

The Democratic Civil Society Platform (DCSP)

Life First: Humanitarian Truce and the Path to Just and Sustainable Peace in Sudan

Position paper
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The DCSP is a broad national civilian framework, rooted in longstanding traditions yet renewed in its vision, bringing together leaders and activists from across Sudan’s diverse civil society components. The platform seeks to contribute to the transition from war to peace, from division to unity, from authoritarianism to democracy, from exclusivity to pluralism and diversity, and from ad hoc and politicized civic work to professionalism, objectivity, and the core values of civil society. The platform believes in the importance of coordination and integration with political, professional, and trade union forces as well as other democratic actors. It remains committed to the spirit and objectives of the glorious December Revolution — freedom, peace, and justice — and continues to work toward restoring its momentum and advancing its path toward building a modern civilian state grounded in the noble values of humanity, citizenship, equality, and democracy.

Executive Summary

Sudan is facing one of the world’s most severe humanitarian crises, marked not only by mass displacement and food insecurity, but by the widespread collapse of essential public services. For millions of civilians, survival increasingly depends on access to functioning systems: healthcare, water, agriculture, electricity, and education, rather than humanitarian aid alone.

The Berlin Conference (15 April 2026) presents a critical opportunity to move toward a practical and politically grounded humanitarian framework. However, experience since April 2023 has shown that temporary ceasefires devoid of political backing, operational realism, and credible implementation, have failed to improve conditions on the ground and, at times, have increased risks for civilians and frontline responders.

At the same time, current political realities require a more pragmatic approach. A truce should therefore be framed as a flexible and phased cooperation framework, capable of starting with limited, feasible arrangements while building toward more structured and sustainable outcomes, parallel to efforts to develop incentives and accountability structures that foster a more conducive environment for settlement. The DCSP calls for the following priority actions:

1. Anchor the ‘humanitarian truce’¹ within a credible and viable political process, linking humanitarian measures to a pathway toward a permanent ceasefire.

¹ A truce can be understood as a temporary arrangement between conflict parties to suspend hostilities for a specific period or purpose, often as an initial or limited form of ceasefire. For the purposes of this note, the

2. Systematically include and document perspectives from women and diverse civilian groups in truce development and monitoring, ensuring minimum representation thresholds and participation of women representatives in all truce structures. Establish clear procedures to integrate their input into decisions about access, protection, and service delivery priorities.
3. Adopt a practical phased approach to implementation, allowing for incremental, geographically or service focused arrangements (health, education, etc) that can serve as confidence-building measures and expand overtime based on political progress and demonstrated feasibility.
4. Place the restoration and maintenance of essential services at the center of the truce, prioritizing healthcare, water, electricity, agriculture, and education systems through a dedicated framework that supports infrastructure, service delivery, and the retention of critical personnel
5. Ensure unconditional and effective humanitarian access across all affected areas, while treating humanitarian corridors as enabling tools that must translate into sustained service delivery and tangible improvements in civilian living conditions.
6. Establish a functional coordination mechanism, centered on a High-Level Humanitarian Coordination Committee that brings together the conflict parties, international actors, and Sudanese civil society, including youth and women groups with a primary focus on communication, practical problem-solving, and operational cooperation.
7. Prioritize the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel, and civilian infrastructure, while ensuring that violations are documented and addressed and that humanitarian arrangements do not contribute to the normalization of impunity.
8. Provide direct assistance to local actors, including Sudanese civil society groups and community initiatives, and particularly women. This support should help sustain crucial economic and social activities such as commerce, farming, salaries for essential workers, and keeping education systems running.

Sudan's Crisis: Causes, Impact, and Community Response

Sudan is experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced both internally and externally. Health, education, and essential services have collapsed, food supply chains are disrupted, inflation is rising, and social support networks are failing, leading to increasing poverty and hardship.

