

SUDAN

Conflict Observatory

CONFLICT UPDATE & OBSERVED VIOLENCE

AGAINST CIVILIANS IN DARFUR

DECEMBER 2023

Scope Note and Methodology

This report was produced as part of the Sudan Conflict Observatory (SCO) with the support of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, United States Department of State. This report does not necessarily represent the views of the United States Government.

The report provides a summary of conflict in Darfur and its impact on civilians, including recent developments since the last public SCO report.

This report's analysis was completed by the Conflict Observatory's new prime contractor, an independent, leading non-profit organization performing scientific research in the public interest. The analysis relies upon research and reporting completed by previous SCO academic and private sector contributors, including Yale HRL and PlanetScapeAi, over the past year, including corroboration of social media and local news reporting alongside analysis of high and moderate resolution satellite imagery. Nonetheless, this report's analysis and assertions are not intended to represent those previous SCO contributors' views.

Inquiries about this report can be submitted via: <https://contactus.conflictobservatory.org/>

Executive Summary

This report documents the activities of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) in Darfur with a focus on the conflict's impact on civilians since 15 April 2023. This report highlights recent developments across the region to include:

- Following several months of largely uncontested attacks on civilian communities in areas not occupied by SAF forces, RSF systematically and consecutively defeated SAF forces based at divisional headquarters in Darfur other than El Fasher.
 - RSF controls the majority of territory in Darfur and at least two of the three major egress routes to El Fasher but has not taken control of the city. RSF forces are reportedly attacking areas on the outskirts of El Fasher at the time of this publication.
- RSF and aligned forces have engaged in ethnically targeted killings, primarily against the Masalit, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), forced displacement of over 500,000 civilians, and looting and blocking of humanitarian assistance.
- This report seeks to highlight some of the key developments demonstrating a larger trend of human rights violations across Darfur. It is not meant to be a comprehensive or exhaustive product detailing all crimes committed against civilians.

