

Sudan – Joint Operating Principles (JOPs)

The Joint Operating Principles (JOPs) were first endorsed by the Sudan Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) on 18 July 2023. They are available in English and Arabic. This version endorsed 15 July 2024.

A. Issue

1. Following the outbreak of armed conflict on 15 April 2023, it has been necessary to reconfigure the humanitarian response, adjust the mode and methods of aid delivery, and adopt the current principles based on the changing context, reinforcing the common position around the humanitarian principles and reframing the ways of working and engaging with the parties to the conflict.

B. Purpose and Scope

2. The Joint Operating Principles (JOPs) serve as a foundational framework endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for delivering principled and effective humanitarian action in Sudan. They establish shared "ground rules" for the humanitarian community, guiding engagement in humanitarian activities, mitigating potential negative impacts, and upholding core humanitarian principles and relevant International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) standards.
3. These Joint Operating Principles (JOPs) build upon pre-existing legal frameworks, such as IHL and IHRL, which parties to the conflict are obligated to uphold. JOPs ensure a consistent and coordinated approach to delivering humanitarian assistance while providing a framework for facilitating negotiations and resolving access constraints with various stakeholders, including state and non-state actors (e.g., government entities, armed forces, community bodies) who have influence on, or obligations related to, humanitarian activities.
4. These JOPs do not absolve the Government of Sudan of their primary responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to their civilian population, nor do they absolve any party (government, security forces, or de facto authorities) of their obligations under IHL, including to search for, collect, evacuate and care for the wounded and sick, -whether civilian or combatant.

C. Foundations of Principled Humanitarian Response in Sudan

It is crucial to establish the critical foundation for a successful humanitarian response in Sudan. Drawing upon the principles highlighted in the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan, as well as the IHL and the IHRL, to outline the core principles and expectations that ensure effective humanitarian action. These principles serve as the foundation for a response that prioritizes the needs of affected populations while upholding the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence, and humanity.

I. Core humanitarian principles

5. Abiding by humanitarian principles¹ is paramount to the ability of humanitarian partners to continue to conduct effective humanitarian operations. The common principles reflected in

¹ [Humanitarian Principles.pdf \(unocha.org\)](#)

this document, notably the four core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence, are based on existing international normative frameworks and are part of codes of conduct and mission statements guiding humanitarian actors.

II. Critical Humanitarian Access Baseline

6. The following criteria are the ground rules for the humanitarian response in Sudan. In line with the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan², all actors including but not limited to Donors, NGOs, UN Agencies, Parties to the Conflict, State and Non-State Actors, Community Leaders, and others acknowledge that those standards are:
 - a. **Safeguarding the Primacy of Human Life:** is a fundamental principle in humanitarian action, emphasizing that the protection and preservation of human life should always be the paramount consideration in humanitarian operations. These principles mandate that all parties to the conflict will prioritize the safety and security of the humanitarian staff and the people affected in this crisis and will do their best to ensure that assistance is delivered in a manner that minimally risks lives and upholds the highest standards of humanity and respect.
 - b. **Rejection of Association:** Parties to the conflict will respect the principles of neutrality and independence. They understand that humanitarian actors will refuse any requests from parties to the conflict to use humanitarian assets (aid, vehicles, equipment, premises) for non-humanitarian purposes or in ways that suggest association or endorsement to any of the parties. See the [Plan for Implementing and Improving Neutrality of Humanitarian Actors³]
 - c. **Needs-driven Assistance:** Conduct independent needs assessments and base beneficiary selection solely on vulnerability and needs, without discrimination or external influence. Ensure aid is distributed based on needs, irrespective of geographical location, actors' territories, political affiliation, or any other factor. Avoid delivering aid through parties to the conflict without proper monitoring mechanisms.

III. Expectations from Parties to the Conflict and the Local Authorities

All Parties to the conflict agree and understand that according to the national laws, they will facilitate the humanitarian implementation and agree that:

7. **Facilitating Humanitarian Access and Implementation:** parties to the conflict and all regulatory civil entities involved in the humanitarian activities, recognize the critical importance of unimpeded access for humanitarian actors to reach those in need. They commit to facilitating humanitarian operations in a systematic and efficient manner, ensuring that necessary approvals and procedures are streamlined and do not hinder the timely delivery of aid. This commitment includes respecting the independence and adherence to humanitarian principles by all actors involved in the humanitarian response.