Sudan's crisis is a result of continued armed conflicts, failing public institutions, economic hardship, and fragmented leadership by various "de-facto authorities," resulting in insecurity and uncertainty in daily life for civilians. This fragmented governance means there is no unified systems to provide basic services like healthcare, communications, banking, education, water, food, or electricity.

The scale of Sudan's emergency is reflected in alarming statistics. The United Nations estimates that over 24.6 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity, with famine confirmed in el-Fasher (North Darfur) and Kadugli (South Kordofan). More than 20 additional districts across Darfur and Kordofan are at significant risk. As of December 2025, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that 12–13 million people have been forcibly displaced since the conflict began, including approximately 9.5 million internally displaced persons across all 18 states and over 3 million refugees in neighboring countries. IOM has described Sudan as facing the world's largest internal displacement crisis, with numbers continuing to rise as fighting intensifies, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile in recent days.

term 'Humanitarian Truce', or 'truce for humanitarian purposes' refers to the current efforts by the Quad to reach a truce.

A truce can facilitate humanitarian access, however, humanitarian operations should not be conditioned on or limited by truce arrangements alone.

Escalating insecurity and both the politicization and utilization of aid by conflict parties have severely hindered humanitarian access. Attacks on aid convoys have recently delayed the delivery of food and medical supplies, leaving many families without necessary support. The targeting of aid workers has made it increasingly difficult to reach those most affected by the conflict.

In the absence of reliable state support and formal aid, local communities have mobilized to address urgent needs. They have established makeshift clinics, pooled scarce resources, and built informal networks to distribute emergency relief. Despite the challenging environment, these grassroots efforts have played a vital role in aiding and helping people endure the crisis.

The Berlin Conference: Advancing Humanitarian and Political Solutions for Sudan

Against this backdrop, the Berlin International Conference on Sudan (April 15, 2026) presents a critical opportunity to advance a coordinated and actionable strategy for a humanitarian truce that links humanitarian response with political engagement, operational access, and local system strengthening. While logistical measures in the context of humanitarian truce, such as humanitarian corridors remain important, equal priority must be given to restoring and maintaining core public functions across areas of control and dominance, particularly in health, water, electricity, and education, which are indispensable for civilian protection and resilience.

The Washington Conference (3 February 2026) helped re-mobilize international attention, securing nearly USD 1.5 billion in pledges and advancing a proposed peace framework supported by the Quad (United States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates). However, increased funding alone will not translate into meaningful impact. What is feasible at any stage of humanitarian engagement will ultimately be shaped by the trajectory and credibility of the political process. In the absence of parallel political progress, even technically sound humanitarian arrangements are unlikely to secure sustained cooperation from the conflict parties. The Berlin Conference must therefore prioritize securing a comprehensive and enforceable humanitarian truce that enables:

- Restoration and maintenance of essential services, including support to health facilities, water systems, agricultural production, electricity networks, and education structures

- Guaranteed and sustained humanitarian access, including the opening of corridors and coordination of cross-border support and refugees assistance

- Implement robust independent monitoring and accountability mechanisms

- Protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel

- Preservation of aid neutrality and insulation from conflict dynamics

- Support local response actors directly

The conference should act as a platform to gradually shift from crisis management towards a roadmap for de-escalation, and ultimately conflict resolution. Humanitarian truce should not only facilitate aid delivery but also create space for communication, practical cooperation between parties on sustaining basic services and economic life, including agricultural production, trade flows, payment of salaries for health workers and teachers, and the continuation of national examination and accreditation systems for students across conflict lines.

Given the seasonal nature of Sudan’s agricultural calendar, the timing and credibility of a humanitarian truce will directly determine whether communities are able to prepare for planting and complete harvests. Failure to protect agricultural cycles risks locking in famine conditions regardless of humanitarian funding levels, while timely protection of planting and harvest periods could deliver immediate and visible gains in food security and civilian resilience.

Humanitarian measures must be linked to a political track. Without a credible pathway to a permanent ceasefire, humanitarian arrangements will remain fragile. Any framework should include clear a binding timeline humanitarian truce with effective monitoring, and meaningful participation of Sudanese civilian actors.

