London protest and vigil in solidarity with Sudan on one year of war!

OVER a hundred Sudanese and their supporters held a vigil in Trafalgar Square on Monday night.

Organised by London for Sudan and the Madiniya organisation to mark the first anniversary of the world's biggest humanitarian displacement, with 8 million citizens forced to flee their homes which has plunged Sudan into famine.

BY A NEWS LINE REPORTER

The rally was organised to raise awareness and show solidarity with the people of Sudan amidst the harrowing war on civilians, rooted in both internal and external struggles over the country's resources and wealth, which erupted following the 2018 people's revolution.

Leena Taha from London for Sudan introduced actor and writer **Waleed Eljadi** who gave a harrowing account of his parents ordeal saying: 'My parents were in Khartoum for Ramadan when war broke out.

'Our family home is in Amarat, one of the areas worst hit at the beginning because of its proximity to an RSF base. I use the word is because I have hope that one day we'll be able to go back to that family home and rebuild it.

'My parents who are British Nationals in their 70s, insisted on taking the UK's advice of staying put whilst the Foreign Office figured out how to rescue its citizens.

'So, they waited for 11 days. 10 days of denial that everything is fine, of hiding through windows are rushing out of food and water or turning on the generator just enough to let us know they're alive but not enough to attract the attention of looters, of buildings on either side of our house bombed with neighbours and friends lost.

'10 days in which three incidents took place between my father and plain clothed soldiers or so they said who threatened him with violence as he tried to buy water.

'Then RSF soldiers came into the house intimidating my father asking him about his politics and if he was harbouring militants.

'After pressure from us, their children and the advice of family they agreed they would no longer wait for the British to help. Half an hour later, they'd packed a bag and were ready to leave.

'You may remember at the time the international criticism levelled at the UK for how long it took to get its citizens out in comparison to other nations. Incidentally the UK was second only to the US to airlift its own embassy staff out.

'My father would later tell us how neighbours in Amarat with dual nationality were told to get to their embassies so arrangements could be made for their evacuation.

'British nationals on the other hand after 11 days of receiving advice from Foreign Office to "stay put, keep away from windows and sleep on the ground floor in case your building is hit", were told to make their own way to an airstrip an hour's

LEENA TAHA, London for Sudan

drive from the outskirts of Khartoum in Wadi Seidna.

'How my elderly parents would have done that across a warzone with no petrol, God knows? No, the British government weren't the ones who saved my parents. They may not be here if they carried on waiting.

'It was my cousins in Sudan who helped get them safe page across a dangerous Khartoum.

'They helped get them on a bus which waited for 3 days at a border with Egypt to be processed. They helped them cross that border when my father was fast-tracked by the Red Crescent, following a medical emergency brought on by the lack of water food sleep and toilet facilities.

'The privilege of money here has not escaped me – my parents got out, my cousins too eventually.

'Millions of others didn't. That guilt is something that every Sudanese not in Sudan knows something about. But despite that long introduction, this isn't the story of my family.'

Waleed then spoke in detail about a young man, Hassan, who witnessed genocide in Darfur 20 years ago when he was nine years old and is now married with a family in Canada.

Waleed continued: 'Let us stop war in Sudan ... we are not victims. I'm a victim, yes of course, but we are now not victims, we are change-makers, we are leaders, we are activists, we are politicians, we are lawyers, we are anything, we are teachers.

'We are the generation that tomorrow will build this world and our communities and our people ... we are the future for this world ... we have to do more, we have responsibility that we bear in our heart, in our hands.

'During the days of the 2019 revolution, a chant reverberated that became a slogan urging the people to action. "A bullet doesn't kill, what kills is your silence"

'You can help. Don't stay silent! It's the very least we can do for the martyrs that died back then and it is the very least we can do for the Sudanese who are dying right now.

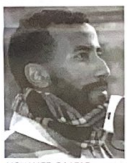
'Don't stay silent!'

Sudanese poet **Mohamed Gaafar** gave a powerful recital of three poems relating to the situation in Sudan.

Dinan Alasad, a young writer from Khartoum, addressing the vigil, said: 'I'm so glad that you're all here but I can't deny that I'm heartbroken that we're gathered for this reason. I keep remembering how we gathered for the revolution. And that felt like a beginning. This feels like an end.

'One year ago a war began in my hometown. One year and one day ago; it was my birthday and all my friends came to my flat to celebrate. We stayed up so late that it made sense for them to just sleep over. So they did.

'Most of them – like me – are Khartoum girls in London, here to study or work. Most of us were counting down the days to head back home for Eid. Some of them



MOHAMED GAAFAR

went ahead, and were already in Khartoum.

'Back then, when people asked me, I would tell them that I lived in Sudan and worked in London, which sounds really comical, like I commute there and back every day.

'But it was true. I only worked in London. I was here because I was working London would stop wanting me the minute I stopped working and nothing belongs to me here. My time belongs to an employer. My home belongs to a landlord. It was all too temporary and volatile to be called living.

