

THE WORLD'S CURRENT "GREATEST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS" IN THE LAND OF BIRTH OF ST. JOSEPHINE BAHITA



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Timeline of Sr. Josephine Bakhita's final journey to sainthood

The death of Sr. Josephine Bakhita on 8th February 1947 was greeted by countless petitions for her canonisation. This timeline illustrates the 40-year final journey to sainthood

- In 1959 Pope St. John XXIII initiates the canonisation process.
- In December 1978 Pope St John Paul II declares the late Sr. Josephine Bakhita 'Venerable'.
- On 17 May 1992 the Venerable Josephine Bakhita is beatified and becomes the Blessed Josephine Bakhita.
- On 1 October 2000 the Blessed Josephine Bakhita is canonised and becomes St. Josephine Bakhita.

News of Josephine Bakhita's Beatification banned in Sudan

Why was the news of the Beatification of Josephine Bakhita, a daughter of the soil of Sudan, banned in that country?

The canonisation process of St. Josephine Bakhita from 1959 to October 2000 occurred concurrently with the onset of political and social upheaval in the wake of Sudan gaining its independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956.

Military coups, dissolution of the parliament, civil war and military conflicts premised on seemingly religious or tribal differences, the abrogation of all human rights and freedoms, the killing of civilians involved in civil disobedience became the order of the day.

It was within this political context that the news of the Beatification of St Josephine Bakhita's was banned from Sudan's airwaves and newspapers in 1992.

However, nine months later Pope St. John Paul II undertook an Apostolic Journey to Benin, Uganda and Khartoum (Sudan). In Khartoum the late Pontiff presided over the **Eucharistic Concelebration in Honour of Blessed Josephine Bakhita** on 10 February 1993 in Khartoum!



(AP Photo/Bruno Mosconi¹)

To read the late Pontiff's inspiring homily delivered at the Eucharistic Concelebration, use the following link - https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19930210_khartoum.html

Why is Sudan's civil war seen as the world's current "GREATEST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS"? What are some of the root causes?

At the time of its colonisation by Britain and Egypt, Sudan was the largest country by area in Africa: it constituted about 8% of the surface of the African continent. Hence, purely in term of its vast area and the ensuing diversity of its indigenous sociopolitical structures, belief systems and livelihoods, it is one of the largest and most complex countries to govern.

Sudan has known very few periods of peace and political stability since its independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956. Indeed, independence from Anglo-British domination was preceded by civil uprisings against the colonisers and internal conflict waged against those who collaborated with the colonisers.

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19930210_khartoum.html

As a colonised state Sudan was divided into a ‘Northern’ and a ‘Southern’ Sudan by an official internal boundary that was never delineated. However, the ‘Arab’ North was clearly advantaged over the ‘African’ South in terms of human development, economic growth and political influence. Consequently, the Anglo-Egyptian colonial systems and structures provided a fecund foundation for the successive outbursts of civil strife as well as the cessation from and declaration of independence of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011.

The discovery of oil by Chevron in southern Sudan in 1978 exacerbated the potential for even greater conflict. The successful exploitation of oil by foreign companies in war-torn Sudan saw human rights’ abuses rise substantially. Governments of the day supported the interests of foreign oil companies by engineering the large-scale forced displacement of whole indigenous populations.

Apart from the large-scale displacement of people, Sudanese populations not only suffered death, destruction of homes and livelihoods, famine and human trafficking, but more fatally, they experienced the rise of armed ‘warring parties’ who engaged in various forms of both internal and trans-border warfare for control over Sudan’s political economy amidst the anarchy created by the absence of any viable state, political or social infrastructure, or civil society institutions. Hence, rebel groups and international human trafficking syndicates stated operating in the arena of chaos and in the context of critical humanitarian need.

Plight of children in St. Bakita’s land of birth since April 2023 – “a deepening children’s crisis”



©UNICEF Annadjib Ramadan Maha: A Sudanese mother and her children take refuge in a town in Chad across the border from Darfur²

As is the case throughout the world, children suffer the most under conditions of warfare, civil strife, and the ensuing humanitarian crises that result from social disorder and lawlessness.