Concurrently, escalating geopolitical tensions elsewhere, particularly in the Gulf region and involving Iran and other actors, risk diverting international attention and resources. Sudan’s crisis has repeatedly demonstrated its vulnerability to being overshadowed by emerging global conflicts. The Berlin Conference must therefore reaffirm Sudan as a stand-alone international priority and ensure that commitments to the Sudanese people are not weakened by shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Why Does a Truce Require a Different Approach This Time?

This paper reflects the perspective of the DCSP² on the proposed truce for humanitarian purposes, which represents a broad segment of Sudanese civil society. These actors cannot view current developments in isolation from the difficult experience endured by civil society, including humanitarian workers, since the outbreak of the war on 15 April 2023.

The first weeks of the conflict (April–May 2023) witnessed a series of ceasefire announcements. The first was declared on 18 April for 24 hours, followed by a 72-hour truce on 21 April, and then several additional ceasefires toward the end of April, before the Jeddah Declaration of 11 May.

All these temporary ceasefires resulted in fragile arrangements that were largely used to consolidate military control, resupply forces, and reposition troops. They lacked genuine political commitment and often turned humanitarian action into a bargaining tool and a basis for mutual accusations between the warring parties.

These attempts failed due to:

- ◁ Lack of effective field monitoring
- ◁ Weak political will and unclear consequences for violations
- ◁ Ongoing pursuit of military advantage by both sides

For frontline responders, including civil society organizations, emergency response rooms, volunteers, and other local actors’ previous ceasefires did not represent periods of safety. On many occasions, these periods instead became moments of heightened danger. Attempts by local responders to expand their activities and operate more visibly based on the assumption that reduced hostilities would create a safer environment, were often met with harassment, accusations of affiliation, arrests, and, in some documented cases, fatal consequences. This was observed, for example, in Omdurman and the Al-Shajarah neighborhood in Khartoum.

² The Democratic Civil Society Platform (DCSP) brings together a broad coalition of Sudanese civil society actors, including humanitarian organizations, community-based initiatives, professional associations, youth networks, and women-led groups and women’s rights advocates operating across different regions of Sudan and within the diaspora. The Platform reflects diverse local perspectives shaped by direct engagement in humanitarian response, civilian protection, and community resilience.

From the perspective of the DCSP, these experiences underscore the need for any future truce to be accompanied by explicit protection measures, enforceable guarantees, and robust monitoring systems and management mechanisms that ensure that reduced violence translates into real safety for those delivering life-saving assistance.

Toward a Credible and viable Truce

Experiences from armed conflicts in general, as well as Sudan's previous wars — including the war that erupted on 15 April — demonstrate that isolated local ceasefires aimed at halting violence rarely produce meaningful change on the ground or in the political calculations of the parties to the conflict unless they are designed as part of a broader and integrated process to end the war.

The experiences of Syria in 2014 and 2016 provide some of the most recent and illustrative examples of temporary truces that reduced violence to a politically “acceptable” level while enabling the redeployment of forces to other fronts without meaningful political concessions. In many cases, the 2014 and 2016 arrangements in Syria were ceasefires imposed on opposition forces and local populations following prolonged sieges and starvation tactics. Although humanitarian considerations were cited among the primary motivations for these arrangements, their humanitarian impact proved limited and temporary.

On the other hand, in 2016, Colombia's peace negotiations included a humanitarian truce that suspended hostilities in specific regions to allow civilian access to health care and education. The truce was monitored by international observers and local civil society groups, resulting in the reopening of clinics and schools in previously inaccessible areas, and eventually paved the way for historic Colombian Peace Agreement signed later that year. This model demonstrated that explicit political commitments, paired with robust monitoring and civil society engagement, can deliver tangible improvements in civilian living conditions and foster longer-term resilience.

