



Darfur Protection of Civilians Flash Update
North Darfur: Armed Attacks on Villages in Kutum and Melit
4 November 2024

This brief by the Darfur Protection Cluster is based on inputs from partners, community networks and others. It has not been possible to verify all the information below due to access constraints and communications breakdowns.

Situation overview: On 2 October, following heavy fighting between parties to the conflict, control of a key RSF base in Birmaza (about 30km north of Kutum town) reportedly fell to Darfur-based armed groups supporting SAF. During that fighting, along with Birmaza village, Breidik, Jinq and Al Mazroub villages were reportedly also impacted. Control over the base continued to be contested by parties to the conflict over 3-9 October. The fighting centered on the base, primarily affecting Birmaza and Disa villages, was reportedly accompanied by actual and feared attacks on civilian settlements in the surrounding area that were perceived by a party to the conflict as having potentially or actually provided fighters in support of the opposing party to the conflict, primarily on the basis of their tribal background. Affected civilian settlements from which IOM DTM reported the displacement of an estimated 3,443 households over this period included Damrat Elshiekh Agdulbagi, Damrat Ghirair, Masri, Hillat Mousa, Hillat Khalwa, Hillat Abu Zakariya, Hillat Awlat Atigo and Hillat Awlat Madibo.

Shortly afterward, reports emerged regarding the establishment of multiple checkpoints inside Kassab IDP camp, which provides shelter to approximately 40,000 IDPs that are of predominantly Fur and Zaghawa tribal background. The checkpoints were described by local leaders as having been established by a party to the conflict on the pretext that IDPs from the camp were providing support to an opposing party to the conflict. The presence of armed elements in the camp and the operation of the checkpoints reportedly prompted a number of camp residents to flee the camp, seeking shelter either with extended relatives in Kutum town or nearby mountains and valleys. The checkpoints were reportedly withdrawn from the camp on or around 13 October.

Hostilities escalated again on 30 October when Breidik village was reportedly attacked, with at least 12 civilians reported to have been killed, four injured and four abducted during the initial attack and the days immediately following. IOM DTM reports that between 31 October and 2 November an estimated 1,550 households were displaced from Breidik and other affected locations, including Jira, Anka and Beri villages in Kutum and Dunkey Bashim village in Melit, with the majority seeking shelter in other areas of Kutum locality. At least Breidik, Jira and Beri were also reported to have been extensively looted and razed. Community leaders from the area have also circulated reports on social media indicating that between approximately 15 October and 2 November a much larger number of villages in the north-eastern areas of Kutum were impacted by violence, forcing the displacement of the civilian population towards Tina, Umbaru and Kernoi localities, and across the border into Chad; however, these reports remain unconfirmed to date.

Protection implications: While fighting was initially focused on control of a legitimate military target, the expansion of violence to encompass attacks on civilian settlements with the apparent objectives of destroying those settlements, spreading terror among the civilian populations and forcing their displacement represents a serious breach of IHL and IHRL. It is particularly concerning that civilian settlements appear to have been targeted on the basis of the tribal background of the civilian population living within them. Civilian status is not negated by any action short of direct participation in the conflict. The targeting of civilians on the basis of imputed political opinion or alignment with a party to the conflict, or family ties with those fighting in the conflict, is prohibited.

Parties to the conflict are urged to ensure that all persons active under their instructions, direction or control abide by their obligation to respect IHL and IHRL prohibitions on the deliberate targeting and forced displacement of civilians, and the destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure. Parties to the conflict are further called upon to ensure that civilians wishing to flee conflict affected areas are able to do so safely, and that all civilians are able to access life-saving humanitarian aid.