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unicef-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-6-july-2023>

So, too, the children of Sudan when civil war broke out in April 2023 between two factions of the military government of Sudan, namely, between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces [RSF] and the Sudanese Armed Forces [SAF].

And indeed, according to the 6 July 2023 Humanitarian Situation Report of UNICEF, **“The conflict in Sudan is a deepening children’s crisis.”** The table illustrates this ‘deepening children’s crisis’ as follows:

24.7 million	People in need
11.9 million	People need to be reached
13.6 million	Children in need
9.4 million	Children need to be reached

To read this report, use the following link - <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unicef-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-6-july-2023>



Sudanese refugees wait to be registered after crossing the border into the Central African Republic. ©UNHCR/Xavier Bourgois

A 2024 update of the plight of the children of Sudan

UNICEF’s Situation Report No. 15 Reporting Period 1 – 31 January 2024 provides the reader with a substantial updated overview of the situation of Sudan’s children as well as with insight into what their current humanitarian needs are.

Some of the focus areas are:

- HEALTH: Children are exposed to diseases such as cholera and measles because there is no secure access to safe drinking water. Hence UNICEF attempts to not only treat children from these diseases, but it also assists with sustaining existing healthcare services.
- NUTRITION: Millions of children in strife-torn Sudan are at risk of wasting, malnutrition and an unprecedented mortality in early childhood.
- WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE [WASH]: UNICEF is working throughout Sudan to establish its WASH programme. Of particular concern is the challenges that women and young girls face in maintaining menstruation hygiene.
- CHILD PROTECTION AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: Together with partner organisations UNICEF provides psychosocial support services for children and their families who are affected by the ongoing conflict and accompanying displacement. This embraces responding to, mitigating and preventing acts of gender-based violence and includes acts of gender-based violence by aid workers.
- EDUCATION: Currently, about 19 million children of school-going age are not in school. About 10,000 schools have been forcefully shut down.
- SOCIAL PROTECTION: UNICEF has expanded its flagship Mother and Child Cash Transfer Plus programme as a platform for increasing social protection of women with children, thereby contributing to a heightening of these women's resilience in the face of war and chaos.

To read the updated Situation Report, use the following link - <https://www.unicef.org/media/153316/file/Sudan-Humanitarian-SitRep-No.15-31-January-2024.pdf>

Child recruitment by armed forces for use as child soldiers and sex slaves


Six months after the outbreak of the April 2023 civil war, Professor Siobhán Mullally, the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, expressed her great concern about the increased risk of forced recruitment and use of children by particularly the RSF militia. From Khartoum to Darfur girls have been "...abducted...for sexual exploitation, including sexual slavery." [Mullally]

However, even in cases where children might appear "to consent to" their forced abduction "as a means of survival" in the chaos of the civil war, Professor Mullally points out, "...that the consent of a child – defined as any person below the age of 18 – is legally irrelevant, and it is not necessary to prove the use of force."

To read the article, use the following link - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/sudan-un-expert-warns-child-recruitment-armed-forces>



© UNICEF/Adriana Zehbrauskas Children play in a child-friendly space at a refugee camp in South Darfur, Sudan.



**Prayer to
St Josephine Bakhita
for Intercession Against
Human Trafficking**

By Pope Francis

Saint Josephine Bakhita,
you were sold into slavery
as a child
and endured unspeakable
hardship and suffering.
Once liberated from your
physical enslavement,
you found true redemption
in your encounter
with Christ and his Church.
O Saint Josephine Bakhita,
assist all those
who are entrapped in slavery.
Intercede on their behalf
with the God of Mercy,
so that the chains
of their captivity will be broken.
May God Himself, free all those
who have been threatened,
wounded or mistreated
by the trade and trafficking
of human beings.
Bring comfort to survivors
of this slavery
and teach them to look to Jesus,
as an example of hope and faith,
so that they may find healing
from their wounds.

We ask you to pray for us
and to intercede on behalf of us all,
that we may not fall into indifference,
that we may open our eyes
and be able to see
the misery and wounds
of our many brothers and sisters
deprived of their dignity
and their freedom
and may we hear their cry for help.
Amen