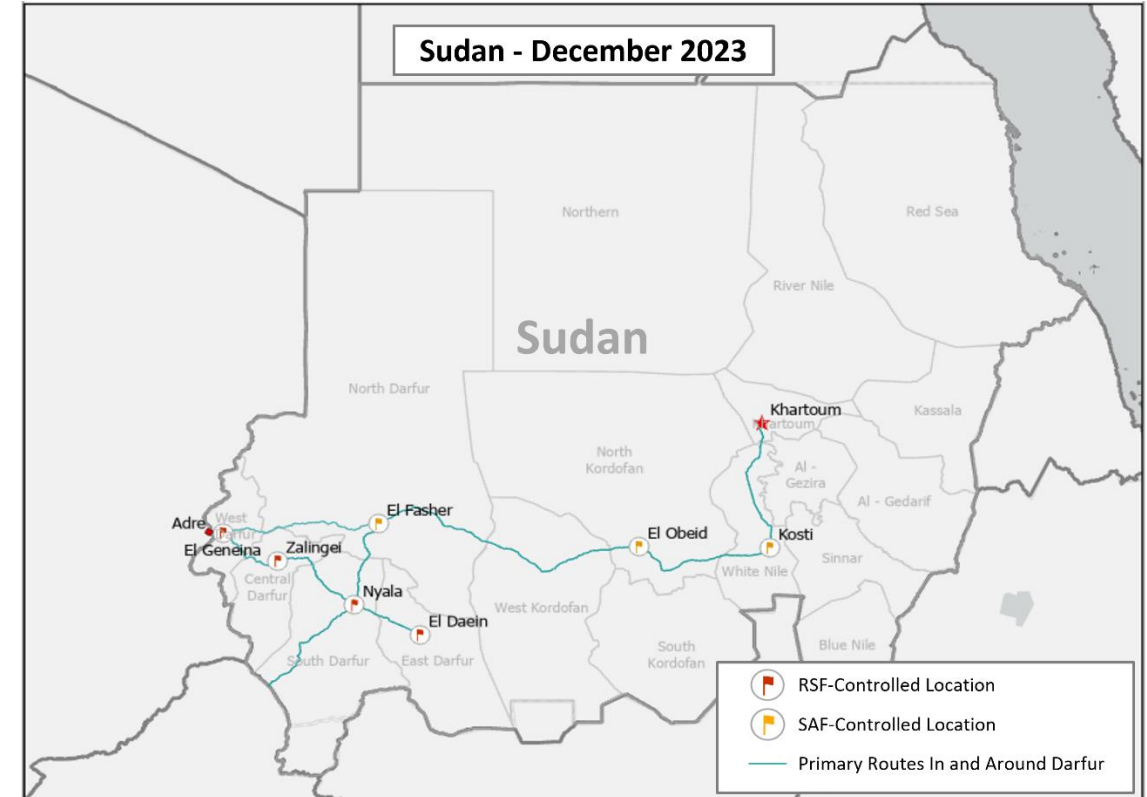
Attacks in Darfur, April 2023 - Present

RSF and aligned forces have systematically attacked and destroyed population centers across Darfur since the onset of the conflict in April 2023.

- Between 15 April - 30 July 2023, the RSF targeted or destroyed at least 27 population centers, including Sirba, West Darfur which experienced near-total destruction.
- The SAF was not present in every population center targeted by the RSF. In areas where they were present, SAF forces retreated and/or were quickly overrun, lacking the will or capacity to protect civilians from RSF incursions.

RSF has systematically and consecutively defeated respective SAF divisional headquarters other than El-Fasher, as of publication:

