Giving Peace a Chance

SalaaMedia Center

DEMOLITION AS DISPOSSESSION FORCED REMOVAL OF "INFORMAL" HOUSING IN KHARTOUM

Eltigani Elhag

September 2026





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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Full term
A/HRC/4/18	Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing annexing the Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement (2007)
AU	African Union
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005)
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSS	Government of Southern Sudan
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP(s)	Internally displaced person(s)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PPS	Population-based (probability) sampling
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States dollar
KLPVRA	Khartoum State Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the demolition of “informal” or “emergency” housing and informal markets in Greater Khartoum as an instrument of land acquisition rather than of urban planning. It argues that successive Sudanese governments have used a consistent three-stage method: first, the withdrawal of legal recognition from particular occupants — often by questioning their citizenship or their standing as lawful holders; second, the construction of an administrative rather than judicial basis for removal, insulated from court challenge; and third, physical demolition followed by reallocation of the cleared land. The paper traces this pattern across four waves of removal — the May regime clearances of the 1970s, the Islamic regime-era replanning of the 1990s, the camp demolitions of 2003–2005, and the campaign conducted since the Sudanese Armed Forces regained control of Khartoum in 2025 — and shows that in each wave the burden fell disproportionately on populations originating in Sudan’s conflict-affected peripheries: Darfur, Kordofan, the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, Abyei, and what is now South Sudan.

The paper’s central legal finding is that the authority invoked for the current campaign — a “Khartoum State Land Protection and Removal of Violations Law of 2018” — cannot be located in any accessible compilation of Sudanese legislation. The paper argues that this absence is dispositive whichever way it is resolved: if the instrument does not exist, the demolitions are ultra vires; if it exists but is unpublished, it fails the basic requirement of legality, since a rule that cannot be consulted cannot be complied with or contested. On either branch, the demolitions lack lawful foundation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2025, the Khartoum State Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority (KLPVR) has conducted a demolition campaign across the peripheral belt of the capital — southern Khartoum, East Nile, Jabal Awliya, and western and southern Omdurman. By late June 2025 the Authority reported the campaign 60 per cent complete against a stated target of 75,000 sites. This paper places that campaign within a five-decade pattern and assesses its legal basis.

The campaign is conducted under an asserted "Khartoum State Land Protection and Removal of Violations Law of 2018." That instrument cannot be located in any accessible compilation of Sudanese legislation. The finding is dispositive either way it is resolved. If the law was never enacted, the Authority holds no demolition power and every removal conducted under it is ultra vires. If it was enacted but never published, it fails the requirement of legality: a rule that cannot be consulted cannot be obeyed, cannot ground a finding of violation, and cannot be contested. On either branch the demolitions are unlawful — and that conclusion requires no determination of motive and rests on no contested fact.

Dispossession in Khartoum has not generally worked by overriding rights. It has worked by reclassifying holders so that rights no longer attach to them. The statutory basis is longstanding: the Unregistered Land Act 1970 vested roughly ninety per cent of Sudanese land in the state in a single provision and authorized eviction by force, leaving peripheral urban populations dependent on discretionary administrative allocation rather than justiciable right. Amendments to the Civil Transactions Act between 1991 and 1993 removed the courts from disputes adverse to the state's interest in that land. Compressed notice is therefore not the primary obstacle to remedy; the forum was closed in advance.

Survey evidence from 2007 establishes that the pattern is durable and predates the current war. Displaced persons were more than twice as likely to have been forcibly removed as other residents (39 per cent against 18 per cent). Southerners were 18 per cent of the sample but 33 per cent of those forcibly moved; residents originating in Khartoum and the northern states were 58 per cent of the sample but 39 per cent of those moved. Of respondents from the Three Areas — Abyei, Southern Kordofan and the Nuba Mountains, and Southern Blue Nile — 76 per cent attributed their removal to government relocation. The same peripheral belt has been the object of removal since 1970 and of military action since 2023.

On the state's own published figures, 1,100 plots are offered against 75,000 targeted sites — compensation for approximately 1.5 per cent of affected sites. The offer excludes structures, possessions, and reconstruction costs; it is made conditional on negotiations not yet concluded; and it is governed by eligibility rules that have historically excluded those without identity documents, female-headed households, later arrivals, and those unable to pay charges.

On 21 July 2025, Khartoum State's official platform reported the allocation of a plot in Block 19 at (Abu Sied) to the Minister of Defense, with survey pegs placed in coordination with the Department of Urban Planning. Block 19 is one of two blocks cleared of 806 residences earlier

that month. The Minister is the same official whose public communiqué pledged suitable alternatives to those displaced. The question of who benefits is answerable from the state's own record.

Finally, the practice has not been constant; it has degraded. The May-era removals of the 1970s were accompanied by planning and by the issue of property documents. The 1990s relocations delivered land without services. The camp demolitions of 1994–2005 delivered plots to a declining share of those affected. The present campaign delivers plots to a fraction of one per cent. Each stage removed a protection the previous stage retained.

INTRODUCTION

In Sudan, the demolition of homes and informal markets is notable for the high number of social, legal, and human rights issues it incites. Government officials justify these actions by citing reasons like urban planning, security needs, and upholding state authority. In contrast, residents and human rights groups view these operations as arbitrary measures aimed at depriving certain populations of their homes and any land claims. Over the past fifty years, three recurring features of these operations have emerged, forming the focus of this paper:

1. The first is the compression of notice. Campaigns have typically been executed at speed and with little or no warning, which has the practical effect of extinguishing the constitutional and statutory right to challenge a removal order before it is carried out. A right of appeal that expires before it can be exercised is not a right.
2. The second is the mismatch between the legal label and the legal facts. Documented reports establish that residents of several demolished areas held allocation contracts, possession certificates, or survey numbers issued by administrative bodies. Where such documents exist, the designation of the area as "informal" or "illegal" is not a description of the occupants' legal position but a reclassification of it — an administrative act that produces the illegality it claims to find.
3. The third is the absence of remedy. Where demolitions have occurred, alternative housing has frequently not been provided, and compensation, where offered, has been confined to land and has excluded the destroyed dwelling, its contents, and the labor and savings invested in it over years or decades.

These features have long sustained a suspicion that removal decisions exceed their declared purpose. Residents and activists in Khartoum have argued that the operations function as instruments for reshaping the demography of particular neighborhoods. The suspicion is sharpened by the observation that the same peripheral belts have been subject both to policy-driven removal in peacetime and to military targeting in wartime.

