

# General Policy Paper: Women's Political Participation as a Political Tool for Building Peace and Ending War in Political Negotiations

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## **Abstract:**

This paper presents a proposed policy framework, a tangible alternative to the recurring debate over quotas and percentages, aimed at achieving the political empowerment of women in Sudan. It squarely addresses the overarching policy challenges impeding the participation of Sudanese women in political processes, while emphasizing the critical importance of this inclusion for securing peace and stability across the country.

The brief delves into the historical struggle of Sudanese women for political parity, meticulously examining the factors that have obstructed this path, such as the entrenched male domination of political institutions and inadequate funding for women's initiatives. It also highlights the achievements already secured by Sudanese women.

Significantly, the paper offers recommendations designed to boost their future participation. These include the necessity of guaranteeing women's representation across all phases of the peace process, providing essential leadership training, and allocating sufficient resources to back women's-led initiatives.

Ultimately, the paper stresses that the participation of Sudanese women is not merely a desirable demand, but a national necessity to ensure the building of a future that is fair, equitable, and shared by all.

## Introduction:

We once held to an old stance: that the Sudanese political movement was developing with one wing (referencing the era prior to women's participation). Before the foundation of the Women's Union in 1952, and following the foundational period, the political and public movements were said to "fly with two wings and walk on two legs," but now the national consensus proceeds carried by one man, a situation that makes the participation of women indispensable for sound progress (1\*).

The inclusion of women in Sudan's political processes has always been a point of contention. The quota was ultimately incorporated as a fundamental right for women in the political and decision-making sphere in the 1995 Beijing Platform. Despite this, the Sudanese feminist political arena began demanding equality in political participation and on the lists for "Elections, Candidacy, and Voting" as early as 1956.

In 2008, Sudanese women succeeded in achieving a 25% quota in the leadership structures of political parties for women's participation.

By 2019, the political debate over participation had become centered on the idea of the quota, until it evolved into the main political battle. This struggle yielded victories that went beyond merely numerical representation, particularly within the political negotiations that took place that same year.

The issue of representation is a chapter for accountability. "I blame ourselves," the text says, "we are supposed to be capable of action and work, and the assumption that there must be a supportive and committed external body to ensure women's participation is incorrect. This is the duty of organized political bodies, but it's we, as individuals, who need to build this from the start" (2\*\*).

Despite the principle and the right of Sudanese women to equitable political participation, most political agreements in Sudanese history have failed to achieve the women's quota percentage (3\*). However, the impact of this numerical percentage has not translated into a clear effect on the lives of Sudanese women.

In 2019, the Constitutional Document stipulated that women's participation in the Legislative Council should be no less than 40%. However, only a minimum percentage was specified for the Sovereign Council and the Council of Ministers, which ultimately reached 25-24% women's participation during the transitional period, before the military coup of 25 October 2021.

The Juba Agreement for Peace stipulated that women's participation should be no less than 40% at the level of the regions, the Legislative Council, and the Council of Ministers. Crucially, it did not mention the specific mechanisms required to achieve this percentage (4\*).

Academic papers and studies have highlighted the military's efficiency in the Juba negotiations, as well as the male/masculine mentality that continues to assign a secondary role to issues vital to women's genuine participation. This, coupled with the absence of guiding initiatives from negotiating bodies to actively encourage women's participation, created real obstacles to meaningful inclusion.

Despite this, the women's participation groups succeeded in the second track of negotiations by pushing for the integration of the agreements and passing the provisions of Resolution 1325. However, women's contribution was limited to participating in public discussions, and they were not part of the core discussions on critical issues such as security sector reform and the division of power (4-1).

The Resistance Committees, grassroots groups that were organizing even before the September 2013 uprising against the Islamist regime, were a key player in the December

2018 Revolution. They evolved to become structured bodies, represented and elected in neighborhoods across all states of Sudan.

They mobilized to resolve citizens' crises, such as the events that unfolded during the "Covid-19 crisis," and confronted the October 25 coup with weeks of peaceful protests.