- In quick succession, primarily at the end of October 2023, the RSF seized control of key cities and strategic locations across Sudan, including Darfuri capitals El Daein, Nyala, El Geneina, and Zalingei.
- RSF now controls the majority of territory in Darfur, including major roads and cities. RSF appears focused on seizing El Fasher, the fifth Darfuri capital, and aiming to control the main egresses out of Darfur into Chad.



Map Produced: 19 December 2023

Map Note: Visualized points represent the highest possible spatial resolution available across sources.

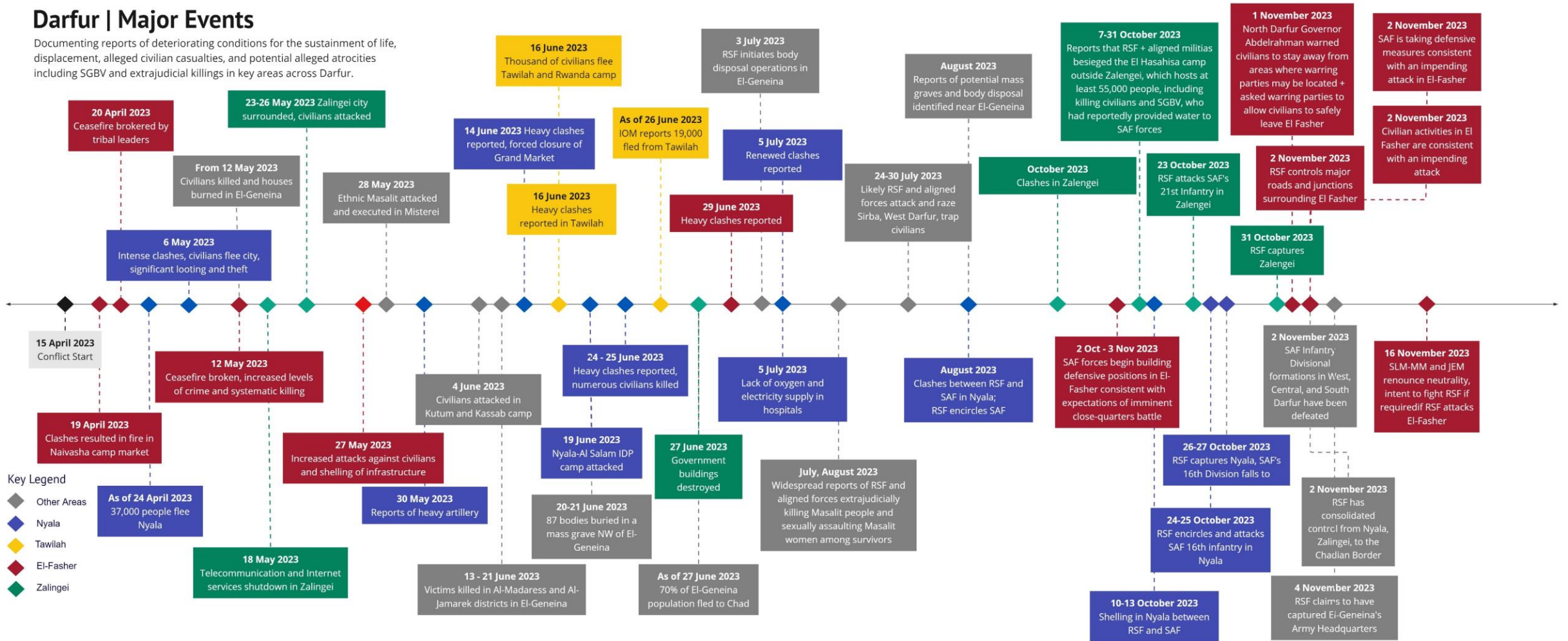
Esri ©, OpenStreetMap contributors, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, and Google