HOUSING LAND WITHIN THE WIDER LAND QUESTION

Forced removal of housing is not a discrete policy field in Sudan. It is one expression of a much older contest over who may hold land and on what terms — a contest rooted partly in customary practice and partly in state interventions that have systematically privileged some claimants over others. The capital Khartoum and the states have generated repeated confrontations between government and citizens over ownership, with both sides asserting a right to control the same ground. These disputes have been lethal in several neighborhoods of the capital, and land questions have similarly fueled tensions south of Omdurman. Observers attribute the intensity of these conflicts to the rising commercial value of land in Khartoum and the states, which has made land a principal fiscal and patronage resource for government. Citizens in historic neighborhoods have alleged that government agencies pursued practices designed to pressure them into relinquishing well-located properties.

Parliament intervened at one point to halt the expropriation of citizens' land for investment purposes without consent or compensation — a measure understood at the time as a check on

an investment law that permitted the state to transfer land to investors without compensating existing owners. The independent member Mohamed Al-Siddiq Drouss argued in that debate that legislative authority is distinct from executive decree, that the constitution outranks both, and that citizens who have occupied their land for generations may not be dispossessed of it without consent[1].

TWO LAND REGIMES, TWO VULNERABILITIES

The evolution of Sudanese land legislation, spanning from the Land Settlement and Registration Ordinance of 1925 to the investment laws of the late 1990s, highlighted two key aspects:

1. In central and northern Sudan, and particularly in urban areas, registration and titling became comparatively stable and consolidated. This produced a more structured legal framework for resolving ownership disputes, including over residential land — and, correspondingly, a higher degree of scrutiny over removal operations. The state's response in these areas has not been to dispense with law but to maneuver within it: revising rules and policies under successive justifications, questioning the residency or citizenship status of occupants, or invoking security imbalance. What such maneuvering tends to reveal, when examined closely, is a prior dissatisfaction with the presence of particular groups on particular land.
2. Beyond that zone, land has been governed by the interaction of two forces: (1) customary dispute resolution among communities, and (2) a persistent governmental tendency to treat all such land as state property. It is worth noting that policy addressing informal or emergency housing is minimal to non-existent in Sudan's rural peripheries. The reason is structural rather than administrative neglect. In rural settings, the environmental, social, and economic conditions blur the boundary between informal and organized housing to the point of dissolving it. Newcomers are absorbed through customary law and social norm; their economic circumstances and the locally available materials produce dwellings indistinguishable from the surrounding built environment. There is, in consequence, no category of "informal housing" to be removed — which also explains the absence of any governmental policy on emergency housing in rural areas.

CONCEPTS AND METHOD

HYPOTHESIS

This paper advances the following hypothesis; that the removal and demolition of emergency or informal housing in Sudan has functioned as a durable official mechanism for acquiring land. The mechanism operates in sequence. It begins by withdrawing constitutional protection from the property claims of specific citizens — most often by questioning their citizenship or national affiliation, which serves as the initial threshold. It proceeds by constructing a legal or quasi-legal basis for removal that is administrative rather than judicial in character and therefore resistant

[1] Idris, Awatef (November 23, 2015). **Land disputes... The conflict between the old neighborhoods and the modern laws. Kabbaj: The government resorts to selling historical lands for its privileged locations**. Al-Rakouba newspaper.

to challenge. It concludes with physical demolition and the reallocation of cleared land. The populations subjected to this sequence have been disproportionately drawn from particular ethnic, cultural, and regional groups, and the resulting removals have extended to their markets and commercial premises as well as their homes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is the geographical and security-framed targeting of Khartoum's peripheral zones — southern Khartoum, East Nile, and western Omdurman — associated with the ethnic composition of those zones?
2. What do official narratives, including their security justifications, disclose when subjected to discourse analysis — and what do their silences disclose?
3. Is there statistical evidence that removals fall disproportionately on populations already displaced from conflict areas?
4. What do firsthand accounts indicate about the conduct of demolitions, including the use of racialized language or the targeting of cultural and social landmarks, and how does that conduct relate to the legal frameworks invoked?
5. Is enforcement consistent? Are comparable violations by differently situated occupants treated differently?

METHOD AND ITS LIMITS

The paper draws on four bodies of evidence: the statutory record; secondary quantitative research, principally the Tufts–IDMC profiling study of displacement in Khartoum conducted by Karen Jacobsen in 2007; official statements and press releases issued by Khartoum State bodies between March and July 2025; and primary testimony collected from residents of three peripheral zones.

WHAT "INFORMAL HOUSING" DENOTES

"Informal" or "emergency" housing refers to settlement that has developed outside the framework of urban planning. The definition is unstable across jurisdictions, since it depends on how a given government chooses to treat such settlement and on the physical and social characteristics of the locality. Its forms are shaped by economic, social, and political conditions rather than by any single architectural criterion.

In the Anglophone literature, informal housing is generally defined as areas where housing development has occurred without the mediation of urban planning. Such dwellings may exist within modern urban space and need not be old. "Slum" housing is more narrowly defined by construction that contravenes building codes and disregards planning regulation[2]. United Nations work on urban land policy has characterized informal housing by overcrowding, high population density, deterioration, and unsanitary conditions that place residents' health and safety at risk[3]. Sudanese scholars have defined informal or forced housing as the growth of

[2] Laurie Ingram (Jul 8, 2025). **Analysis of the Housing Act of 1949**. ANCHOR.

[3] United Nations, Human Settlements.

communities and structures that do not conform to the urban fabric of surrounding areas, deviating from expected growth patterns and contravening urbanization law.

THE FORMATION OF KHARTOUM'S PERIPHERIES

MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

Sudan's geography has made it a corridor for population movement, receiving Arab migration from the east and African populations from West and East Africa. The decisive internal movement, however, began in the 1980s, when populations from the western, eastern, and southern peripheries moved toward the capital in large numbers. Three drivers operated together. The first was environmental: drought and desertification struck the sub-Saharan savannah belt in the mid-1980s. The second was conflict: civil war in the south, localized conflict in western Sudan, and war across the Horn of Africa. The third was economic: the exhaustion of rural livelihoods. Cities, and Khartoum above all, offered comparatively better services and higher rates of development, and absorbed a large share of those displaced, drawn substantially from the former rural workforce.