'So I would say that I lived in Khartoum, where I would land and be greeted by people who loved me and be taken to the house I grew up in and instantly stop needing to earn my presence. I wouldn't just exist, I could begin living.

'All of that changed on the 15th of April 2023. That morning, my friends and I woke up to the news of the war and the rest of the year is a blur of agony and panic and pain.

'I've been trying for 365 days to make sense of it. I've been trying to find words but the loss is too vast. Some days it has a name. It has a face. It was someone I loved that is now gone. And sometimes I can't even name what I miss. Because it's a smell. Or a feeling. Or the way the moonlight fell on the trees.

'During the revolution, whenever things got really hard, which they often did, I would listen to the advice of women who had been in the business of resistance since the very beginning of El-Bashir's regime. Their advice sustained me. It was an anchor.

'This was so different – their words couldn't span this new loss. We're up against something so brand new that there's no elder who has lived through it and can advise.

'I find comfort in the fact that the elders who became experts on resistance were also once confused young people up against something so much larger than them and so much more sinister than they could imagine and they forged a new path.

'They invented new words and learned along the way. We built our revolution on their lessons. We can do that too. I look around and people have already started. There's not much hope to find but I find some of it in this.'

Dinan then read a poem that her father wrote 'that I feel captures not just the sorrow and bewilderment we feel but also the hope, the faith in triumph', she added.

Maddy Crowther, from the *Waging peace organisation assisting Sudanese asylum seekers and refugees* said: 'I am here with one simple message: All individuals fleeing Sudan's wars deserve protection, safety, and welcome in the UK.

'It sounds simple, but it's simplicity is deceptive. This is far from the case right now, at this very moment. Let me tell you the challenges those fleeing Sudan to reach the UK face today.

'Many are forced to travel first across land and then across the Mediterranean to reach Europe. En route they can get trapped in Libya, facing horrible conditions of slavery and torture, that even many years later people cannot speak about to Waging Peace when we offer them support.

'Those who have family and loved ones in the UK they want to join often find themselves in Calais, a refugee camp on the UK's border with France. Here they face police brutality, and terrible conditions within the area that can make life unlivable.

'At one medical drop-in we were told about, the percentage of people this charity was supporting who were Sudanese was 90% – 9 in 10.

'There are many thousands of Sudanese young people only 100 miles away from us as we stand here today who have fled Sudan's wars.

'Some in Calais eventually make the deadly Channel crossing via so-called "small boats". The risks of this crossing should be known to us all.

'Many are warehoused in hotels, their cases stalled, maybe without a lawyer to advise them, maybe without support to learn English at a local college. Many tell us they are deeply distressed, and unable to cope with crippling boredom and a lack of community contact.

'Many are criminalised for having arrived via "small boats", and may even be sent to prison for being alleged "human traffickers" if they physically steered the boat at any stage.

'Many, including unaccompanied children and young teenagers, are being told by the Home Office that they are older than they say they are, and not given adequate care.

'Many have complained to us that, in comparison with other conflict contexts like Ukraine and Afghanistan, Sudanese individuals were never given a bespoke resettlement route. That the range of people who are considered 'family' when applying for family reunion is too narrow.

'So many we work with are now, on top of everything, being made homeless, we are hearing from so many people now who literally have nowhere to turn, who will spend weeks or months sleeping rough.

'The Home Office wants to paint a picture that the war in Sudan is about battlefield gains alone, about an indiscriminate humanitarian crisis. This is certainly one view. But I do not need to tell this crowd that the war in Sudan is DEEPLY political and ideological.

'Fighting division and forging solidarity is the work of us all. It is this fight that will define Sudan in generations to come. I have faith in us all to meet the the challenge of fighting division, and of fostering unity. I have seen it so beautifully on display today.

'I repeat the message I started with: All individuals fleeing Sudan's wars deserve protection, safety, and welcome in the UK. I am hoping you now agree with me.'

Zaza Elsheikh from the Sudanese Legal Network and **Yasmin Abdel-Magied** also addressed the vigil saying: 'We don't know the names of all those who have been killed, so instead I will say "inna lillahi wa inna illayhi raji'un" 365 times, join me.'

Moise from Madiniya concluded saying: 'I want people gathered here today to think about the UK's role in this war, to think about Rishi Sunak's, David Cameron's and James Cleverly's role in this, because since 2021, the UK has sold over £400 million worth of arms to the United Arab Emirates.

'The Emirates do not produce their own weapons, the weapons come from Britain.

'I want everyone here to understand that the UK pays for Sudan's genocide, the UK profits from Sudan's genocide and that the UK is a state sponsor of terrorism.'

WALEED ELJADI, actor and writer, addressing Monday night's vigil in Trafalgar Square

Photo credit: SADAFU FUTA

Saturday's March for Sudan makes its way down Edgware Road

DINAN ALASAD, writer

MADDY CROWTHER, from Waging Peace

Dr ZAZA ELSHEIKH from the Sudanese Legal Network addressing Saturday's rally

Photo credit: Dawn Pia

Marchers for Sudan assemble before setting off from Church Street towards the rally in Trafalgar Square