Source: Esri, HERE, LSIB, UN OCHA, GADM.org, Google Maps

The RSF has specifically targeted civilian populations and population centers, particularly non-Arab communities such as the Masalit. The RSF has executed Masalit leaders, targeted and extrajudicially killed men and boys, and committed SGBV against women and children.

Darfur | Major Events

Documenting reports of deteriorating conditions for the sustinment of life, displacement, alleged civilian casualties, and potential alleged atrocities including SGBV and extrajudicial killings in key areas across Darfur.



Alleged Crimes Against Civilians in Darfur

Secretary of State Antony Blinken determined on 6 December 2023 that RSF and allied militias have committed crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Sudan. Secretary Blinken further determined members of both the RSF and SAF have committed war crimes in Sudan.

RSF and allied forces have committed alleged gross human rights abuses against civilians in Darfur since the outbreak of the conflict:

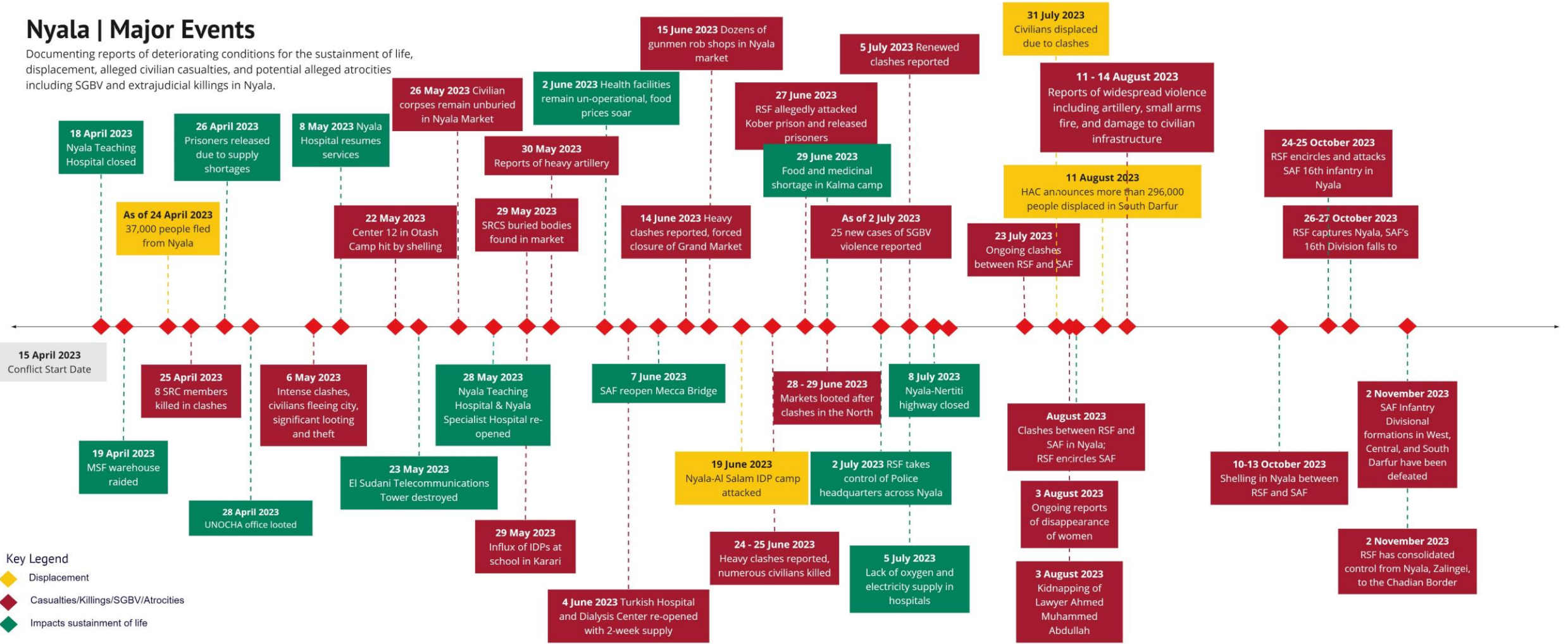
- Razing at least 27 population centers - in part or in whole - in Darfur, primarily focusing on the Masalit and other non-Arab communities, including attacks specifically targeting men and boys ¹
- Forced displacement of at least 500,000 civilians, according to UN estimates ²
- Ethnically motivated extrajudicial killings (EJK), especially against the Masalit in El Geneina in July 2023 and Ardamata in November 2023 ³
- Sexually-based gender violence (SGBV) ⁴
- Obstruction of humanitarian aid across Darfur, specifically in El Hasahisa Camp, Tawila, Kutum, Balil, and Kalima ⁵