However, the first major waves into Khartoum began in the mid-1980s under the combined pressure of famine and war. The war resumed in 1983; drought struck Sudan in the same year and lasted through 1984, affecting an estimated 8.4 million people — around half the population — in Darfur and Kordofan, and producing famine across both regions[4]. The rural economy was further destroyed by a war strategy in the south that deliberately uprooted rural populations. Darfur and Kordofan, rich in agricultural and pastoral resources, saw cultivation abandoned and rangeland degraded. By the mid-1980s an estimated three million people were displaced; around half a million crossed into neighbouring countries and some 2.3 million moved north, of whom an estimated 1.8 million reached Khartoum. Yet, arrival did not end the displacement. In the capital these populations were marginalized — economically, into low-paid and casual labor, and socially, through dynamics that confined and ultimately excluded them.

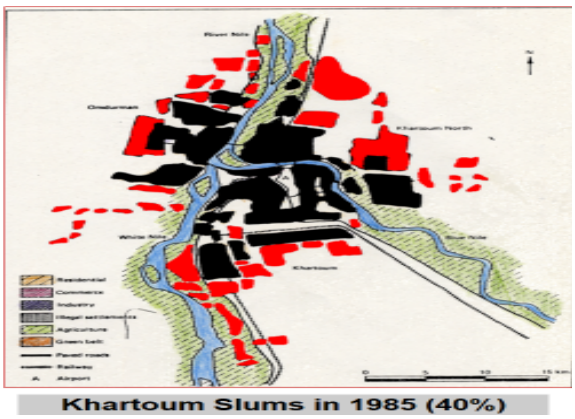
THE EMERGENCE OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

Informal settlement in Khartoum accumulated across decades of disaster and conflict, compounded by developmental imbalance and inadequate education and health provision in the regions of origin[5]. The earliest such settlement in Khartoum appeared around 1927, near what is now the Khartoum Bahri industrial zone, produced by rural-to-urban migration. A significant influx followed in 1961 and a much larger one in 1983, driven by drought, desertification, and the civil war in the south. By the mid-1980s — around 1986–87 — internal displacement had

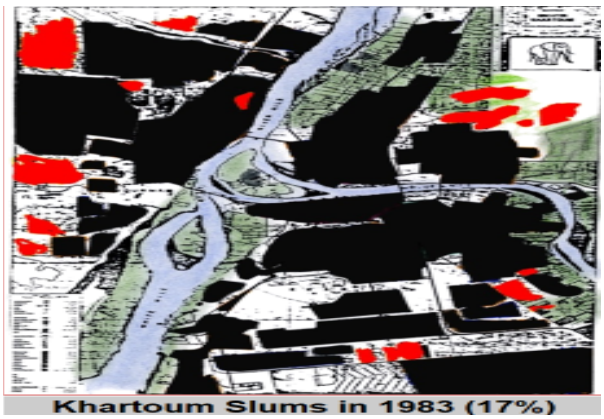
[4] ESCWA, Beirut (2017). **Study on International Migration in Sudan**. UNESCOWA Archives

[5] Idris, Um Hani (February 2017). **Emergency Housing in Sudan: Problems and Solutions: A Case Study of the Khartoum Locality**. A Study Published on Research Gate

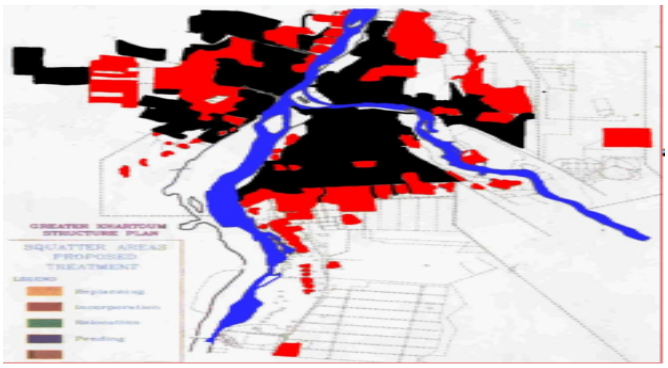
produced roughly 96 informal settlements around Khartoum, housing approximately 600,000 people[6].



Khartoum Slums in 1985 (40%)



Khartoum Slums in 1983 (17%)



Khartoum Slums in 1990 (60%)

The maps above show the increase in the density of emergency (slum) housing in the red areas, and its movement to the outskirts of Khartoum during the period from 1983 to 1990.

Mohamed Bakheet's survey of these settlements maps a ring around the capital: running south from (Mayo), (Soba), and (Andalusia) toward (Jabal Awliya); west along the fringes of Omdurman through (Dar es Salaam) and (Naivasha) and north to (Marzouq) and (Al-Fateh); and in Khartoum Bahri through (Carton Kassala), (Al-Baraka), (Dar al-Salaam), (Al Wohda), (Al Takamol), (Altaawidat), and (Karton Barona)[7]. In 1991 the government established four official IDP camps for southern displaced populations: West Omdurman in Dar al-Salaam, Mayo, and Jebel Awlia. Khartoum's subsequent growth absorbed these camps into the urban fabric, converting land that had been peripheral into land with substantial commercial.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Bakhit, Mohamed (2014). **Identity and Lifestyle Formation in Multi-Ethnic Slums: A Case Study in the Pond Community in Khartoum. PhD Dissertation.** Leith Publishing, Münster. Atter, August 7, 2025.

