

Protect Children in Sudan's Child Care Institutions during Crises

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Transform Alliance Africa (TAA) is rooted in Africa, with a Vision of an Africa free of orphanages, where all children belong and grow up in safe and loving families. The Alliance has a representation from Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Madagascar and Mozambique. As an Alliance, we are grieved by the news of the on-going conflict in Sudan that has affected children and families and resulted in the loss of lives, livelihoods and embedded trauma that will reverberate for years and generations to come.

Like many other African countries, Sudan still operates orphanages for children who have been deprived of parental care. According to the United Nations World Report on Violence Against Children, children in institutions are 6 times more at risk of violence than their peers who live in families¹. As evidenced by ongoing crises, institutions by their own nature expose children to a plethora of child protection risks in the context of conflicts and emergencies, including severe neglect and lack of access to vital humanitarian assistance.

In May, news outlets reported that over 50 children died in Mygoma, a state-run orphanage in Sudan. These children, in desperate need and lacking the protection of family, did not receive the necessary care and protection from the responsible authorities. Overstretched staff and caregivers, affected by the ongoing conflict and threatened in various ways, were unable to reach the institution and to be present continuously to support and protect the children in the orphanage.

Governments have the primary responsibility to alleviate suffering, provide primary care, and protect at-risk children. However, due to insufficient staff to care for them, over 50 children in Mygoma succumbed to severe malnutrition and dehydration, while others in the new-born unit of the orphanage reportedly died from high fever².

¹ United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children in 2006

² Maggie M. (2023, May 29). Special Report: Dozens of babies die in orphanage as Sudan war takes grim toll on Khartoum. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/dozens-babies-die-orphanage-sudan-war-takes-grim-toll-khartoum-2023-05-29/>



We recognize and appreciate the critical support and intervention by the humanitarian actors involved, such as UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross, in rescuing and providing safety and much needed health assistance to the remaining children in Mygoma. However, this awful tragedy calls for urgent action to minimize the risks for the remaining children in institutions in Sudan.

We call upon the Government, humanitarian actors and the international community to work together to map out the whereabouts and needs of all children living in institutions across the country and provide them with vital humanitarian assistance. Appropriate response measures should be deployed to prioritise the safety, security, and health of children in orphanages and other institutional care settings during the crisis.

As an Alliance, emboldened by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, we recognize that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. Hence, we call upon all actors to strengthen families and provide the necessary support including psycho-social support, health, and nutritional support for families to stay together and avoid separation and subsequent placement in institutions which, as this case highlights, are harmful to children and expose them to enhanced risks. Only families can provide the love, sense of belonging and identity that children need to grow.

Furthermore, organisations should not hastily establish institutions for children during this period of crisis but should prioritise and make every effort necessary to protect and strengthen the family unit.

Lastly, to prevent future harm to institutionalized children, drawing from the lessons of the past eight decades, which have revealed the harmful nature and significant child protection risks associated with institutions in both peaceful and crisis situations, and in accordance with the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Actions, we call upon the government of Sudan to develop and implement a de-institutionalization strategy that will ultimately end institutionalization of children, and ensure all children are brought up in safe, loving, and nurturing families and communities.

Transform Alliance Africa

