane came in the sky during the day. It was so noisy and scary. It started throwing bombs on the houses. We ran. So many people were running. My dad was crying. I never saw him cry before. It made me scared. We came to a place where people stopped. Two children came with us. They were crying. They got lost from their parents. I felt scared. I did not understand why this was happening.

Zara watched her father cry, and it frightened her more than the bombs did. For a child, a parent's visible collapse signals that the protection the parent provides is no longer reliable. The bombing cracked the sky.

Her father's tears cracked something more fundamental. Zara also encountered two children who had been separated from their parents during the flight. She does not explain what happened to them. She includes them the way a person includes something they could not resolve: they were there, they were crying, and she moved on because she had no other option. The separation of children from caregivers during displacement is one of the most significant protection risks in conflict settings, exposing children to exploitation, abuse, and compounded trauma.

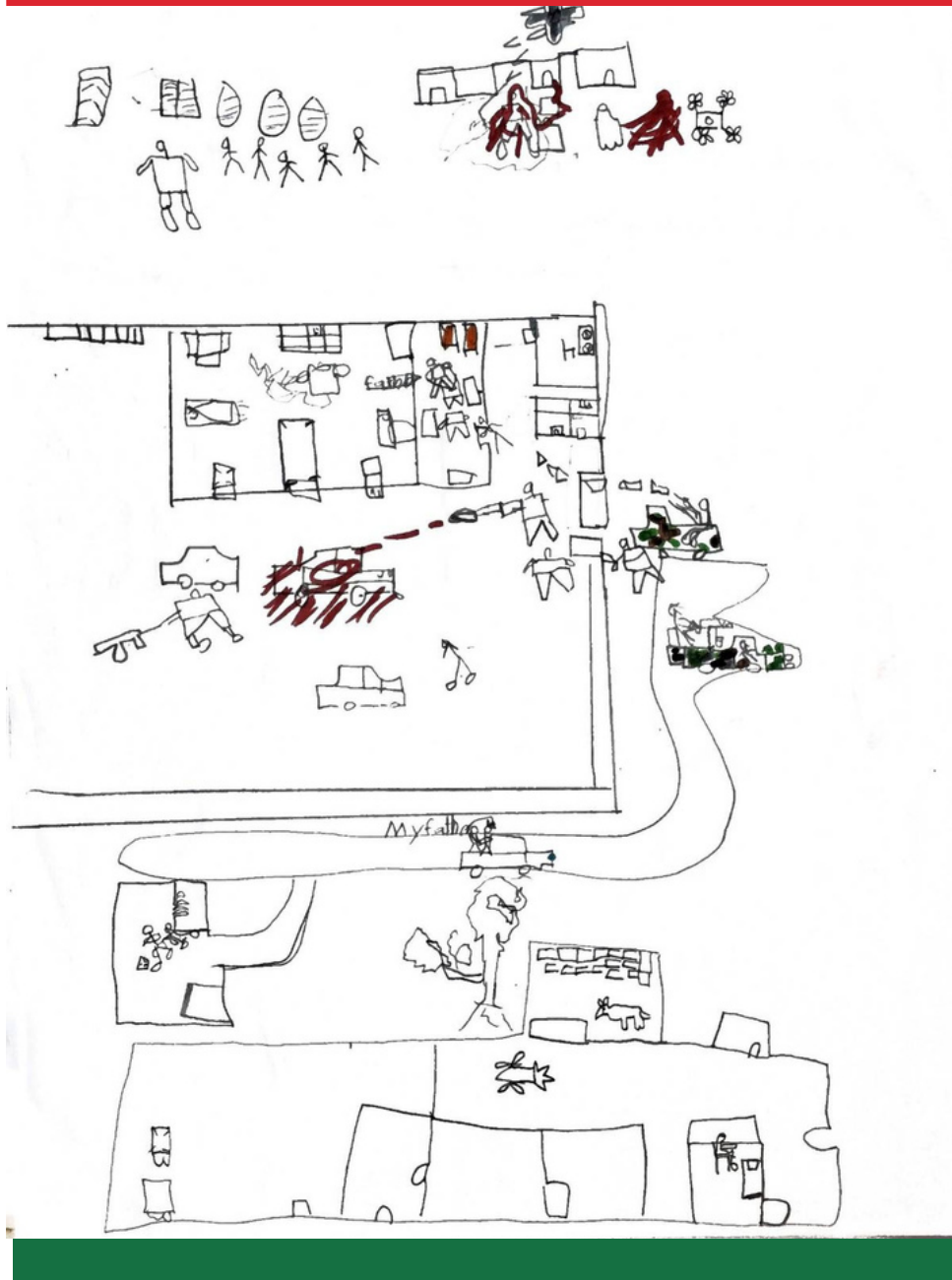
Pseudonym: Rania | Age: 11 years | Originally from: Khartoum