WAVES OF REMOVAL

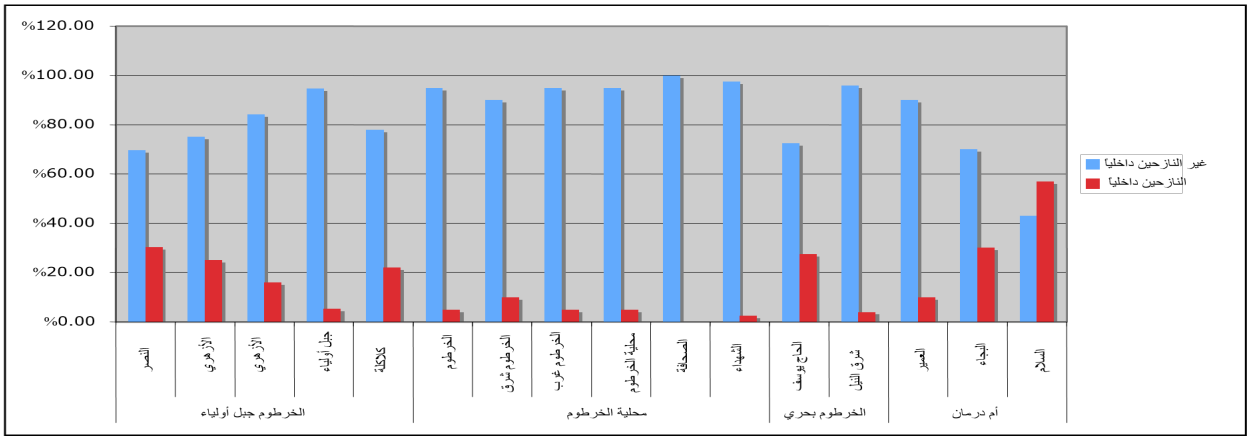
THE MAY REGIME (1969-1985), 1970 ONWARD

In 1970 the authorities of the May regime (1969-1985) ordered the evacuation of the "carton" areas of the capital and the relocation of their residents to land south of the Green Belt — the area still known as Mayo, or the "South Belt"[8]. The plan covered the Great Cistern area on Al-Ghaba Street in Khartoum; Khartoum Carton (3), near the industrial zone, populated largely by workers; Souk Al-Shams, south of the horse-racing venue; the (Lamab) area; the Soba Carton, whose residents had helped construct Soba University Hospital; the Barri Cartons, housing workers and guards of the Central Electricity Authority; and the Dar es Salaam Cartons east of Al-Kalaklat. The stated rationale throughout was urban replanning.

THE ISLAMIC REGION ERA: REPLANNING IN THE 1990S

In the 1990s, under Minister Sharafeddin Banga, Khartoum State launched a campaign to dismantle informal housing under the heading of urban planning, framed as implementation of the 1991 master plan for Greater Khartoum. The campaign reached across all three cities: (Al-Eshash Falata) and (Soba) in Khartoum; (Al-Khudair), (Al-Thawrat Al-Jadida), and Umbadat in Omdurman[9]. Residents were relocated to peripheral settlements designated "Dar es Salaam". Between 1989 and 1990, government initiatives sought to manage the spread of informal housing by creating Dar es Salaam districts in southern Khartoum, Jabal Awliya, Bahri Hajj Yusuf, and western Omdurman.

The relocation areas were deficient in every basic service, health care, schools, water, electricity, transport, and security infrastructure. Residents were required to procure these independently, without government assistance, under heightened security measures and social tension. The pattern supports a reading of the relocations as designed to distance new settlers from the center of the capital rather than to serve them.



Distribution of IDPs and non-IDPs by administrative regions: Source: Karen, Jacobsen

[8] Al-Khader Jahallah, Kamal. (May 4, 2024). **The city of May, south of Khartoum: Origin, development, and ethno-linguistic composition**. Sudan Ashwaq Platform.

[9] Ibid.

During the tenure of the former governor of Khartoum, Abdulrahman Al-Khader, the Land Protection and Violation Removal Authority was launched in Khartoum State is formed. This initiative involved a force of 1,000 policemen dedicated to preventing encroachment on government lands, as outlined in the state's official statement. Additionally, another team consisting of a thousand hybrids of civilians and police was tasked with removing civil violations. Governor Al-Khader emphasized that the agency's employees should not resort to taking the law into their own hands but should instead proceed through the proper legal channels, such as courts and prosecution. He outlined the agency's mission in two main areas: first, to protect government lands from unauthorized claims, ensuring that citizens can only acquire land through valid documentation. He stated that random housing developments would not be permitted by this agency, emphasizing that any unauthorized constructions would be subject to removal. The governor also emphasized that the agency's role includes holding state executive bodies accountable if they fail to perform their duties. He noted that while relevant laws exist, there has been a lack of strict enforcement, which is why the agency has been tasked with implementing these laws effectively[10].

The Khartoum State's definition of the mission for the Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority outlines that members will conduct their duties civilly, following good method by issuing a warning first[11]. If there's no compliance, those warned will face legal actions. Emphasis is placed on enforcing laws to remove all types of violations in Khartoum State, transforming it into a healthy capital and fostering a green environment. The Authority aims to raise awareness and educate citizens on the significance of village re-planning, eliminating slums, and addressing all deformities that adversely impact the city's environment. It focuses on safeguarding land from encroachment risks while promoting voluntary compliance, preserving human life, and protecting the environment according to established plans and policies. The Authority is empowered with all necessary executive powers to halt land encroachments, promote public behavior on roads free from deformities, and enhance cleanliness efforts in streets and neighborhoods. These activities are coordinated with relevant bodies as per regulations, facilitated through the Authority's offices across the state's localities and the central administration[12].

In early July 2025, overseen by the Land Protection Authority in Khartoum State, the removal of what was termed as indiscriminate encroachments in Squares 18 and 19 B (Abu Sied) in the Omdurman locality was completed. The director of the Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority at that time, Abdulaziz Abdullah, stated that 806 houses were removed with the involvement of regular forces, the prosecution, engineers, and employees, in line with state directives to dismantle informal housing due to perceived security threats and associated negative phenomena.

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[10] Sudan Build Axis website (n.d.).

[11] Khartoum State General Secretariat website, (August 10, 2026), social media, Facebook.

[12] Ibid.



Demolition of houses in the Al-Khairat area of East Nile: Source, Radio Dabanga 28 May 2025

On July 12th, joint forces from the East Nile locality cleared informal housing in Market 4 of the Al-Baraka neighborhood (Kassala carton). As per the Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority, Khartoum State accomplished 60% of its broader plan to inventory and eliminate informal housing across all localities, including efforts in the Al-Khairat area in the East Nile locality, Square 19 Halfaya, Square 13 of Matari Al-Halfaya, Ezba in Bahri locality, and areas like Mandela and Gabbush in southern Khartoum extending to Jabal Awliya. Field reports suggest this was actually a forced displacement following the army's takeover of Khartoum, with residents targeted on ethnic and tribal grounds under accusations of aiding the Rapid Support forces or concealing weapons. Southern refugees were particularly affected, while housing plots were allocated to outsiders under the Al-Karama project, intended to accommodate families of those who perished in the Dignity War[13].

[13] Shahid Ayan (November 23, 2025). **The Governor of Khartoum launches the Dignity Cities Project to house the families of martyrs.** Shahid Ayan Electronic Platform.