With the outbreak of war, the Resistance Committees became the media monitor of human rights violations and transformed into a first-aid hub for the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

The greater opportunity for me, as a woman, lies within the grassroots committees, the Resistance Committees open to criticism and change, and the Resistance Committees themselves. They have undergone significant stages of change from being led by men, who set meeting times and social agendas. We are now demanding appropriate timing for our circumstances, demanding the capacity for women to draft regulations that accommodate the presence of women in secure spaces within the workplace (5\*\*).

Following the 25 October 2021 coup, and alongside the Framework Agreement, there was the Revolutionary Charter for the People's Authority established solely by the Khartoum State Resistance Committees in 2022. This Charter did not explicitly mention a numerical percentage for women, but instead indicated that they must be represented by half (50%) at all levels.

The Charter for the People's Authority, and similar charters from the states, mentioned the establishment of a commission for women and gender justice and the necessity of empowering them with opportunities, but it did not specify a precise percentage for women's participation and did not set out any plans or mechanisms for the commission's work.

The Coordination of the Democratic Civil Forces (Taqaddum), the largest civil political bloc currently active in efforts to halt the war, confirmed in its concluding statement from the founding conference held in Addis Ababa in May 2024 that 40% of its core structures must be reserved for women.

Women's Political Participation from 2019 to the Political Framework Agreement (Before the Outbreak of War, 15 April 2023) (6\*)

**April 2019**

On 6 April 2019, the Sudanese people staged a sit-in in front of the General Command. The Islamic Front regime, represented by President Omar al-Bashir, fell on 11 April of the same year. Political negotiations began between the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), which was founded in January 2019, and was composed of a coalition of Sudanese professionals, the Sudanese front, the National Consensus Forces, the Federal Opposition Union, and the Sudan Call. This coalition formulated the Declaration of Freedom and Change / Charter for Freedom and Change, which called for the removal of President Omar al-Bashir.

The military wing, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, submitted to the resignation of Lieutenant General Awad Ibn Auf after only one day, on 15 April 2019.

The Declaration was signed and agreed upon by the political parties, professional associations, trade unions, student unions, and civil society and feminist groups.

The negotiating delegation included both the Civilian Bloc and the Sudan Call bloc, and the National Consensus Forces, with two representatives from each grouping.

The delegation initially included two women: Mariam al-Sadiq, representing the Umma Party, and Mervat Hamad El Nil, representing the Civilian Bloc. Mervat Hamad El Nil remained as the sole woman in the negotiations.

### **May 2019**

The Umma Party withdrew Mariam from the negotiations in May 2019. Mirvat al-Nil continued as the sole representative for the Civilian Bloc until the document was signed.

Lawyer Ibtisam Sanhoury also participated as part of the Technical Committee responsible for reviewing and drafting the Constitutional Document.

It is worth noting the crucial contribution of lawyer Ibtisam Sanhoury to resolving a major point of ambiguity in the document on the morning of the signing: the lack of clarity regarding the mechanism for selecting the Deputy Public Prosecutor and the Chief Justice. This issue was resolved by attaching an amendment to the Constitutional Document on 17 August 2019.

### **June 2019**

Negotiations were halted due to the massacre of the General Command sit-in on 3 June 2019, until negotiations resumed again on 9 July 2019.

### **August 2019**

The final negotiation between the Forces for Freedom and Change and the military component then took place, concluding with the signing of the Transitional Constitutional Document on 17 August 2019.

Mariam al-Sadiq participated in the first delegation to the negotiations as a founding member of the central committee of the Forces for Freedom and Change.

The government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was formed in September 2019. The former Prime Minister, Abdalla Hamdok, appointed his first government on 5 September 2019. 18 ministers were appointed, four of whom were women:

- Asma Mohamed Abdalla, Minister of Foreign Affairs (Appointed 8 September 2019 – July 2020)
- Intisar el-Zein Soughayroun, Minister of Higher Education (Appointed during September 2019 – 25 October 2021)
- Lena Elsheikh, Minister of Labour and Social Development (Appointed during September 2019 – 9 February 2021)
- Wala'a Essam al-Boushi, Minister of Youth and Sports (Appointed 8 September 2019 – 9 February 2021)

And two women out of nine men in the Sovereign Council, who were:

- Aisha Musa el-Said
- Raja Nicola

The first government did not include any female governors or female ambassadors.