SAF forces have allegedly obstructed humanitarian aid and failed to protect civilians from RSF targeting ethnic groups.

The 14 July 2023 SCO report documenting atrocities from April to July 2023 in Darfur asserted “the RSF and aligned forces’ patterns of attack are identical to the atrocities and crimes committed by the government of Sudan and Janjaweed militias in 2003 and 2004.”

Nyala | Major Events

Documenting reports of deteriorating conditions for the sustainment of life, displacement, alleged civilian casualties, and potential alleged atrocities including SGBV and extrajudicial killings in Nyala.



South Darfur - Nyala

On 26 October 2023, the RSF captured Nyala, Sudan's second largest city and the state capital of South Darfur. ⁶

- RSF has been intermittently attacking SAF and targeting civilians in Nyala since 15 April 2023. Civilian dwellings and other infrastructure have been damaged, local civil leaders have been killed, and there are multiple reports of SGBV and women and girls disappearing. ⁷
- By mid-August 2023, nearly 300,000 people across South Darfur were displaced, including people from Nyala. ⁸
- Finally, from 23-24 October 2023, the RSF launched a major offensive, capturing the SAF military hospital, SAF fuel depot, and Nyala television center, and surrounding the SAF 16th Infantry Division headquarters. ⁹

Reports of shelling between SAF and RSF in Nyala were confirmed by the SCO via commercial imagery. ¹⁰

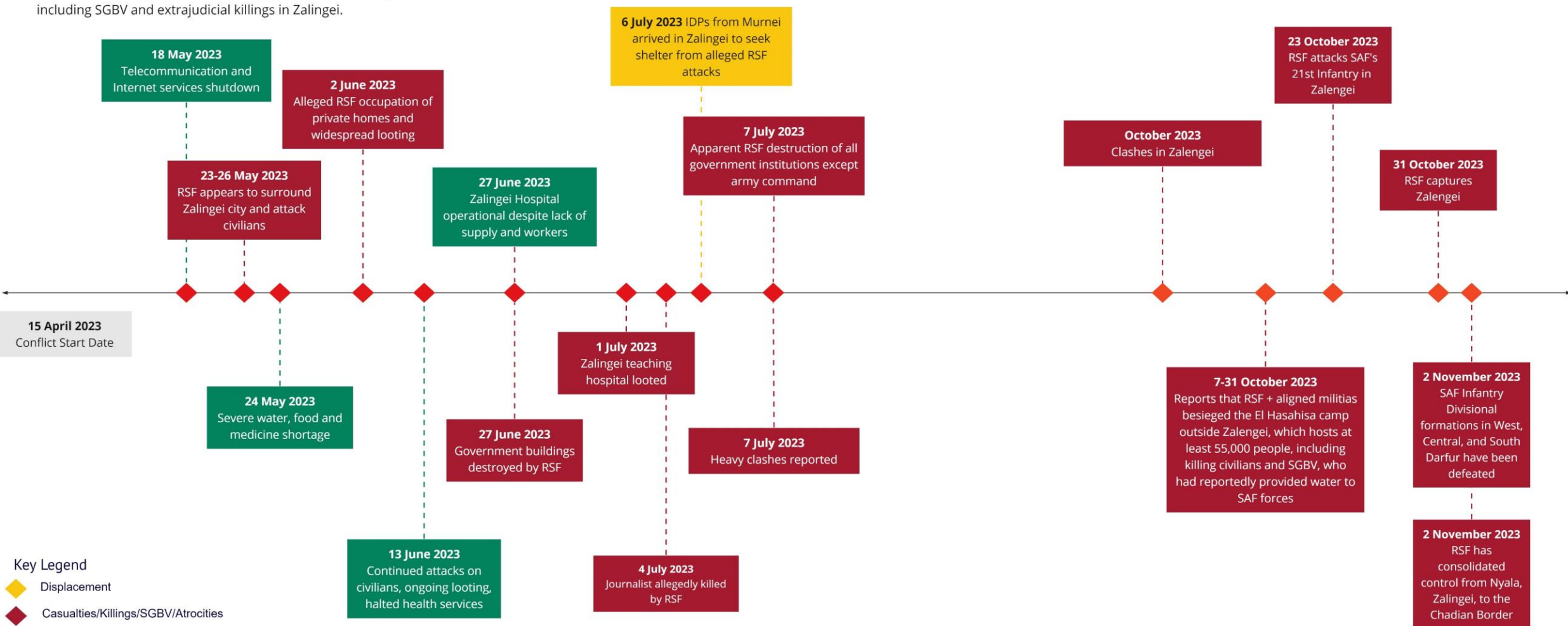
Prior to the RSF's takeover in Nyala, the movement of humanitarian aid into Nyala had been extremely limited. The RSF has actively been limiting aid deliveries, and resumption of these deliveries depends on securing safe passage for aid convoys either across the border from Chad or through routes via El Obeid and Kosti. ¹¹