Source: Khartoum State General Secretariat page, August 12, 2026, Facebook

The study also highlighted that of 665,000 internally displaced persons whose homes were demolished and who were forcibly relocated between 1989 and 2008, more than half were moved after 2004. Many experienced multiple relocations. Where IDPs were moved, schools, clinics, and latrines were commonly destroyed alongside dwellings. Those who received plots had to pay to rebuild; those who did not had nowhere to go.

Also, the issue eligibility for a plot was itself a mechanism of exclusion. According to the Ministry of Engineering, only those registered up to 1996 were treated as IDPs and considered for plots — a cut-off adopted, in the government's framing, to separate those genuinely in need from those seeking to profit. The legal status of those excluded by the cut-off was left undefined, and as of December 2004 no policy had been issued as to where they should go. Those who had lost identity documents, female-headed households, arrivals after 1996, and those unable to pay plot charges were systematically excluded. Recipients faced charges of around USD 200 plus further costs to obtain the legal documents that would make ownership secure — a process described in the source literature as opaque, corrupt, and favorable to the wealthier.

However, examining the various reasons presented by different administrations in Khartoum concerning compulsory or informal housing, and linking these to policies that emphasize protecting government lands or addressing issues that negatively impact the city's environment, reveals a pattern. The recent actions, especially by the Land Protection Authority in Khartoum State, illustrate that demolitions have predominantly targeted the outskirts of Khartoum's three cities—Khartoum, Khartoum Bahri, and Omdurman. These areas developed due to significant internal displacements previously mentioned and their underlying causes. Agnes de Goffrey has

described these actions as a governmental strategy to legitimize land acquisition by pushing poorer residents to the city's most distant areas. Official reasons given include urban planning aimed at facilitating basic services like water, electricity, education, and health—services, unfortunately, still lacking in these regions[14]. It's evident that the demolitions are primarily directed at displacing internally displaced persons (IDPs) from informal settlements within urban spaces. As cited by Agnes de Goffrey, much of the land initially settled by IDPs has appreciated considerably in value, underpinning the true motives behind evictions or resettlements. Frequently, displaced individuals resist urban planning to retain hopes of eventually receiving legal titles to new lands distributed in these farther locales. This pattern has been observed across numerous areas in Khartoum, as documented in a study by Karen Jacobsen.

Never the less, the Tufts–IDMC study documents three specific operations of this period.

1. In 1994, the replanning of Angola camp in Omdurman produced the demolition of some 16,000 homes; only 8,000 households received plots. Of the 8,000 that did not, approximately half settled in the squatter area near Salahin and the remainder dispersed elsewhere in Khartoum.
2. In 1998, the replanning of Hajj Yousif involved the demolition of all houses in the suburb. Around 80 per cent of affected households received plots; the remaining 20 per cent moved to informal areas.
3. In 2003 the government began replanning and demolishing the IDP camps themselves. By November 2004, 40,000 homes and thousands of latrines had been demolished[15].

Additionally, the study found that many participants had previously relocated within Khartoum. This movement was closely connected to their original locations, with over 56% indicating they had moved within Khartoum. The largest group came from Darfur, the southern regions, and the three regions comprising South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Abyei. About 21.6% had faced forced relocation or deportation after arriving in Khartoum. Those originating from the three regions experienced the highest rates of forced relocations, while individuals from Khartoum/Northern State had the lowest. Despite people from the south making up 18% of the sample, they accounted for 33% of forced relocations. Conversely, although residents from Khartoum and the northern region constituted 58% of the sample, they represented only 39% of those forcibly relocated. Jacobsen concludes that forced relocations are significantly linked to when individuals arrived in Khartoum, particularly those who came between 1991 and 1995, who were more subject to forced movement or expulsion compared to those arriving within five years before or after this period. The reasons provided by the displaced for their expulsions were as follows:

1. Among the 212 respondents who reported being forced to move, 30 percent attributed this to an inability to pay rent, while over half (51 percent) experienced government rehousing, and 13 percent were asked to leave by their landlords.

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[14] Jacobsen, Karen (August 2008). **Urban Internal Displacement: A Joint Descriptive Study between the Centre for Internal Displacement and Tufts University, Khartoum, Case One**. API international – displacement .org.

[15] Multiple sources, IOM 2005 Survey of Return Intentions, adapted in the UN Plan of Action for Sudan 2008. Agnes de Goffrey.

2. There was a notable connection between the previous homes of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their likelihood of being involved in government resettlement programs. Specifically, 76 percent from the three areas (South Kordofan, Abyei, and the Blue Nile), and 53 percent from the south, pointed to government resettlement as the reason for their relocation. This contrasts with 40 percent in Khartoum/Northern State and 38 percent in Darfur.

When considering IDPs compared to non-IDPs, it's evident that a significant number of IDPs were evicted due to government resettlement programs. Additionally, many were forced to leave because they could not afford rent or because landlords requested their departure. The analysis concludes that these actions predominantly affected vulnerable groups, primarily from Sudan's peripheral areas, such as Darfur, Kordofan, and South Sudan. These populations fled to Khartoum due to factors like poor living conditions, conflicts, or environmental challenges in their native regions. It's notable that the relocations executed in May were conducted in a structured manner. The communities were moved to the outskirts of Khartoum as part of urban planning processes, allowing them to obtain property documents—an improvement over previous actions under different governments.

THE CAMPAIGN SINCE 2023

After the outbreak of conflict on 15 April 2023, and particularly following the reassertion of control over Khartoum by the Sudanese Armed Forces, demolition resumed on a scale and at a tempo without precedent in the earlier waves. In mid-March 2025, residents of Al-Ezba in Bahri were woken by bulldozers and heavy machinery demolishing their homes with furniture and possessions still inside, without prior notice. Operations continued through Um Al-Qura North, where the Authority reported clearing 532 sites and stated that prior warnings had been issued and legal procedures followed[16]. Clearance extended to Jabal Awliya in the Andalusia neighborhood, addressing violations at the Yarmouk rainwater drain in Al-Kalakla East, with further operations announced. The Authority characterized the cleared areas as having become hubs of criminal activity.

In early July 2025, the Authority removed structures classified as informal encroachments in Blocks 18 and 19 at Abu Saad in Omdurman locality. Its head, Abdulaziz Abdullah, stated that 806 residences were demolished, in coordination with regular forces, prosecutors, engineers, and other personnel, under state directives addressing “security threats and negative phenomena” attributed to informal settlement. On 12 July, forces from East Nile locality demolished informal structures at Market 4 in Al-Baraka, known locally as Carton Kassala. By late June 2025 the Authority reported that Khartoum State had completed 60 per cent of a plan, described as methodically designed, to eliminate informal housing across the state. The plan extends to Al-Khairat in East Nile, Block 19 in Halfaya, Block 13 of Matarey Al-Halfaya, the Ezba area in Bahri, Mandela and Gaboush in southern Khartoum, and Jabal Awliya.