### **February 2021**

The government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was reshuffled on 9 February 2021. It included 26 ministries, an increase from the 20 in the first government, with five women ministers being appointed. They were:

- Mariam al-Sadiq al Mahdi, Minister of Foreign Affairs

- Taysir al-Noorani, Minister of Labour and Social Security (Appointed 9 February 2021 – 25 October 2021)
- Buthaina Ibrahim Dinar, Minister of Federal Governance (9 February 2021 – 14 August 2022)
- Sarah Abdulazim, Minister of Federal Health (9 July 2020 – 9 February 2021)
- Hiba, Minister of Finance (9 July 2020 – 9 February 2021)

The second government also included two female governors:

- Amna Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed al-Makki, Governor of River Nile State (22 July 2020 – 25 October 2021)
- Amal Ezzeldin (22 July 2020 – 25 October 2021)

And at the level of the Sovereign Council, 9 men and 2 women, in addition to 3 other men who joined in March 2021 in implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement arrangements:

- Buthaina Ibrahim Dinar
- Na'amat Adam Jama'a

### **January 2022**

The military authority formed after 25 October 2021 had a negative impact on the actual presence of women at the political and grassroots resistance level.

However, 5 women took up ministerial positions when they were appointed by the Chairman of the Sovereign Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan:

- Batoul Abbas Awad, Minister of Industry (Appointed 20 January 2022)
- Amal Saleh Saad, Minister of Trade (Appointed 20 January 2022)
- Ahlam Madani Mahdi, Minister of Investment and International Cooperation (Appointed 20 January 2022)
- Souad el-Tayeb Hassan, Minister of Information and Administrative Reform (Appointed 20 January 2022)

### **April 2023**

Participation in the Final Political Process – The Framework Agreement

It was difficult to determine the number of women participants. Abla Karrar, a member of the drafting committee, states that the participation of women was respectable compared to women's representation in 2019.

The actual presence at the legislative table was 20 individuals, including 10 women, representing 50% . They produced a draft that included gender issues in the Constitution, which arose due to a specific viewpoint towards inclusion." This proposed transitional constitution was presented by UNITAMS on 20 September 2022 (7\*).

## Political Agreements to Ensure Women's Participation in Peace Processes

### UN Security Council Resolution 1325

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, issued on 31 October 2000, is regarded as one of the most significant international decisions. It fundamentally acknowledges women's essential role in the creation of peace and security, and mandates the Security Council to ensure its missions incorporate gender considerations and women's rights, including through consultation with various women's groups.

Resolution 1325 was adopted after a year of deliberation on objective resolutions concerning the protection of civilians and children in armed conflict. Its necessity became acute following the failures of peacekeeping in Rwanda, Somalia and Yugoslavia. Critically, the resolution aims to address the roots of the crisis in Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, including through tackling systematic sexual violence. It was informed by global resolutions concerning gender and conflict, including those from the Global South, and arose from the key outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the 2000 Beijing+5 Declaration. This established the obligation for the Security Council to integrate gender and women's rights into its missions via consultation with national and international women's groups.

The Resolution is articulated in an 18-point document that focuses on four intersecting themes:

- Protecting women from the impact of conflicts, by amending discriminatory laws, and developing systems for women's protection and the prosecution of violators of women's rights.
- Early warning mechanisms, public awareness campaigns, and the prosecution of women's rights violators.
- Protecting women during and after conflicts, through containing violence directed against women in local communities, and by parties to the conflict or conflict resolution parties.

The participation of women in taking various decisions related to conflict, such as general state policies during times of peace and war, negotiations on peace-making and transitional justice, and supporting women's roles in relief operations, economic recovery, and reconstruction.

#### The National Action Plan for Implementing Security Council Resolution 1325

In September 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development began work with the Geneva Institute for Human Rights and the Norwegian Embassy, communicating with civil society organizations to agree on a national vision for implementing Resolution 1325.