For this reason, the DCSP hopes that any forthcoming truce will be credible and capable of contributing to a ceasefire that ultimately leads to sustainable peace. In this regard, the concept of a “humanitarian truce” should be understood not only as a temporary ceasefire, but as a broader humanitarian cooperation framework, one that entails positive, operational commitments by the parties to protect civilians, sustain essential services, and enable practical coordination on issues affecting civilian life. Drawing on a range of experiences, including the Sudan 2002 Nuba Mountains ceasefire agreement, March 2016 bilateral Colombian ceasefire, and more recent ceasefire arrangements in Gaza, evidence suggests that agreements that incorporate the greatest possible number of the following elements, and in sufficient operational detail, are more likely to be implementable and sustainable. These are:

1. A clear and operational definition of the truce, including its geographic scope, timing, and modalities for entry into force, as well as a precise definition of violations. This should be supported by detailed implementation arrangements, including agreed monitoring and verification mechanisms (with clear procedures for reporting, verification, and dispute resolution), and the use of clear operational maps and timelines to minimize ambiguity and ensure consistent application.
2. Disengagement of forces and establishment of buffer zones: The creation of buffer zones through the separation and disengagement of forces along active frontlines, with the objective of reducing direct tactical contact and limiting the risk of escalation³.

³ The feasibility of establishing civilian crossing points in such areas should be carefully assessed, given the significant risks to civilian safety in a fragile and fluid security environment.

3. Humanitarian corridors and designated safety areas: The establishment of clearly defined humanitarian corridors, relief routes, and access points to facilitate the safe and sustained delivery of assistance, alongside the identification of designated areas for displaced populations⁴.
4. Engagement of civilian actors and provision of public and critical services: the truce should actively involve civil society organizations and local communities in its implementation and oversight. This participation is crucial for monitoring access, promoting transparency, and ensuring that the needs of affected populations are addressed. Civilian actors will also contribute to trust-building, thereby enhancing the credibility, inclusiveness, and durability of the truce. Furthermore, the truce must prioritize the restoration and continuation of essential services such as healthcare, education, water, and electricity and explicitly include protection of agricultural activities, such as land preparation, planting, irrigation, herding, and harvesting, which are time-bound, highly sensitive to insecurity, and essential to food security and local economic stability, particularly in areas previously inaccessible.

Framework of Recommendations: Civil Society Priorities for Supporting a Credible Truce

Building on this vision, the paper proposes a framework of practical recommendations grounded in Sudan's experience, the realities of humanitarian operations, and the urgent need to translate political pledges into measurable and implementable commitments.

First: Transforming the Truce from a Political Declaration into a Formal Commitment

The truce should be given a regional and international legal character and endorsement, through resolutions of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) and/or the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to create accountability structure parties could not easily ignore. Other diplomatic measures, such as creating a contact group from states and international bodies further strengthens accountability measures.

The DCSP recommends that external actors should condition any political or humanitarian support to the warring parties on the acceptance of a time-limited renewable humanitarian truce.

Second: Guaranteeing Unconditional Humanitarian Access

All humanitarian corridors, once agreed, whether land, air, sea, or river, should be opened to severely affected areas like El-Fasher and Kadugli⁵, regardless of territorial control. While humanitarian corridors remain essential, they should be understood as enabling tools rather than ends in themselves. Equal priority must be given to ensuring that this access arrangements translate into the restoration and sustained functioning of essential services, including healthcare, water systems, electricity networks, and education.

Lessons should be drawn from previous Sudanese experiences, particularly the 2002 humanitarian access arrangements in the Nuba Mountains, and the four Danforth Tests, all of which demonstrated that progress is more likely when: (i) agreements are broken down into incremental, testable steps rather than broad, non-implementable commitments; (ii) pilot arrangements are implemented in high-need areas to build confidence and demonstrate feasibility; (iii) credible international monitoring mechanisms are in place to verify compliance; and (iv) processes are inclusive of civilian

⁴ While such arrangements may improve access and protection, they also carry significant risks, particularly the potential exposure of civilians in the event of a truce breakdown hence must therefore be approached with caution, robust safeguards, and continuous risk assessment.