[16] Sudan News Agency, (March 16, 2025). **A major campaign to remove slums in the Ezba area in Bahri**. Social media, Facebook.

The East Nile branch of the Authority has reported prosecutions of persons said to have encroached on government land and obstructed public roadways, causing visual pollution and impeding services. It has grounded these prosecutions in article 183 of the Penal Code together with articles 7, 8, and 15 of its own law and regulations, acting under directives from State Governor Ahmed Othman Hamza and the Executive Director of East Nile locality, Mortada Yacoub. It has stated that no person is exempt from the law[17].



Field reporting characterizes these operations as a campaign of forced displacement initiated after military forces assumed control of Khartoum, directed at specific ethnic and tribal groups, and accompanied by allegations that residents collaborated with the Rapid Support Forces and concealed weapons — allegations pressed with particular force against southern refugees. Housing plots have reportedly been redistributed under a scheme designated Project Dignity, allocating land to families of those killed in the War of Dignity rather than to original inhabitants.

MILITARY TARGETING AND REMOVAL

The purpose of examining areas subjected to military action after April 2023 is to assess whether that targeting was incidental, militarily necessary, or continuous with displacement policy. The areas concerned lie on the periphery of the capital, and their residents are predominantly of ethnic and cultural backgrounds originating in western Sudan, particularly Kordofan and Darfur, who migrated to the capital across different periods of time.

Jabal Awliya, south Khartoum: Hostilities occurred between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces in the Jabal Awliya military area, while aerial bombardment targeted RSF

[17] Mursal News July 19, 2026

positions in Bahri to the north. An army statement described clashes with what it termed a rebel militia in the Jabal Awliya vicinity, producing substantial losses, and accused the RSF of escalating mortar attacks on civilian localities with considerable civilian harm. An army source reported that a contingent linked to the Jabal Awliya sector engaged the RSF, capturing military vehicles, wounding RSF personnel, and detaining four members and their families. Airstrikes on RSF positions in Bahri were also reported[18].

Mayo, south Khartoum: On the morning of Sunday 10 September 2023, between 07:00 and 07:15 local time, a well-known market in the Mayo area was bombed. Media reporting attributed the attack to drones operated by Sudanese government forces[19].

East Nile: Airstrikes in the capital produced more than 75 civilian casualties in three days. The Khartoum State Ministry of Health reported that a strike on a popular market in East Nile killed and injured more than 30 people including women and children, hours after an incident in a neighborhood south of Khartoum in which 47 people were killed and more than 70 wounded, several critically[20]. Through November 2023 the East Nile locality was subject to sustained assault, extrajudicial killing, and aerial bombardment in populated areas, alongside expanding looting and theft, enforced disappearance, kidnapping for ransom, arbitrary arrest and torture, armed attacks on neighborhoods, and forced displacement of residents[21].

Kandahar market: western Omdurman. The market was shelled in July and December 2023. Supporters of the armed forces had publicly demanded that it be targeted, on the basis that it was controlled by the RSF and contained vehicles and goods stolen by them[22].

Central Market, south Khartoum: On 15 August 2024 the Sudanese military conducted an operation against the Central Market district south of Khartoum, presented as part of an effort to recover territory held by the RSF. Following the RSF takeover of the market, allegations circulated that it had become a hub for illicit trade in weapons, ammunition, fuel, and narcotics, reinforced by videos said to show vendors selling arms beneath a nearby bridge[23].

THE LEGAL ARCHITECTURE

From a legal point of view, all removal and demolition activities have been based mainly on two main foundations:

1. "The Land Protection and Violation Removal Law in Khartoum State for the year 2018". By reviewing the official websites on the Internet, we did not find any published document proving the existence of the Land Protection and Violation Removal Law of

[18] Aljazeera, August, 2023.
[19] Sudan Archive, 2024.
[20] Sudan Akhabar, September 14, 2023.
[21] Mutabaat Darfur, December 11, 2023.
[22] Sudan war monitor, Jul 30, 2024.
[23] Sudaltika, September 12, 2024

2018. The websites are: "Sudan Laws Online", "Sudan Law Folders", and "Sudan Law Index".[24]

2. "The Land Protection and Clearance Authority in Khartoum State". The agency, reportedly established under this law, works closely with the governor of Khartoum State and is actively involved in implementing eviction policies alongside the police and local authorities. As reported in the media, leadership of the agency has been assigned to Eng. Alwaleed Mohieddin Osman. He referenced the aforementioned "Protection Law," which governs the agency's operations. The agency's specialized tasks involve legal procedures aimed at preventing encroachments on government lands, including buildings, roads, environmental areas, sewage and rainwater networks, as well as water networks and transmission lines.

Upon examining the legal grounds for these removals, it becomes apparent that they relied on a law that is inexplicably absent from Sudan's legal framework. Alternatively, the actions might have been based on temporary orders issued by the state or another high-level governmental body. The earliest relevant legislation is the Urban Planning and Land Management Law of 1994[25], which bears little resemblance to the 2018 law cited in this context. Importantly, this 1994 law does not authorize demolitions in the way current actions by the Land Protection and Clearance Authority suggest.

A review of United Nations documents reveals that annually, millions worldwide are forcibly evicted, often plunging them into severe poverty. These forced evictions inflict significant trauma and exacerbate conditions for marginalized or vulnerable groups. They violate numerous internationally recognized human rights, such as the rights to adequate housing, food, water, health, education, and employment, as well as personal security and freedom from degrading treatment and restrictions on movement. According to the UN definition, forced evictions involve the permanent or temporary removal of people from their homes or land against their will, without legal safeguards or protection[26].

While international human rights law does permit evictions under exceptional circumstances, they must be justified, conducted legally, and in full compliance with international standards. The assessment of forced evictions involves understanding the context, evaluating their human rights impact, offering practical guidance to stakeholders, and monitoring the situation. It is crucial that these actions remain open to appeal[27].

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[24]. Websites: "Sudan Laws Online", "Sudan Laws Folders", "Sudan Laws Index.