In February 2020, relevant governmental and non-governmental parties met, including civil society organizations, resistance committees, civilian administrations, religious leaders, and representatives of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, in addition to state-level priority committees, to reach a consensus on drafting the National Action Plan.

#### Objectives of the National Action Plan:

- Effective inclusion of women in peace building processes, peacekeeping, peace negotiations, decision-making at all levels, relief, reconstruction, and development.
- Enhancing recognition of women's rights before, during, and after armed conflict.
- Guaranteeing women's protection from all gender-based violations, such as rape and sexual slavery, and putting mechanisms in place for accountability and punishment.

The Plan seeks to achieve these objectives through the following four interconnected pillars (Participation – Protection – Relief – Reconstruction).

Approval of this plan signifies a commitment to advancing the participation of women as a fundamental part of the peace-making and drafting process, fulfilling the demands of women who suffer from forms of intersectional discrimination due to their overlapping marginalization, such as gender-based violence, systematic impoverishment, and economic exclusion. The implementation period for the National Action Plan was extended from 2022 until 2024 due to the disruption caused by the exceptional circumstances that the country has endured since the events of 25 October 2021.

**FOC: The Framework of Cooperation with the United Nations Concerning Conflict-Related Sexual Violence**

This framework defines the fundamental principles for documenting sexual violence as a crime under international law, drawing upon the best practices established in this field. The Protocol aims to serve as a tool to support national and international efforts in the field of justice and human rights to document sexual violence as a crime under international law, specifically classifying it as a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a crime of genocide. This is a protocol that the Government of Sudan ratified in 2021.

## **Juba Peace Agreement**

**Chapter Four (Compensation and Reparations)**

This chapter fails to mention women in a general sense; instead, it limits its focus to women affiliated with armed struggle movements. Furthermore, it completely overlooks women survivors of sexual violence. (8\*)

## **The War of April 15 and Women's Participation in Political Blocs**

The war has generated a complex and multi-faceted political reality. Since the coup of 25 October, the political scene has been characterized by a division of the continuous unified front, resulting in numerous groups, initiatives, and political declarations.

The Nairobi (Hamdok – Abdul Wahid) Declaration, May 2024

This is an agreement between former Prime Minister Mohamed Abdalla Hamdok and Abdul Wahid al-Nur regarding mediation to halt the war. Both parties affirmed their commitment to international law and established general principles that contribute to addressing the cumulative crises through a foundational process. No specific mention was made of women or their inclusion as a fundamental basis. They merely confined themselves to guaranteeing the basic principles for peace processes, a measure that historical experiences have proven to be a hollow shell when placed within peace conditions without defining clear mechanisms.

The Nairobi (Abdul Aziz al-Hilu – Abdul Wahid) Declaration, May 2024

This is an agreement between the Chairman of the Sudan Liberation Movement, Abdul Wahid al-Nur, and the Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N), Abdul Aziz Adam al-Hilu. The declaration calls on the warring parties, the Army and the Rapid Support Forces militia, for an immediate ceasefire, calling on them to commit to international humanitarian law.

The declaration of Hamdok and al-Hilu mentioned the necessity of establishing any permanent constitution based on the principles of comprehensive treatment for the cumulative crises through a foundational process, which will grant the Sudanese peoples the right to self-determination.

This declaration also did not mention the importance of Sudanese women's participation in achieving these principles or in the mediation process.

Outcomes of Political Workshops (Taqqaddum)

Security and Military Reform Workshop (Kampala, March 2024):

The outcomes did not mention the specific inclusion of women or the necessity of their integration into the security and military apparatus.

Transitional Justice Workshop (Kampala, March 2024):

The outcomes stipulated: guaranteeing women's participation in the structures concerned with transitional justice, supporting women's groups advocating for peace and transitional justice and human rights, in addition to the inclusion of youth in traditional and local reconciliation processes.

Local Governance Workshop (Nairobi, October 2024):

The recommendations addressed discrimination based on diversity and the necessity of guaranteeing women's representation in administrative units and women's right to benefit from the land.