⁵ The proposed locations may be revisited at the implementation stage based on conditions on the ground, including recent developments in areas such as Blue Nile and associated displacement dynamics. The prior identification of select areas could help test the truce and serve as a confidence-building measure.

and local actors, avoiding narrow, elite-driven agreements that undermine sustainability. While the truce should apply to all areas affected or potentially affected by hostilities, a phased implementation model may be adopted, beginning with the most critical and high-risk areas — particularly Darfur and Kordofan — before expanding gradually according to clearly defined performance benchmarks.

Third: Management and Monitoring Structure for Humanitarian Truce

Formation of a **High-Level Humanitarian Coordination Committee (HHCC)** composed of representatives of the Quad countries, representatives of the two conflict parties, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a coalition of international humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Sudanese civil society actors, including representatives of Emergency Response Rooms and other locally grounded humanitarian initiatives.

The HHCC is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the humanitarian truce through a multi-level coordination structure that ensures effective delivery of aid, civilian protection, and local conflict management.

The HHCC to ensure that the perspectives of women and diverse civilian groups are systematically captured, documented, and integrated into truce development, implementation, and monitoring processes. This should include minimum representation thresholds for women and civilian actors within management and coordination structures, structured engagement with women-led organizations and community-based initiatives, and clear procedures to ensure that consultation outcomes inform decision-making related to humanitarian access, protection, and service delivery priorities.

At the operational level, the HHCC establishes and supervises **Local Humanitarian Committees (LHCs)** to coordinate humanitarian assistance through the cluster system (e.g. health, food, shelter, education) and manage 24/7 operations rooms. These committees are supported through targeted capacity-building in humanitarian principles, monitoring, and coordination.

To address localized tensions, the HHCC also mandates the creation of **Local De-escalation Committees (LDCs)** civilian-led bodies that focus on early warning, community-level dialogue, peacebuilding and social cohesion, protection of civilians, and real-time coordination with humanitarian actors and higher-level structures.

The HHCC is further tasked with identifying and securing humanitarian corridors, including cross-border access routes, and coordinating with national and international actors to ensure safe, timely, and unimpeded aid delivery. This includes logistical planning such as storage sites, road and air access points, and evacuation pathways in high-risk areas.

In addition, the Committee oversees data collection, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms related to aid distribution, human rights violations, and gender-based violence (GBV), ensuring confidentiality and survivor-centered approaches.

The HHCC develops facilitation mechanisms, such as a “fast-track” system, to remove administrative and bureaucratic barriers to humanitarian operations, enabling rapid deployment and sustained service delivery.

The committee should be chaired by an independent international humanitarian figure and include Sudanese humanitarian experts to strengthen legitimacy, and national ownership.

Capacity-building efforts should focus on training members in conflict sensitivity, humanitarian principles, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and coordination skills, while also strengthening their ability to support survivors of gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence (GBV/CRSV). In addition, these efforts should promote gender-responsive monitoring and verification approaches

ensuring that information is systematically gathered from diverse segments of the population, including women, and reflected in accountability and implementation processes at the local level.

Fourth: Protection of Civilians and Human Rights as the Core of the Truce

The protection of civilians and respect for human rights must not be treated as secondary considerations but rather as central pillars of the truce.

Establish agreed de-escalation zones, particularly in South Kordofan and North Darfur, with a prohibition on targeting civilian infrastructure, farmland, irrigation systems, food storage facilities, agricultural inputs, and harvest activities, and the immediate investigation of any violations, especially those involving sexual and gender-based violence against women, men, girls and boys.