[25]. Urban Planning and Land Management Act of 1994Location: Scrap

[26] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 7. United Nations Documents.

[27]. See: **Questionnaire on the Evaluation of Forced Evictions**, OCHCHR.

THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis examines written, spoken, or visual language within its social and cultural context, extending beyond individual sentences to larger textual units in order to identify underlying meanings, ideological commitments, authority claims, and effects on audiences[28]. Applied here, the object is the body of texts through which the state has justified removal and demolition. The aim is to test the hypothesis by examining what these texts assert, what they presuppose, and — most productively — what they omit.

SAMPLE 1: THE KHARTOUM LOCALITY CAMPAIGN

> *The Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority announced a campaign to clear informal settlement in Khartoum, covering 180 locations in the (Al-Lamab) area south of the capital, including the dismantling of 332 mud-constructed rooms. Abdel Moneim Al-Bashir, Executive Director of Khartoum Municipality, stated during a visit to (Al-Takamul) that the operations implemented a state mandate to eliminate informal housing from urban planning zones. He stated that since the military assumed control of Khartoum a statewide effort had been under way, targeting 75,000 sites, and that the plan included compensating affected residents with 1,100 housing plots. He urged holders of residential plots in affected areas to vacate quickly in order to claim their land and regularize their position, and indicated that coordination with the Ministry of Urban Planning would identify vacant land for allocation to rightful owners. Hossam El-Din Abdullah, Director of the Authority in Khartoum locality, stated that operations would extend to informal housing sites across various administrative units. The Government Land Protection Agency recorded the campaign as covering, in (Al-Takamul) and (Al-Lamap Bahr Abiad), 332 clay rooms, 130 red-brick rooms, 832 walls, 38 bathrooms, 493 makeshift shelters, and 32 scattered structures*.

SAMPLE 2: THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE

> *In a communiqué following a meeting of the Higher Committee for Preparing the Environment for the Return of Citizens to Khartoum State, the Minister of Defense, Lieutenant General Hassan Daoud Kabroun, affirmed a commitment to continue dismantling informal settlement in the capital. He stated that affected persons would receive suitable alternatives in accordance with existing land legislation and regulation. He located the initiative within a broader governmental strategy of reorganizing the urban landscape, framed as achieving equilibrium between urban security requirements and residents' rights, and stated that demolition would be*

[28] Lagtiri, Mustafa (January 7, 2026). **Mechanisms of pickling speech**. Communications, Facebook.

accompanied by concurrent regularization of the position of affected citizens, within a plan to revitalize Khartoum as an administrative and economic center.[29]

ANALYSIS

Authority. Both texts ground removal in a legal frame — the 2018 law and the Authority constituted under it — and in state-issued orders. The operative effect is to present the affected population with a fait accompli whose only available response is compliance. The analysis, however, establishes that the cited legal foundation cannot be located. The authority claim is therefore performative rather than substantive: it does the work of authority in the text while lacking the instrument it names.

Compensation as inducement. Both texts contain a compensation paragraph, and the offer is equitable in form. Four features undermine it in substance:

First, the offered compensation is land only. It does not address destroyed possessions, the labor and savings invested in the demolished dwelling, or the costs of reconstruction. A household given a bare plot after losing a completed house and its contents has been compensated in a category, not in value.

Second, the arithmetic does not close. Sample 1 identifies 75,000 sites targeted and 1,100 plots offered. That is compensation for approximately 1.5 per cent of affected sites. Even allowing for differing units of measurement between "sites" and "households," a shortfall of this magnitude cannot be reconciled with a commitment to provide suitable alternatives. This is the most direct internal contradiction in the official record and it can be shown from the state's own published figures.

Third, the compensation commitment is made conditional within the same text. Sample 1 refers to forthcoming "understandings" with the Ministry of Urban Planning to identify vacant land. Compensation that depends on negotiations not yet concluded is an expectation, not an entitlement.

Fourth, the precedent is documented. The historical record in Section 5.3 shows that plot allocation has consistently excluded those without identity documents, female-headed households, later arrivals, and those unable to pay charges — categories that capture a substantial proportion of the very population now affected.

Context of implementation: Sample 1 dates the campaign explicitly from the army's assumption of control over the capital. Three questions follow, and the texts answer none of them. Why was military control a precondition for removing informal housing? Who bears responsibility for implementation — the military or the civil authorities nominally competent? And why proceed at

[29] Statement, (October 1, 2025). **Warning letter from the Minister of Defense to the residents of Khartoum**. Sudan News.

that moment, rather than awaiting civilian agencies able to act under legal procedure and specialist assessment?

The silences: The unanswered questions are the analytical yield. The texts are silent on the destination of cleared land, on the identity of subsequent allocatees, on the legal instrument relied upon, and on the fate of the roughly 98.5 per cent of affected sites for which no plot is offered.

De Geoffroy's finding supplies the explanation the texts withhold: relocation policy in Khartoum has functioned to legalize land acquisition by pushing poorer populations to the furthest peripheries, under a planning rationale whose promised services did not materialize. The present campaign differs from that pattern in one respect, and the difference is unfavorable. De Geoffroy's account describes a state apparatus pursuing land value through the forms of planning. The current context — collapsed legal institutions, insecurity, and the marginalization of civil authority — has removed even those forms. Water and electricity provision is not a deferred promise in this environment; it is not a consideration at all.

Who benefits. The question is answerable. Given the conduct of the campaign under military direction, the suspension of effective legal supervision, and the displacement of civil institutions, the beneficiaries are located within the military authority, its internal hierarchy, and its immediate social environment. Two widely reported features of Khartoum's post-conflict property market corroborate this: plot prices are low, and a substantial share of buyers are officers of the regular forces.

The conclusion this paper draws is accordingly not an inference from silence but a finding supported by the state's own published record: under conditions of armed conflict and institutional collapse, demolition in Khartoum has operated as a mechanism for transferring land from displaced civilian populations to actors positioned within or adjacent to the military authority.

TESTIMONIES

Seven questions were administered to respondents selected from the South Belt, East Nile, and western Omdurman:

1. What is the demographic profile of your residential area, and its estimated population density?
2. What are the ethnic backgrounds of the predominant population, including residents from western Sudan, eastern Sudan, or elsewhere? Are there residents from outside Sudan?
3. When did these residents arrive, and was land acquisition involved?
4. Were removal operations conducted? If so, of what nature, and were residents notified in advance or was removal sudden?
5. If removals occurred, did they target specific population groups or were they conducted randomly?