Geolocated videos filmed by RSF combatants show that they captured SAF positions outside the military hospital, and the hospital itself, which is less than 1 km north of the 16th Division headquarters, as well as a military fuel depot. *Source: sudanwarmonitor.com*

Zalingei | Major Events

Documenting reports of deteriorating conditions for the sustainment of life, displacement, alleged civilian casualties, and potential alleged atrocities including SGBV and extrajudicial killings in Zalingei.



Central Darfur - Zalingei

On 31 October 2023, RSF detained the SAF 21st Infantry Commander in Zalingei, along with 50 SAF officers. This brought the SAF's regional base under RSF control and solidified its seizure of Zalingei. ¹²

The RSF attacked Zalingei in late May 2023, when they surrounded the city, attacked civilians, and began to take over civilian neighborhoods. ¹³

- By the end of July 2023, nearly all major government buildings - other than SAF structures - were destroyed.
- Zalingei appeared to experience widespread telecommunications and power outages, which limited on-the-ground reporting on the human security situation. ¹⁴
- The RSF methodically destroyed civilian infrastructure necessary for survival.

Throughout October 2023, the RSF and SAF clashed in Zalingei.

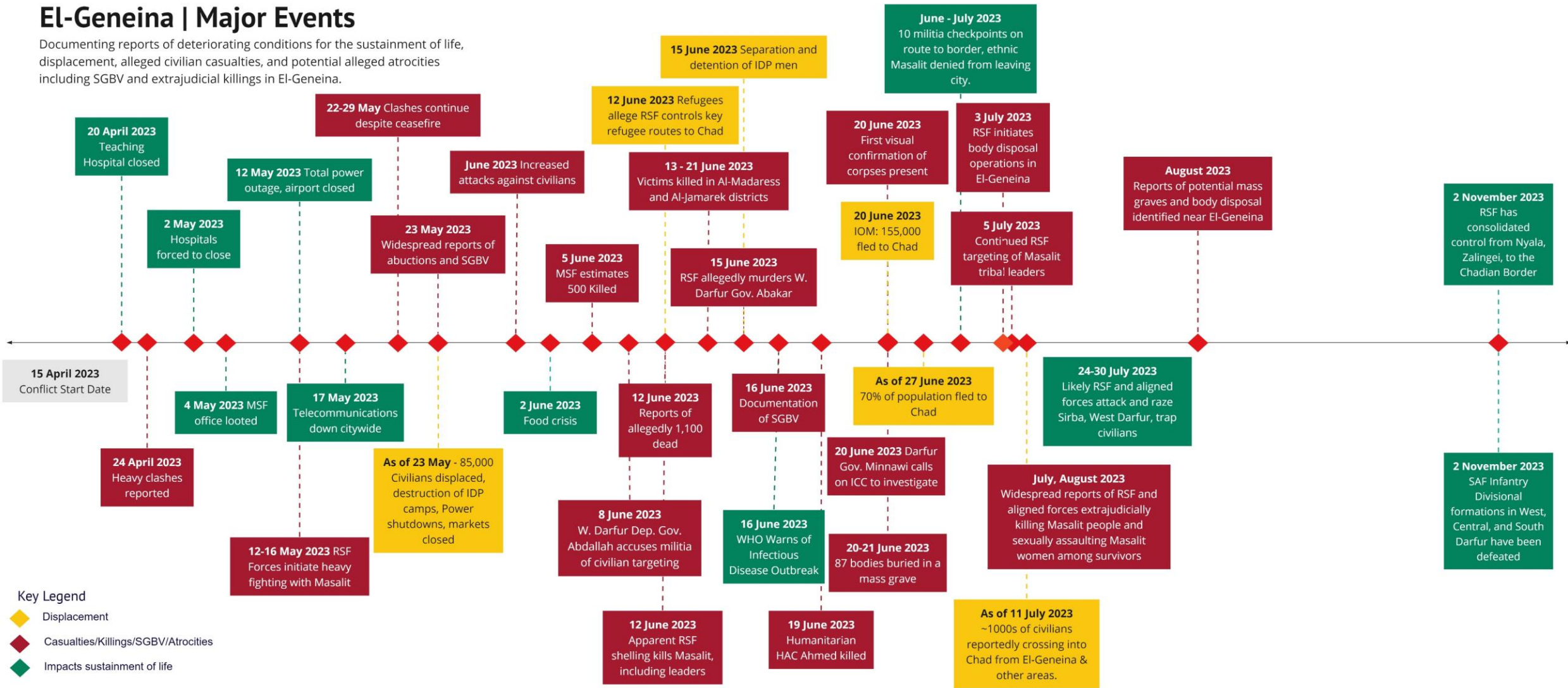
- Since 4 October 2023, fighting in areas near IDP camps in Zalingei had reportedly increased. ¹⁵
- The RSF appeared to target both SAF's forces and civilians and IDPs. Local media outlets reported that RSF shelled and blocked access to these camps. ¹⁶

Zalingei already hosted an unknown number of survivors who had fled from areas across Darfur that had been attacked and razed.

- Media outlets also reported the RSF and aligned militias besieged the El Hasahisa camp, which hosts at least 55,000 people, since 7 October 2023. ¹⁷
- In addition, local sources reported that the El Hasahisa camp came under artillery shelling. Multiple civilians were allegedly killed and injured, and conflict-related sexual violence towards women and young men was reported. ¹⁸

El-Geneina | Major Events

Documenting reports of deteriorating conditions for the sustainment of life, displacement, alleged civilian casualties, and potential alleged atrocities including SGBV and extrajudicial killings in El-Geneina.



West Darfur – El Geneina

On 4 November 2023, RSF overran the SAF 15th Infantry Division Base in El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur. ¹⁹

- SAF forces fled to Chad after initially withdrawing to Kulbus, north of El Geneina. Those left behind were taken prisoner and filmed on RSF social media exhibiting visually observable signs of physical abuse. ²⁰
- RSF and aligned forces in El Geneina reportedly systematically targeted men and boys, abducted civilians, and committed SGBV and extrajudicial killings, including allegedly executing West Darfur Governor Khamis Abakar. ²¹

Additionally on 4 November 2023, the RSF arrived at the Ardamata IDP camp on the outskirts of El Geneina, shooting people in their homes and in the streets. ²²

- The assailants killed primarily Masalit men. Members of other non-Arab communities, notably ethnic Tama and Eringa people, were also reportedly killed and injured. ²³
- Eighty children have been identified among the people detained by the RSF in Ardamata. ²⁴

In June 2023, there were confirmed reports of systematic massacres and extrajudicial killings targeting Masalit communities in El Geneina. ²⁵