We used to have many neighbors. My family, my uncle Osman, and the raksha man lived near our house. I had many friends there. I miss them a lot. One day, an airplane came. It started shooting at our house and the houses of our neighbors. Everything was burning. There was fire everywhere. My father was injured. I was very scared. After that, we left and came to South Sudan. Now we live in a camp. I do not like it here. I do not feel happy here. I just remember my home and my friends.

Rania drew her neighbourhood: her family's house, her uncle Osman's, the raksha man who kept his motorised taxi nearby. She drew a community that existed and then described what happened to it. Her father was injured. The family fled to South Sudan, where they now live in a camp. She is eleven years old. She does not feel happy. She just remembers. That phrase, I just remember, is the calibration of a child who understands that the present offers very little and the past is where the real things were.

Pseudonym: Yusuf | Age: 12 years | Originally from: Al Fasher, North Darfur



We were at home with my mom, father and my little brothers and sisters. Then we heard people screaming outside. Mom started crying and shouting. I couldn't hear her voice properly because everything was so loud. She grabbed us and said, 'Come! Run!' We ran. The houses were on fire. Smoking was everywhere. The fire was big. I was so scared my legs was hurting me. We passed in the big market, it was full of smoke and ashes. The next day, we went to my grandfather's village.

Yusuf ran through a burning market with his family on the day Al Fasher erupted in violence. His mother told him to run and he ran, his legs hurting from the fear. The family reached his grandfather's village the next day. Al Fasher, the last major city in Darfur not under RSF control, withstood siege for over 500 days before falling in October 2025. The city Yusuf fled through, its market full of smoke and ashes, was a city that hundreds of thousands of people called home.

3.4 Loss of Education and Belonging

School is not merely a place of instruction. For a child, it is a social world: the place where friendships are formed, routines are established, and identity outside the family takes shape. The destruction of that world, even without a single act of physical violence against the child, constitutes a serious and lasting harm. As of September 2025, approximately 13 million of Sudan's 17 million school-age children were out of school, having been so for more than two and a half years.¹¹

Nearly half of all school buildings across the country are no longer functioning. In some cases, school buildings have been repurposed by armed actors as detention facilities or military bases.¹²

The children in this section did not draw soldiers or fire. They drew classrooms. They drew friends whose whereabouts they do not know. The restraint of those drawings is not innocence. It is grief finding the only form available to it.



¹¹Save the Children International. More Than Three Quarters of Sudan's Children Out of School as New Academic Year Begins. September 2025.

¹²Save the Children International. Sudan: Children Reveal Harrowing Violence in Latest North Darfur Mass Displacement. July 2025.

Pseudonym: Dina | Age: 12 years | Originally from: Al Fasher, North Darfur



This is our school. I used to play with my friends in the school compound. The school was only for girls. I was in class 5. I loved being there. I miss my friends. Najwa and Hawa. I do not know where they are now. I hope they are alive. Now I am just here in Zamzam camp. There is no school here. I feel lonely. I feel so sad. I wish I could go back. I wish I could see my friends again.

Dina did not say she hopes her friends are well, or that she hopes to see them soon.

