SUMMARY
AN EXPOSÉ: THE ATTACK ON THE REVOLUTION IS AN ATTACK ON THE WOMEN OF SUDAN

The Sudanese revolution of 2019 was characterized by a popular uprising against a repressive and militarized regime that had subjected its citizens to division and militarization, operating under impunity. Despite their marginalized role within Sudanese society, where a militarized interpretation of Shari’a law has positioned women and girls as subordinate to men, women were instrumental drivers behind the Sudanese revolution. Throughout the revolution, women-led protests in Sudan have demonstrated the ability to clearly organize, lead, and speak at the frontline. New women’s movements, such as the Sudan Women Protest, created new spaces for a unified platform of women’s resistance, increasing their capacity to achieve common goals: to advance women’s rights, create equality in the law, and provide development opportunities for women regardless of ethnicity, religion or political orientation. In Khartoum, women succeeded in creating both a geographical and symbolic safe space for protestors, known as the “sit-in” site, a site occupied around the clock by all manner of Sudanese society to discuss, express themselves, and participate. This space transcended traditional barriers in Sudanese society and was seized by the young and the old alike, who viewed it as a microcosm of what an inclusive Sudan may look like.

It is under this context that the Khartoum Massacre took place. The Transitional Military Council (TMC) orchestrated an attack on civilians aimed at dispersing protestors at the sit-in site, killing 100s of civilians and raping an estimated 70 women and men. The attack coordinated heavy weaponry, sexual violence and an almost total communications and internet black-out to beat, rape, kill, and dispose of hundreds of unarmed civilians. It became clear that the targets of the attacks were entirely civilian and predominantly women, due to their central position in the protests. A collection of eyewitness accounts and personal accounts gathered by SIHA exhibit a harrowing pattern of violence by the TMC’s security actors where the use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war became the favoured technique to strip unarmed and vulnerable women of their dignity and personhood. This pattern was systemic, identified outside of the core sit-in site and across Khartoum, where different sites of protests were targeted with the same brutal tactics. Between June 3rd and 9th, TMC forces continued to leave a trail of violence and destruction across Khartoum under explicit impunity.

This exposé pinpoints how the Khartoum Massacre is representative of the direct link between militarization of spaces and the predation on women and girls throughout the revolution. The reliance on militias to govern civilian spaces has legitimized violence and normalized sexual violence as a weapon of war. It has undermined the rule of law in the country, allowing state-sanctioned militias to operate with full impunity. Most importantly, the Massacre highlights that sexual violence is perpetrated within a highly politicized space, where systemic violence against women is part of a clearly formulated political and military strategy propagated to ‘break the enemy’ and to dehumanize women and girls.

SIHA urgently recommends that the international community address the militarization of civilian spaces in Sudan, while also acknowledging the gendered implications of this militarization. Sexual violence against women and girls is part of a systemic strategy of violence against them and must be brought to the forefront of this complex transitionary process.