Fifth: Integrating the Restoration of Basic Services as a Core Component of the Truce

The truce should prioritize the restoration and revitalization of basic services across Sudan, including healthcare, education, water supply, food, electricity, agricultural production and seasonal livelihoods, essential supply chains, without geographic or political discrimination, and inclusive of returning populations and refugees wishing to return voluntarily. In many areas of Sudan, the survival and resilience of civilians depend less on the delivery of short-term humanitarian aid than on the continued functioning of basic systems and public services. The DCSP therefore recommends establishing a “National Essential Services Support Program” linked to the truce and funded directly through donor commitments. Operating in parallel with humanitarian response efforts, the program would aim to:

- Restore minimum levels of critical infrastructure and ensure they are well maintained
- Provide temporary salary support for essential service personnel
- Support time-critical agricultural activities, including land preparation, access to seeds and tools, irrigation maintenance, livestock movement, and protection of harvests
- Preventing the complete collapse of the education and health systems
- Reduce pressure on host communities and displaced populations

The truce agreement should explicitly support the rehabilitation of hospitals, health centers, schools, and water facilities, and ensure the safe return of medical, technical, and educational personnel to their workplaces.

In addition, the truce framework should create space for structured and practical cooperation between the parties on sustaining essential economic and social functions that underpin civilian life. This includes facilitating trade flows and supply chains, supporting agricultural production cycles, enabling the payment of salaries for health workers and teachers, and ensuring the continuity of national examination and accreditation systems for students across conflict lines.

Framing the truce in this way—as a platform for maintaining essential services and economic stability—may also increase its political feasibility, as it aligns with the interests of the parties in preserving a minimum level of governance and stability in areas under their control, while delivering tangible and immediate benefits to civilians.

Sixth: Recognizing Civilian Actors as Partners

Civil society organizations, Emergency Response Rooms, local initiatives — including community kitchens (*takaaya*), youth groups, women’s organizations, and refugee and returnee associations — should be actively involved in planning and monitoring processes.

Donors should be encouraged to provide direct and structured support to local initiatives that have demonstrated their ability to deliver humanitarian assistance, alongside political and security protection for these actors.

Seventh: Preventing the Normalization of Impunity

Humanitarian truce must not grant blanket political or legal immunity.

International investigation mechanisms and documentation of violations should continue alongside any ceasefire arrangements.

Any approach that leaves the truce in a permanent state of suspension without a clear pathway toward a comprehensive end to the war and a political transition should be firmly rejected.

Conclusion

Sudan stands at a critical juncture. The period following the Washington and Berlin conferences represents a narrow and time-bound window in which the international community, regional actors, and Sudanese stakeholders can move beyond symbolic gestures toward a humanitarian truce that delivers tangible protection and relief for civilians. Experience since April 2023 has demonstrated that ceasefires lacking political anchoring, credible monitoring, and operational guarantees do not save lives and may, in practice, increase risks for civilians and frontline responders. Humanitarian funding alone, regardless of scale, will not translate into impact unless it is accompanied by enforceable commitments, sustained access, and meaningful accountability.

A credible humanitarian truce must therefore be conceived not as a temporary pause in fighting, but as a structured humanitarian cooperation framework that prioritizes the protection of civilians, the restoration of essential services, and practical coordination across conflict lines. By centering healthcare, water, electricity, education, livelihoods, and safeguarding agricultural seasons and harvest cycles is equally decisive: without it, famine risks will persist regardless of ceasefire declarations or funding commitments the truce can address the core determinants of civilian survival and resilience, while creating incentives for compliance through visible improvements in living conditions. At the same time, humanitarian arrangements must remain firmly insulated from political manipulation, uphold aid neutrality, and avoid contributing—directly or indirectly—to the normalization of impunity.

Ultimately, a humanitarian truce cannot substitute for ending the war. Its credibility and sustainability depend on being embedded from the outset within a broader, civilian-led political process aimed at a permanent ceasefire and a just transition. Designed and implemented in this way, the DCSP hopes, and works toward ensuring, that the truce can serve as an entry point to rebuild trust, preserve Sudan’s unity, and reaffirm civilians not as passive recipients of aid, but as central actors in shaping a peaceful and democratic future for the country.