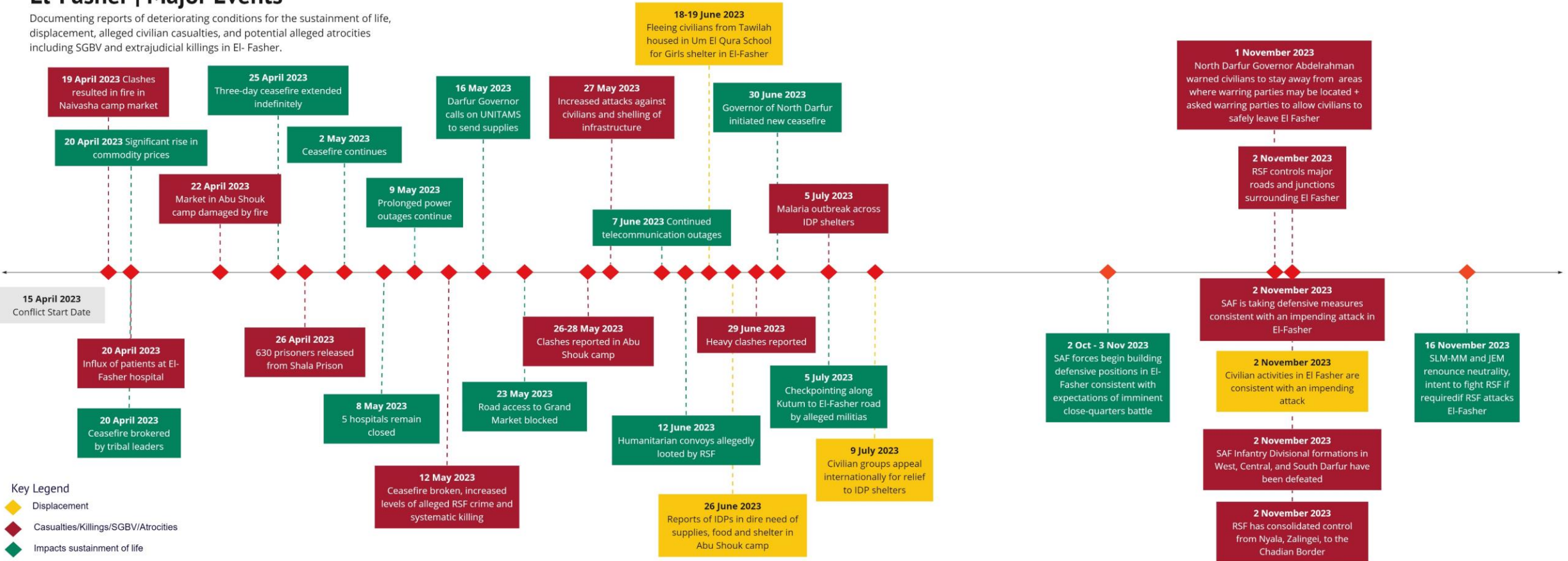
- By the end of June, the majority of El Geneina's population had been forcibly displaced to Chad, often along roads that RSF controlled.

During July and August 2023, there were widespread reports of RSF extrajudicially killing and committing SGBV against civilians from the Masalit community. ²⁶

- Tribal elders attempted to broker the SAF base's surrender to prevent bloodshed, but SAF rejected the proposal, causing civilians to flee across the border into Chad for fear of an RSF assault.

El-Fasher | Major Events

Documenting reports of deteriorating conditions for the sustenance of life, displacement, alleged civilian casualties, and potential alleged atrocities including SGBV and extrajudicial killings in El-Fasher.



- Key Legend**
- Yellow Diamond: Displacement
 - Red Diamond: Casualties/Killings/SGBV/Atrocities
 - Green Diamond: Impacts sustenance of life

East Darfur – El Daein

On 21 November 2023, the RSF gained control of the SAF 20th Infantry Division base in El Daein, the capital of East Darfur. ²⁷

- Local press reported at least 40 civilians were killed and more than 50 others were injured in a SAF airstrike near the base. ²⁸
- This marks the fourth and most recent SAF base to be seized by the RSF.

In East Darfur, armed clashes erupted between the SAF and RSF on 20 November 2023 near the SAF headquarters and Al Matar, Al Guba, Al Arab, Khour Omer, and Al Zariba Al Jadeeda neighborhoods. ²⁹

- As a result of the violence, 30 people were reportedly killed, and 60 others were injured.



RSF fighters at the SAF 20th Infantry Division, November 2023. Source: sudantribune.com

North Darfur – El Fasher

El Fasher remains the one state capital in Darfur that has yet to fall completely under RSF control, at the time of this publication.

- RSF controls much of the area around El Fasher and at least two of the three major egress routes from El Fasher. ³⁰

The Joint Security Force, constituted pursuant to the Juba Peace Agreement, has forces in El Fasher, having been seen by some parties as a potential deterrent to RSF attacks.