She said she hopes they are alive. That is the calibration of a child who has been inside a war zone and has understood enough to know that 'alive' is not a given. She was in class five. She loved being there. She is now in Zamzam camp, where she reports no access to education. In April 2025, Zamzam camp was attacked. Nearly 500,000 people, including 260,000 children, were displaced from it within weeks, amounting to 99 per cent of its population. Dina had already been displaced once to reach Zamzam. Then Zamzam itself was taken.¹⁵

¹⁵UNICEF Press Release. 825,000 Children Trapped as Conflict Rages in Sudan's Al Fasher and Zamzam Camp. March 2025.

Pseudonym: Sara | Age: 13 years | Originally from: Khartoum



This is our school in Arkawit. I used to go there. My friends Samira and Hawa were very close to me. We used to play together during break time and do our homework together. I miss them. I do not know where they are now. School felt nice when we were all there together. I wish, maybe one day, we can go back to our school again.

Sara drew her school in Arkawit, Khartoum, with careful attention to its layout. She described her friends Samira and Hawa playing together at break time, doing homework together.

She does not know where they are now. She does not say she hopes they are alive, the way Dina does. She says she does not know where they are, and she wishes, maybe one day, they can go back. That maybe holds everything: the uncertainty about whether the school still stands, whether the friends survived, whether return is possible at all. Sara is thirteen years old and she is holding that uncertainty with a generosity toward the future that it has not yet earned.

3.5 Home, Hope and Innocence

The final account in this report does not describe violence. It describes a green crayon, a house with rooms for everyone who is loved, and a friend named Taahir. It comes from the youngest child in the programme, aged six, and it is in some ways the most difficult to read, not because it is disturbing, but because of the distance between the world this child is describing and the world she is actually in.

A child who draws a house and names every room is not naive. She is doing something

purposeful. She is using the available tools, a piece of paper, some crayons, thirty minutes of safety at the TRAIID center, to hold something that has not been taken from her yet: the knowledge of who she loves and where they belong. This account closes the Findings not with resolution but with that act of holding, however small, however provisional.

Pseudonym: Leila | Age: 6 years | Originally from: Madani



This is our house. My father has a room. My big sister has a room. I sleep with my mum in the same bed. I miss my friends. Taahir. I used to play with him. I loved the color green. Can I take this crayon home to my mother? The green one. I want to tell my father to buy colors like this for me.

Leila is six years old, and she asked for a green crayon to take home to her mother. Not a toy, not food, not something her displacement obviously denied her. A crayon, specifically green, because she loves that color, because she wants her father to know what to buy. The request is so small and so completely sincere that it reorients the entire frame of what this report is documenting. Behind every statistic about displaced children is a child like Leila, whose desires are not shaped by the scale of the crisis but by who she is: a six-year-old who loves green, who misses her friend Taahir, and who wants to bring her mother something. She is also a child living through one of the largest humanitarian emergencies in the world. Both of these things are true at the same time.

4. LEGAL ANALYSIS

The testimonies in this report are not only accounts of suffering. They are accounts of violations. Each testimony, read against the corroborating documentation, engages specific and binding legal obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL).

This section establishes the applicable legal framework, identifies the nature and classification of the conflict, and connects the violations documented to specific legal instruments. It is intended to serve both legal professionals and the general reader: where legal terminology requires explanation, it is provided.

4.1 Classification of the Conflict

International humanitarian law distinguishes between two types of armed conflict. International armed conflicts involve two or more states. Non-international armed conflicts (NIACs) involve one or more non-state armed groups fighting within a state's territory. The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that began on 15 April 2023 meets the criteria for classification as a NIAC under the Geneva Conventions of 1949: the level of armed

violence far surpasses internal disturbances, and the RSF, as a paramilitary organisation controlling significant territory, exhibits the required level of organisation. As a NIAC, the conflict is governed by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and by Additional Protocol II, which Sudan ratified in 2006. International human rights law applies concurrently and without derogation.

4.2 Applicable Legal Instruments

Common Article 3, Geneva Conventions (1949): Binding on all parties to a NIAC at all times, without exception. Prohibits violence to life and person, cruel treatment, torture, and humiliating or degrading treatment of all persons not taking active part in hostilities. Kareem lay on the ground at a checkpoint in Bara while the men around him were executed. Samia watched soldiers beat her brother while laughing. These acts are prohibited under Common Article 3 regardless of the victim's status or the perpetrator's identity.

