

Statement of Assistant Secretary Molly Phee
Bureau of African Affairs
United States Department of State
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, allow me to begin by thanking the committee for your longstanding interest in and support for a successful transition from authoritarian to civilian rule in Sudan. We share your alarm about the increasingly volatile situation and the risk of regression. Since the fall of the Bashir dictatorship in 2019, the United States and our international partners have robustly endeavored to support the Sudanese people in their extraordinary efforts to build a democracy. We have worked closely with this Committee and Congress to advance this shared priority.

This was always an ambitious undertaking. After 30 years of an Islamist, military dictatorship and recurring internal conflicts, the Sudanese are coping with a legacy marked by a military-dominated economy now in danger of collapse, a denuded civil service as a result of repeated political purges, a fractured political system following calculated military intervention to break and divide, and the generational damage to the country's historically marginalized areas such as Darfur which left hundreds of thousands dead, millions displaced, and the nation divided in two. Even as we welcomed the transitional government's progress in repealing repressive legislation that restricted human rights, opening space for civil society and political activism, ending decades-long government support for terrorist organizations, and embarking on free-market economic reforms, we were acutely aware of the immense structural issues facing the transition, aggravated by internal power struggles and external spoilers.

We were also inspired by the remarkable and resilient civilian resistance movement, which achieved the historic overthrow of Bashir and drove the security forces to agree in 2019 to a civilian-military transitional partnership and path to elections known as the Constitutional Declaration. Sudanese stakeholders also reached a landmark transitional power-sharing arrangement for the historically marginalized regions known as the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement. These two documents offered the promise of finally achieving democracy and thus peace for Sudan. We were proud to work with Congress and our international partners to leverage our diplomacy and our assistance to support this transition, which holds so much promise for the people of Sudan, the region, and the continent.

On October 25, as we all know, Sudan's security services upended the civilian-military partnership when they betrayed the transition and the Sudanese people by seizing power directly – overthrowing the Prime Minister and cabinet and damaging the trust of the Sudanese people in the promise of the transition and the goodwill of the international community. The subsequent November 21 Political Agreement that restored Prime Minister Hamdok to office failed because it did not include key civilian stakeholders and did not definitively end military repression of and violence against civilian protests. Prime Minister Hamdok's decision on January 2 to resign

shocked the Sudanese political system and led prompted civilian and military stakeholders to reach out to the international community for help in rescuing the transition.

Given the repeated troubling actions of Sudan's security services, the Sudanese people have concluded that it is no longer realistic to look at Sudan's transition as a partnership with the military. They are now intent on restoring civilian leadership of the country's democratic transition through reform of the Constitutional Declaration and the Juba Peace Agreement to ensure that these guiding documents reflect the needs of the present moment. To do so, Sudanese stakeholders demand a new relationship between the military and civilians, one that redefines and right sizes the role of the military from partner in a transitional government to participant in the transitional process. For our part, we have made clear we support the civilians in realizing this ambition and will act to facilitate that change.

Sudanese stakeholders across the military and political spectrum tell us they seek a way back to a transition but would welcome international support to help them find common ground. With the announcement on January 8 that the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) would facilitate a Sudanese-led political process, the international community began actively working with Sudanese civilian stakeholders to build consensus around a common vision for reform of the Constitutional Declaration to refashion the path of the civilian transition, carve-out an appropriate participatory role for the security services, stand up a Legislative Council, and establish the necessary groundwork to advance elections, economic reforms, accountability, and implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement.

With a Security Council mandate to use its good offices in support of the transition, UNITAMS will be in front but not alone. The United States – in concert with the Friends of Sudan (Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, the African Union, the European Union, the League of Arab States, and the United Nations) – has pledged our full support to the UNITAMS-facilitated process. We have done so with full recognition of the uphill work facing the Sudanese and their regional and international partners. Successful democratic transitions require broad-based agreement among multiple stakeholders in the capital and across the country. It will require the contributions of many to meet this sizeable challenge. We are prepared not only to provide diplomatic and financial support to this effort but also to work closely with UNITAMS leadership and key international partners – especially the African Union, the European Union, and Saudi Arabia – to shape this process to ensure that it is time-bound and delivers concrete results.

In my two visits to Sudan, civilian and military stakeholders expressed a strong desire to find a way out of the quagmire that has bedeviled the country since the October 25 military takeover. While they have pledged their support to the UNITAMS-facilitated political process, such pledges must be met by action, particularly on the part of the security services. On behalf of the United States, I have made clear that the ongoing reprehensible pattern of violence against peaceful protestors in which security services have engaged since October 25 must end. So too must the use of detentions of civil society activists, closure of media outlets, attacks on medical

facilities, and communications blackouts. These actions perpetuate a cycle of violence that hardens positions and makes agreement on a political way forward all the more difficult.

We have already worked with our partners in the international community to impose significant costs on Sudan's military regime for its actions on October 25. The pause of bilateral and multilateral assistance to the government and of debt relief has left the country's finances in a precarious state, unable to meet its current financial obligations. We have been clear that the only path to restoration of international financial assistance is predicated on ending the violence and restoring the democratic transition.

At the same time, as I have made clear to military leaders, we in concert with our partners are prepared to apply additional costs should the current pattern of violence continue. We are now reviewing the full range of traditional and non-traditional tools at our disposal to further reduce the funds available to Sudan's military regime, to isolate its military-controlled companies, and to increase the reputational risk for any who choose to continue to engage in "business-as-usual" with Sudanese security services and their economic enterprises. Using such leverage smartly will enable us to press for behavior change on the part of security sector leaders, and could contribute to a reset of the military-civilian balance of power in Sudan, a prerequisite for the long-term success of its democracy.

We applaud Sudanese from all walks of life who continue to take to the streets at great personal risk to demand civilian rule and democracy. Since 2018, they have been the vanguard and the heroes of Sudan's revolution. As the UNITAMS-facilitated dialogue progresses, we will provide concrete support to enable the Sudanese people and civil society organizations to channel their determination to refashion a new civilian-led path to democracy that includes political and economic reforms essential to achieving the Revolution's goals of freedom, peace, and justice.

Three decades of military rule under Bashir failed to bring stability or prosperity to Sudan. The Sudanese people have made clear through four years of sustained activism and protest that they will not allow their demands for civilian rule and democracy to be ignored, set aside, or coopted. Sudanese history undeniably demonstrates that only a democratic state can produce a sustainable peace. It is past time for Sudan's military leaders to recognize this reality, cease the use of violence, and participate constructively in a civilian-led transition to democracy. The United States and the international community share the aspirations of the Sudanese people to restore and advance their transition and we will continue to work with our regional and international partners towards that goal. We will continue to seek your help and engagement to help the Sudanese people realize the full potential of their brave and historic revolution.

Thank you very much.