As early as 19 April 2023, there were intermittent clashes between SAF and RSF in and around El Fasher, as well as attacks in and around civilian areas and on civilians and infrastructure. However local communities sought to broker peace between RSF and SAF.

- As a result of clashes in late October 2023, 10 people were reportedly killed and 42 were injured. ³¹
- According to initial reports from IOM field teams, approximately 100 families (about 500 people) were displaced to the south from the northern and eastern neighborhoods of El Fasher. ³¹

The IDP camps in and around El Fasher include populations that fled the 2004 Darfur Genocide, in addition to people newly displaced due to the current violence in Darfur.

- The estimated number of civilians and IDP communities at threat of mass killing, SGBV, forced displacement, and looting could be as high or higher than 750,000 people. ³²

As of 16 December 2023, there has been confirmed fighting between RSF and SAF forces within approximately three kilometers of El Fasher, including RSF reportedly firing into Abu Shouk IDP camp, and near the Abuja and Nafasha IDP camps. Civilian casualties and displacement have been reported as a result of these clashes. ³³



A fire in a livestock market in El Fasher, in North Darfur, in September 2023. Sudanese paramilitary and military forces are fighting for control of the region. *Source: AFP-Getty Images.*

Sources Cited

1. <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan/pages/darfur-1>
2. [Sudan - Conflict, update \(DG ECHO, UN OCHA, IOM\) \(ECHO Daily Flash of 19 December 2023\) - Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)
3. [Sudan: War crimes rampant as civilians killed in both deliberate and indiscriminate attacks – new report - Amnesty International](#)
4. [Genocide returns to Darfur \(economist.com\)](#)
5. [Sudan Humanitarian Update \(14 December 2023\) \[EN/AR\] | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)
6. [Major South Darfur army base falls to RSF - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
7. <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/f2980dd9cff142c9823a500af3b97f0b/data>
8. [Explainer: How Darfur became a ‘humanitarian calamity and catastrophic human rights crisis’ | UN News](#)
9. [Major South Darfur army base falls to RSF - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
10. [Major South Darfur army base falls to RSF - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
11. [Darfur relief convoys brave perils amid ongoing conflict - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
12. [Sudan war: Key Central Darfur army base ‘falls’ to RSF - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
13. [Fights in Central and South Darfur as RSF ‘seeks to seize all towns’ - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
14. [Activists call to restore communications in the devastated Zalingei of Central Darfur - Sudan Tribune](#)
15. [Picking up the pieces as Darfur and Khartoum battles abate - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
16. [Sudan war: Key Central Darfur army base ‘falls’ to RSF - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
17. [Hasahisa-Secuiriy-Reports.pdf \(awafy.org\)](#)
18. [Picking up the pieces as Darfur and Khartoum battles abate - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)
19. [Mass arrests in El Geneina after withdrawal of garrison to Chad \(sudanwarmonitor.com\)](#)
20. [Sudan: New Mass Ethnic Killings, Pillage in Darfur \[EN/AR\] - Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)
21. [Sudan conflict: West Darfur governor killed after genocide claim \(bbc.com\)](#)
22. [Sudan: Killings in Ardamata | OHCHR](#)
23. [Sudan: New Mass Ethnic Killings, Pillage in Darfur | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)
24. [Sudan: RSF Seize North Darfur Garrison, Reportedly Commit Mass Atrocities in West Darfur - allAfrica.com](#)
25. <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan/pages/darfur-1>
26. [Sudan Humanitarian Update \(7 December 2023\) | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)
27. [Sudan War - East Darfur SAF Base 'Falls to RSF' \(msn.com\)](#)
28. [Military airstrike reportedly kill Dozens in El-Daein as RSF seize Army command - Darfur24 News Website](#)
29. [Sudan Humanitarian Update \(7 December 2023\) | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)
30. [Darfur leaders urged RSF to cease attack on El-Fasher, Idris says - Sudan Tribune](#)
31. [Sudan Situation Report, 2 November 2023 \[EN/AR\] | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)
32. [Sudan Situation Report, 2 November 2023 \[EN/AR\] | OCHA \(unocha.org\)](#)
33. [SAF/RSF fighting breaks out in North Darfur capital and Abu Shouk camp - Dabanga Radio TV Online \(dabangasudan.org\)](#)

SUDAN

Conflict Observatory