Additional Protocol II (1977), ratified by Sudan 2006: Article 13 prohibits attacks on the civilian population. Article 14 prohibits starvation as a method of combat. Article 16 prohibits attacks on places of worship. Article 17 prohibits forced displacement of civilians for reasons connected with the conflict. Nour's sister Sara was killed by aerial bombardment. Amira's friends Rugaya and Malaz were shot on a road home from school. Tariq's mosque was destroyed. All thirteen children in this report were forcibly displaced.¹⁴

¹⁴Sudan ratified Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions in 2006.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Sudan: Article 6 protects the right to life: Sara, killed in Madani; Ruqaya and Malaz, killed in Khartoum; the unnamed child shot on a football field in Nyala. Article 19 requires protection from violence: Samia's testimony, Omar's testimony, Kareem's testimony each engage this directly. Article 28 protects the right to education: Dina and Sara have each lost their school. Article 38 requires states to respect international humanitarian law applicable to children. Article 39 requires states to promote the physical and psychological recovery of child victims of armed conflict: Amira sees her friends in her dreams every night and wakes crying. Article 39 is not being met.

Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), ratified by Sudan: Prohibits recruitment and use of children under 18 by any party to a conflict. Requires demobilisation and psychosocial reintegration of former child soldiers. Omar witnessed soldiers take four boys from a football field in Nyala and load them into a military vehicle. A child who tried to run was shot. The UN Secretary-General's report verified 277 children recruited and used by armed groups in Sudan between 2022 and 2023 alone.

Convention Against Torture (CAT), ratified by Sudan without reservation, 10 August 2021: Article 1 defines torture as intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering by or with the acquiescence of a public official. Article 2 prohibits torture under any circumstances, including in armed conflict. No derogation is permitted. Soldiers tied Samia's brother to a tree and beat him while laughing. This account describes conduct that meets the definition of torture under Article 1 of the CAT.¹⁵

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR): Sudan has been a party since 1986. Article 5 prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in all circumstances. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), ratified by Sudan: Article 22 requires states to respect international humanitarian law as it applies to children. Article 27 prohibits the recruitment of children into armed forces. These instruments are applicable before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005): Six Grave Violations Framework: At least five of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict are documented in this report. Killing and maiming of children: Nour, Amira, Kareem, Omar. Recruitment and use of children: Omar's testimony describes boys taken from a football field. Attacks on schools and hospitals: Dina and Sara have lost their schools; school buildings across Sudan have been used as detention facilities. Abduction of children: consistent with Omar's account and corroborated by UN documentation. Denial of humanitarian access: famine-level malnutrition confirmed in Zamzam camp where Dina lives, with the humanitarian appeal 84 per cent unfunded. Sexual violence against children, the sixth violation, is not present in the testimonies gathered by TRAIID but is extensively documented in corroborating sources.

International Criminal Court (ICC): Darfur Jurisdiction: UN Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005) referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC, granting jurisdiction over crimes committed in Darfur from 1 July 2002.

¹⁵Sudan ratified the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on 10 August 2021, without reservation.

Sudan is not a party to the Rome Statute but is bound by the referral. The violations documented in this report engage Rome Statute Article 7 (crimes against humanity) and Article 8 (war crimes), including wilful killing of protected persons, torture, sexual violence, and conscription of children under 15. The ICC must prioritise investigations under this existing mandate.¹⁶

5. CONCLUSION

Thirteen children. Five thematic areas. Khartoum, Nyala, Al Fasher, Madani, Sinnar, South Kordofan, Bara. Ages six to thirteen. These are the coordinates of this report. They are also, collectively, a portrait of what it means to be a child in Sudan in the third year of this conflict.

What emerged across the programme was not a single story but a pattern. The same elements appear again and again in different children's accounts: aircraft in the sky, soldiers at the door, a road walked for hours, a school that is no longer there, a friend whose whereabouts are unknown. The pattern is not coincidental. It is the structure of the conflict itself, the consistent application of armed force against civilian populations across a vast geographic area, landing in the lives of individual children as a series of specific, particular, unforgettable moments.

