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Sudanese Women Leading Revolution: Impact on Transformation

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On 19th of December 2018 a revolution started throughout Sudan. It lasted for eight months until July 2019 and ended the 30 years of dictatorship of President Omar al-Bashir. Both, the hope for a better future within Sudan and a critique of the corrupt government that misused Sudanese wealth – e.g. important resources such as petrol or gold, the fact that 80% of the gum Arabic is produced in Sudan or the fertility of the land for agriculture – were main reasons for almost all in Sudan to aspire for change. In this revolution, Sudanese women played an important role. Moreover,

their participation and engagement have substantially contributed to changes after the end of the revolution and the establishment of the transitional democratic government.

Women's Roles in the Sudanese Revolution

Sudanese women participated in and shaped the revolution in various ways. These women were of different age, classes, regions and ethnicities. They have shown courage in participating in and leading the peaceful revolution. Several factors may offer an explanation why women have played a prominent role within the revolution: Women had lived in displaced camps for years. They had to experience that armed rebellions did not produce regime change that would improve their living standards. They had also faced restrictions to human security and freedom in their every-day lives, for example by being arrested or being fired from work due to their activism for rights and democracy.

Furthermore, many Sudanese women and men perceived themselves as second class citizens in their own country because only those Sudanese who belong to the ruling Islamist dictatorship regime were capable to lead a dignified life in Sudan, and they were a minority. The majority experienced different levels and types of discrimination, harassment and marginalization, which the political regime justified with references to religion. Before the revolution, women had already participated in the public: as workers in the informal sector, as university students in large numbers, as well as in the private sector, in political parties and civil society. Despite the restrictions imposed on political parties and civic associations, Sudanese people had not resigned themselves to the Islamist dictatorship.

Hence, it was no surprise that women were leading the demonstrations across Sudan and the sit-ins from 6th of April to 3rd of June 2019. The peaceful sit-ins took place in front of the Ministry of Defence headquarters and symbolized the request towards the military to both protect and align itself with the demonstration. The sit-ins were accompanied by daily marches where people demanded a transfer of power to civilians, the installation of a just judiciary system independent from the government, the end of corruption of the Islamist regime, transitional justice and retribution for the bloody war in Darfur. The protesters also called for justice and freedom and for freeing detainees, as well as for gender equality and empowering rural women, the protection from rape and sexual harassment of internally displaced women and women in war zone areas, and in general to respect the rights and diversity of Sudanese people. That was summarized in the revolution slogan "Freedom, Peace and Justice".

In this revolution, women played a substantial role as speakers but also as guards at the entrances to ensure security during the sit-ins. Moreover, they were at the forefront as medical doctors and psychologists, providing support for those who faced violence during the demonstrations and to the families of those who had been killed during the Islamist dictatorship. They also led women-specific demands dur-