



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc

Headquarters & Secretariat

Georgetown University
Center for Contemporary Arab
Studies

3700 O St. NW, ICC STE 241
Washington DC 20057

Phone 520-333-2577
Fax 520-207-3166
secretariat@mesana.org
mesana.org



5 April 2024

General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan
Sudan Armed Forces
Khartoum, Sudan
@SudanDefence
@aftaburhan

General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo
The Rapid Support Forces
Khartoum, Sudan
@RSFSudan
@GeneralDagallo

Tom Perriello
U.S Special Envoy for Sudan
@tomperriello

General al-Burhan, General Dagalo and Special Envoy Perriello:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deep concern regarding the destruction of universities, the conversion of campuses into defense positions, and the displacement of students and professors since the fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces erupted on 15 April 2023. The impact of the fighting on civilians has been devastating. As educators, we call on all parties to end the conflict and to ensure that students and teachers can safely access schools, universities, and libraries.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

We are deeply troubled about the devastation wrought on the educational sector in Sudan since April 2023. According to [UNICEF](#), as many as 19 million Sudanese children were out of school at the end of January 2024. More than 10,000 schools closed at the start of the conflict. Many of these schools were then used to house people displaced by the fighting, creating an [untenable choice](#) between re-opening schools and providing emergency housing.

In addition, many universities have been damaged, closed, or [re-purposed](#). In [a recent interview](#), the Sudanese Minister of Higher Education, Mohamed Hassan Dahab, has warned that this ongoing war has “put many universities back to square one,” referring not only to the war’s heavy toll on the educational infrastructure, human lives, and students’ future, but also the challenges of rebuilding the educational sector after the war ends. According to Dahab, in the Khartoum area alone around 115 public and private universities and colleges serving about a half million students have “been destroyed or lost buildings, equipment, libraries, and other facilities to vandalism and looting that occurred in the wake of military clashes.” Four large teaching hospitals, along with their laboratories and research centers, have also been destroyed.

[Universities](#) have been destroyed outside of Khartoum as well. The spread of the conflict to Gezira and Wad Medani has disrupted higher education across the country by displacing testing centers that were to be used for the taking of final exams for many of the universities based in Khartoum. We commend university lecturers who have continued to teach despite these conditions, sometimes sending lecture recordings via WhatsApp or Telegram so that their students can graduate.

The [ongoing conflict](#) has further exacerbated the challenges the Sudanese educational system has faced for decades due to limited funds, minimal teacher training, and political interference from the government. The war jeopardizes the future of a whole generation of students in Sudan, just as it limits the educational opportunities for students from African and Arab countries, some 24,000 of whom were studying at [Sudanese universities](#).

All parties to the conflict in Sudan have obligations under international law to ensure that students have access to education. Obstruction of such access is a clear violation of Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Sudan is bound by these instruments, and the right to education is binding under all circumstances and to be protected in all situations, including during crises and emergencies resulting from civil strife and [war](#). International humanitarian law also requires parties to an armed conflict to ensure that children have access to education.

Sudanese students have competing needs at this time, including access to food, shelter, and physical safety. We encourage leaders in Sudan and the international community to give the maximum consideration to civilian rights, including the right to education, by protecting educational institutions from attack and physical damage, providing adequate



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emergency housing for displaced persons, paying teachers, and ensuring the safety of students and educators.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aslı Ü. Bâli'.

Aslı Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

The Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund

United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)

The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)