

Independent media matter for Sudan and the International Community

More than two years after the fighting in Sudan re-emerged, the situation has worsened for the civilian population. Since the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces militia started again on April 15, 2023, life in Sudan has become extremely dangerous for all civilians. Almost [12 million people are displaced, 4.3 million are refugees in neighbouring countries](#) and almost all media workers have left the profession or the country. 25 million Sudanese are hungry and are in need of food and shelter.

For millions of Sudanese people who had to flee their homes there are two main priorities: health and safety, as there is a huge humanitarian catastrophe developing. Access to information plays a vital role in this, for example about how to prevent cholera at the current outbreak or where to find food and safety. Media is the lifeline of society, especially in times of war. Accurate and reliable news is not just important; it saves lives. For people caught in conflict, the media provides crucial updates on safe routes, aid, and imminent dangers. It can mean the difference between life and death. It also brings people together, fostering dialogue and understanding. Vital information that can be life-saving.

At this moment, international journalists have no access to Sudan and local journalists are persecuted in Sudan. Without independent journalism inside Sudan, there is a vital role that Radio Dabanga plays for millions of Sudanese, serving peace, unity and return to democracy.

In December 2008, Dabanga started as a radio station in exile to inform the public in Sudan about what is going on in their country; independent trustworthy, fact based and relevant information following international standards of journalism. In the 17 years it existed, Dabanga produced, edited and distributed health information combatting the Cholera epidemic, Yellow Fever and provided all sorts of humanitarian and Human Rights information, for example regarding family reunification and humanitarian access. Relevant, fact based and impartial information.

This is important, because independent information was censored, blocked, and journalists were persecuted by the former regime of President Omar Al-Bashir. During the peaceful, civilian revolt against President Bashir, Dabanga was a source of reference for the women and youth that protested the dictatorship in 2018 and forced a regime change. Dabanga also was a source for the ICC prosecutors of the ICC in the trial of Ali Kushaib, standing trial for the massacres of 2003-2005 in Darfur, Sudan.

After the revolution of 2018-2019

Manipulative ancient regime media continued to play a role and the grip of the security services on the state broadcast media remained a problem that contributed to confusion and disappointment. Unfortunately, the crucial importance of independent media was not considered a priority for government reform during the interim transitional government of prime Minister Hamdok. That should change in a future situation when the war ends and a new phase starts. Scenario planning for post war Sudan is currently starting without that notion of independent media.

After the coup d'état in 2021 by general Abdel Fattah Al-Burhane of the Sudan Armed Forces and RSF general Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the stranglehold of the media returned with suffocating results. And since the outbreak of war, the media became a prime target. Since the war started, 90% of the media infrastructure has been destroyed (power, satellite, internet, telecom and broadcast connectivity).

As for the independent media, their offices were destroyed and looted, and the Sudan Journalism Syndicate registered 555 incidents of violations including arrest, 230 detentions, murders and beatings or preventing journalists from working since the start of the war. In total 33 journalists were killed, in 16 cases they were directly targeted because of their journalistic work. Five Journalists are currently missing, two in [areas](#) controlled by the SAF, and three in RSF-controlled areas. Two Journalists remain in custody of the RSF, one of them is working with Al Jazeera and has been arrested in El Fasher recently. 2000 journalists lost their jobs and were forced to flee the country or stop working.

What remains intact:

Dabanga – Radio TV Online remains the only Sudanese news broadcaster with national coverage that can defend the Sudanese people from fake news and disinformation. A vital source for the millions of displaced Sudanese and refugees who have no access to internet and digital information. Through its shortwave radio, satellite TV, and online platforms Dabanga provides accurate and independent news to communities that have no access to reliable information. Those communities are caught up in a war and humanitarian crisis not of their making. Their survival depends upon trusted information to make informed decisions that can ensure their safety and their participation in efforts to stop the fighting and enable peace and democratic development.

Dabanga is the only independent media house with sources inside Sudan, who are working under the radar. It is a network that sends information and pictures to Dabanga in the Netherlands. Dabanga broadcasts from outside Sudan through shortwave radio and satellite TV, because this can't be censored or taken off air. The shortwave broadcast is on for about an hour and a half daily and the radio can also be heard on a satellite TV channel 24 hours a day.

In Sudan there are regular power cuts, phones and the internet are sometimes not working, and many homes have been destroyed. Whenever social media are up and running, Dabanga publishes content and also uses it to appeal for information. We ask people: where are you? What is going on? We encourage people to use Dabanga as a communication platform.

Other exiled media, important as they are for a pluralist media scene like Ayin media, nominated for the Human Rights Tulip, the Sudan Tribune and others, have been affected by the budget cuts of the US government. Most media now work with volunteers to keep some information available. That is why Dabanga took the initiative to gather the independent media under the umbrella of the Sudan Media Forum to advocate for the crucial needs of media and journalists in Sudan now, as well as the future importance of independent media. Within Sudan Media Forum, 25 media organisations now cooperate, republish each other's stories and create synergies, a truly unprecedented step for media which helps them to face the crisis. We are resilient and steadfast.

What is a threat

The respective warring parties and their agents have created dozens of websites, and fake accounts on social media platforms, to control the flow of information and spread false and misleading news, hate speech, and racism. Partisan media founded by the two militaries, these efforts are assisted by funding from hostile states and contracted foreign communication firms in Western Countries. Their goal is the creation of confusion, conspirative thought, violence between communities and ultimately the division of the country. Atrocities in plain sight, summary executions, torture and degrading pictures of the treatment of women too horrific to watch are intoxicating Sudan.

This is why we have three recommendations for you to give the citizens of Sudan a chance to work towards a return to democracy in a peaceful united Sudan:

- Ensure the continuation of Dutch support to independent media to help survive fact-based information for Sudan.
- Tech support for media is needed to research the proliferation of hate speech and misinformation of the warring parties. There is a shortage of secure storage and cloud services to collect video evidence of perpetrators on social media. This support will allow media to contribute with evidence to a future effort to bring the perpetrators of human rights abuse and war crimes to court
- Of course, we also support all efforts to end the proliferation of arms, prevent arms trading, exploitation of resources and support all efforts to stop the war. New efforts to return to a democratic citizen led government needs to integrate an independent media system as a priority in the scenario planning for a return to a civilian administration.