None of the children in this report had any capacity to cause or prevent what happened to them. They were not combatants. They were not parties to any political dispute. They were, at the time of their displacement, between six and thirteen years old. They are now among an estimated 15.7 million children and families in

Sudan at risk of mental health conditions arising from the conflict. They are among the 13 million school-age children currently out of school. They are among the children who, in the absence of adequate international funding, are receiving little or no sustained psychological support.

The drawings in this report are primary documents. They are not illustrations added to a text to make it more appealing. They are the evidence. Amira drew her school and her friends, mid-walk. Nour drew her home and her sister's bed. Kareem drew the bus that never reached El Obeid. Samia drew the tree. Omar drew the football field. Tariq drew the mosque before it was broken. Dina drew her school and listed the names of friends she does not know are alive. Sara drew her school and said maybe, one day. Leila drew her house and asked for a green crayon.

These are not metaphors. They are what children did with paper and colour when they were given the space and the safety to do it. They are what the conflict looks like from the inside, recorded by people who had no choice but to be there. The world has a choice.

¹⁶UN Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005), referring the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court. Jurisdiction covers crimes committed in Darfur from 1 July 2002.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The accounts in this report are not only testimony. They are, taken together, a practical guide to what is needed. Children who cannot sleep because of recurring nightmares need psychological support. Children in camps with no schools need education. Children whose fathers have vanished need tracing and family reunification services. Children in areas where armed actors move through residential neighborhoods need protection. The recommendations below are grounded in what these children described.

To Donor Governments and International Funding Bodies

- Close the humanitarian funding gap for Sudan without delay. The UNICEF Sudan appeal remains critically underfunded. That gap has a direct, documented impact on the delivery of nutrition, education, health, and protection services to millions of children.
- Allocate dedicated resources for children's mental health and psychosocial support, both inside Sudan and in displacement settings in Uganda, Chad, Egypt, South Sudan, and other host countries where Sudanese children are living with no access to sustained psychological care.
- Direct funding toward refugee-led and community-based organizations, including TR Aid, which reach children and families that larger international systems frequently do not.

To the United Nations and International Humanitarian Bodies

- Demand and secure unimpeded humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, with particular urgency in North Darfur, where hundreds of thousands of children remain with critical shortages of food, water, and medicine.

- Strengthen child protection mechanisms across Sudan, with specific attention to verified patterns of checkpoint violence, family separation, and sexual violence against children.
- Expand and accelerate documentation of grave violations against children, including killing, maiming, recruitment, abduction, and sexual violence, and pursue accountability for those responsible through the ICC's existing Darfur mandate.
- Prioritize family reunification services for children separated from caregivers during displacement.

To the Government of Sudan and All Parties to the Conflict

- Comply with obligations under international humanitarian law, including the absolute prohibition on deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, markets, and places of worship.
- Facilitate the immediate and unconditional passage of humanitarian aid to all areas of Sudan, without restriction based on the ethnic, political, or regional identity of the receiving population.
- End the systematic targeting of civilian men and boys at checkpoints, as documented in this report and corroborated by multiple international human rights bodies.
- Release all children held in association with armed forces or armed groups immediately and without conditions, and facilitate their access to medical and psychosocial care.

To Civil Society Organizations and Advocacy Bodies

- Centre the voices of Sudanese children and young people in public advocacy on the Sudan crisis. The children who produced the drawings in this report have documented, without assistance, what the conflict looks like from the inside. Those voices belong in public discourse.
- Support the development and expansion of child-friendly psychosocial spaces for displaced Sudanese children in Uganda and other host countries.
- Advocate specifically for the right to education of displaced Sudanese children. More than two and a half years of schooling have already been lost. Each additional year represents harm that compounds.

To the General Public

- Treat the Sudan conflict as the ongoing emergency it is. It is currently the largest displacement crisis in the world, and among the least funded.
- Support organizations working directly with displaced Sudanese communities, including TRAIID.
- Share the documented experiences of Sudanese children through available platforms. Sustained public attention is one of the conditions that makes political and financial action more likely.

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Trauma Rescue Aid