6. Since the outbreak of the current conflict, have removals taken place, and did they target particular residents?
7. Have residents' areas been subject to military targeting, and if so was that targeting intended to compel evacuation?

TESTIMONY (1) MAYO, SOUTH BELT

Mayo or the South Belt is home to eleven tribes with a population of approximately 11,000. Most residents trace their origins to western Sudan. Some came originally from South Sudan; many of those returned after separation. Displacement into the area has continued since the 1990s, with a notable influx in 2003. Land ownership for displaced residents was never completed. They entered the area as displaced persons under an arrangement referred to as "May Peace." After separation, the status of many residents was regularized — most had until then been treated as foreigners — and land tenure was formalized: plots were registered in their names and assigned numbers, pending completion of the ownership process. That process was never finished.

Removals followed, and then conflict. The operations were extensive, affecting approximately 11,000 families. No removal notice was issued, although one should have been. Red flags were placed, and within twenty-four hours removal began, conducted with loaders and military force. All homes and families in the area were affected.

In the respondent's assessment, the removals served specific objectives, and the demolished houses have since passed into the hands of what the respondent termed land mafias. Under stable governance, the respondent held, no land or property should be removed without legal proceedings; the lands at Mayo should not be classified as encroachments, being legitimately held, and the residents' claims remain valid. Military operations in the area were described as targeting locations identified by police as crime-prone, but the removals were carried out against the wider residential area.

The account is directly probative on several points established elsewhere in this paper: the existence of formalized but incomplete tenure, the absence of notice, the twenty-four-hour interval between marking and demolition, the use of military force in a civil operation, and the subsequent transfer of cleared land.

TESTIMONY (2) OMDURMAN

The Omdurman area includes residents of various tribal backgrounds. The block discussed had an estimated population of about 2,500 families. Many residents were displaced during the first and second months of the war, and the area is now almost empty.

According to the respondent, eligible residents had previously been granted land, with allocations dating to the 1980s. Regarding removals, citizens were notified of eviction through markings placed on walls; some blocks complied and others did not. The respondent understood the removals as part of a general campaign

against informal housing rather than as targeting specific groups. The respondent stated that there was no direct military targeting of the area, describing the actions as security measures, and added that conditions were perceived as better than during the presence of the Rapid Support Forces.

CONCLUSION

Demolition and removal in Khartoum, from the 1970s to the present, has not been free of the intent to exclude. The populations affected were driven to the capital by conditions that successive governments tolerated and in significant part produced: the failure to deliver security and basic services in the regions of origin, compounded by drought, famine, and war. Having moved in search of survivable conditions, they settled on the city's peripheries, and there they have been removed repeatedly, under justifications ranging from urban replanning to bare assertion, frequently without notice and without any accounting.

The eviction of residents from the peripheral zones of Khartoum — western and southern Omdurman, East Nile, and southern Khartoum or the South Belt — has fallen predominantly on ethnic and cultural groups originating in western Sudan and the conflict-affected peripheries, and has proceeded without legitimate basis or lawful procedure. It has deprived those populations of constitutional protection while disregarding tenure they in fact held. The Mayo/South Belt testimony records 11,000 families removed, holding documents and awaiting completion of registration that the state itself had begun; the state proceeded without notice.
The legal foundation asserted for these actions cannot be found. The systems and policies constructed upon it are correspondingly void. The situation deteriorated sharply after 15 April 2023, as demolition intensified under conditions of insecurity and suspended legal authority.

FINDINGS

Finding 1 — The legal foundation of the current campaign is absent. The instrument on which the Land Protection and Violations Removal Authority relies cannot be located in accessible compilations of Sudanese legislation. Whether it was never enacted or was enacted and never published, the demolitions conducted under it lack lawful foundation. This finding does not depend on any contested question of fact and is the paper's principal legal conclusion.

Finding 2 — Dispossession operates through the withdrawal of legal recognition. The mechanism does not typically override existing rights; it reclassifies holders so that the rights no longer attach to them. The statutory instrument that made this possible at scale is the Unregistered Land Act 1970, which converted the great majority of Sudanese land into state property and left peripheral urban populations dependent on discretionary administrative allocation rather than justiciable right. The 1991–93 amendments to the Civil Transactions Act completed the structure by removing the courts from disputes adverse to the state's interest in such land.

Finding 3 — The burden falls disproportionately on populations from the conflict-affected peripheries. This is established on independent evidence. The 2007 survey data show that displaced persons were more than twice as likely to have been forcibly removed as non-displaced residents; that southerners constituted 18 per cent of the sample but 33 per cent of

those forcibly moved; that respondents from Khartoum and the north constituted 58 per cent of the sample but 39 per cent of those forcibly moved; and that 76 per cent of those from the Three Areas attributed their removal to government relocation. The spatial record shows that the same peripheral belt has been the object of removal across five decades.

Finding 4 — Compensation is not capable of performing the function claimed for it. On the state's own published figures, 1,100 plots are offered against 75,000 targeted sites. The offer excludes structures, possessions, and reconstruction costs, is made conditional on negotiations not yet concluded, and is governed by eligibility criteria that have historically excluded those without documents, female-headed households, later arrivals, and those unable to pay charges.

Finding 5 — The trajectory has deteriorated, and dating the deterioration matters. The May-era removals of the 1970s were accompanied by planning and by the issuance of property documents to relocated residents. The Islamic regime-era relocations of the 1990s delivered land without services. The camp demolitions of 1994–2005 delivered plots to a declining proportion of those affected. The present campaign delivers plots to a fraction of one per cent. The practice has not been constant; it has degraded, and each stage removed a protection the previous stage had retained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. An immediate moratorium on demolition in Khartoum State pending publication of the legal instrument relied upon and independent verification of its enactment.
2. Publication of the 2018 instrument, if it exists, together with the Khartoum State Legislative Council record of its enactment. If it cannot be produced, the Authority's constituting act and all operations conducted under it should be treated as void.
3. A registry of cleared land and subsequent allocation, disclosing every plot cleared since March 2025 and the identity of every allocatee, with particular attention to allocations to serving military and security personnel.
4. Independent investigation of the strikes on the Mayo market, the East Nile market, and the Kandahar market, on the question of whether they were directed at military objectives.
5. Accession to the Kampala Convention, which Sudan has not ratified despite hosting one of the largest internally displaced populations in the world.

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