Humanitarian Aid Workshop (Addis Ababa, May 2024):

The outcomes mentioned protecting women and youth from displacement and sexual violence and exploitation within the framework of activities during the conflict in Sudan, without mentioning a specific mechanism for the protection or provision of medical assistance to women who have been exposed to rape.

The Problem:

- Male political dominance in the field of political negotiations, and increasing the numerical percentage of women without paying qualitative attention to political participation.

During the Juba peace negotiations, on the formal track, men comprised an overwhelming majority of more than 70% of the participants, while women were represented by only 14 government representatives and 12 remaining representatives from all who were brought to the table. Women succeeded in including five women in the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), with the exception of the Justice and Equality Movement (JAM). Meanwhile, the representatives on the second track numbered 19 women, 15 from the group of political and civilian women "Munsam", 2 from the Women's Union, and 2 representing the "No to Women's Oppression" group.

The women on the second track stated that they were welcomed, while others said that some of the leaders or negotiators attempted to limit women's participation on the formal track. They stressed that "men cannot conceive of women's participation on the formal track" for discussing protocols on power-sharing or security arrangements, believing, quite simply, that this is the men's role.

Despite the obstacles, the women who considered themselves part of the Juba peace process believe that they achieved gains by pressuring party leaders and negotiating on the percentage of women's participation based on their preparation within the parties and the importance of their role in peace decisions (9\*).

## Lack of Independent Funding Opportunities for the Sudanese Feminist Political Movement:

There are no official statistics that speak directly to the conditions for funding any political movement that commits to spending its budget on women. It is also noted since 2019 that there are similar faces in political participation processes, and in the event of any new female invitations, they do not constitute part of the formal decisions or negotiations.

The continued accusation of feminism is also noted, even against groups that signal their feminist political demands, which has been continuous because the feminist discourse is a radical discourse that does not respect precedence, customs, or traditions. And, women suffer from a lack of experience due to their younger age, relative to their experiences in politics.

By way of a simple comparison with 2019, while individuals and feminist groups were demanding the importance of ratifying and signing without reservation the CEDAW treaty and the Maputo Protocol, especially on issues of sexual violence, abortion, family laws, and human rights, they did not receive support from feminist political groups.

With the outbreak of the April 15 war and the beginning of the crime of rape, there was an urgent need for the right to abortion, and the request for assistance from feminist groups in obtaining abortion drugs (governmental). The involvement of the feminist and civilian women's groups (such as "Munsam" and "Women Against War") was limited to secret participation, and this group self-funds its participation in the feminist and civilian groups through specific partnerships.

They conduct tours to pressure regional and international decision-making centers to halt the war.

More information is not available about the recent discussion with concerned parties. The answer was that the reason for preserving the security and continuity of this group is the near date of its launch in its early rounds.

- Lack of Training in Political Capacities: Training workshops provided by international and regional organizations for women, aimed at increasing political participation rates and raising capacities, are less focused on and dedicate less

effort to matters related to general political policies, political negotiation, documentation, and political advocacy.

Additionally, the training is limited solely to women, when the situation requires the presence of male politicians (governmental) and within armed movements in decision-making centers to compel them to include women and make them part of women's advocacy campaigns within political and organizational bodies.

#### Targeted Groups:

- Negotiators in the Jeddah Platform – Political groups outside the Democratic Bloc (Taqaddum).
- Resistance Committees.
- Feminist political groups (Munsam, Women Against War) – Organizations/Companies/Individuals funding political processes.

#### Proposed Policy Measures:

- Stipulating the monitoring of gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity in political groups.
- Consideration of the distribution of opportunities and accessibility for women and women with disabilities.
- Guaranteeing grassroots feminist representation in the fields of humanitarian and human rights assistance.
- Guaranteeing the participation of women/feminist groups in war crimes investigation committees.
- Training women in political negotiation and general policies, documentation of rights, digital security, and protection (10\*).

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Representative Bahja Abdallah, a frontline defender in Berlin, in October 2023, who was subjected to direct threats

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