² [Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan - United States Department of State](#)

³ [Plan for Implementing and Improving Neutrality of Humanitarian Actors.pdf](#)

8. Freedom of Individual Movement: all parties to the conflict acknowledge the rights of IDPs and refugees to move freely and safely. Humanitarian organizations will refuse to participate in or facilitate any forced displacement, returns, or relocations.
9. Humanitarian Access Restrictions: all parties to the conflict acknowledge the importance of unimpeded access to populations in need, challenging movement restrictions that hinder humanitarian operations. All parties to the conflict agree on the early notification system for humanitarian movements including personnel and shipments.
10. Independency and Impartiality of the Humanitarian Sector: all parties to the conflict understand and agree on the Independence and Impartiality of the humanitarian actors regarding implementation and operation in Sudan, this includes refraining from taking control of humanitarian facilities and assets, or entering humanitarian facilities or vehicles with weapons, or using humanitarian activities for political or military propaganda, whether in a negative or positive manner.

D. Red Lines:

All aid actors and parties to the conflict understand and acknowledge that those non-negotiable elements are essential for a principled humanitarian response in Sudan. The Red Lines frame principled access and implementation, and all humanitarian actors agree that they **will not**:

11. Use armed escorts based on external directives. Any use must meet the Last Resort criteria and comply with IASC guidelines and Country Specific Guidelines for Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination⁴ in Sudan.
12. Accept usage of humanitarian facilities, including (but not limited to) offices, warehouses, vehicles, commodities, or any other humanitarian assets for military purposes.
13. Deliver humanitarian assistance directly to armed parties or groups engaged in conflict, except when it is necessary to fulfill obligations under IHL to protect and treat those who are wounded, sick, or detained, ensuring that such assistance is provided in a manner that upholds humanitarian principles and does not compromise the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian aid.

E. Ground rules

I. Principled Humanitarian Action

14. Needs-based assessments: Humanitarian assistance will be guided by independent and needs-based assessments using tried and tested methodologies. Delivery will be impartial, aligned with cluster strategies, and avoid discrimination.
15. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Advocacy: Humanitarian actors will conduct independent monitoring and evaluation, advocate for respect of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by all parties and ensure unimpeded access to populations in need. This includes advocating for safe passage for civilians.
16. Coordination: Humanitarian Actors will make every effort to coordinate activities with others in the same locations and sectors. This includes sharing lessons learned, working through the cluster system, ensuring transparency and accountability, achieving comprehensive coverage, and avoiding duplication.

⁴ Under revision

17. Payments and Incentives: the humanitarian actors will not pay illegal taxes, duties, or other payments on humanitarian projects, deliveries, or services to beneficiaries. Where authorities require taxes and duties to be paid by law, formal procedures and requirements should be publicly available and modalities clearly established.

II. Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)

18. Do No Harm: Continuous assessment and mitigation of potential risks associated with interventions are necessary to avoid causing harm to beneficiaries or communities.
19. Minimum Standards and Conflict Sensitivity: Humanitarian actors will adhere to global AAP minimum standards, using the "do no harm" approach and mainstreaming conflict-sensitive protection, gender, and crosscutting themes in all programming.
20. Participation and Empowerment: Humanitarian Actors will strive to engage affected populations in designing and implementing programs, prioritize their safety and dignity, and ensure meaningful access, accountability, participation, and empowerment.
21. Feedback Mechanisms: Operational feedback mechanisms should be established by designated clusters to allow affected populations to raise concerns regarding program implementation and quality.
22. Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Humanitarian actors commit – individually and organizationally – to creating and maintaining an environment where sexual violence is not tolerated and prohibited for all interactions.
23. Risk Management: Humanitarian Actors will identify potential risks from the outset of interventions and implement appropriate mitigation measures.

III. Stakeholders Engagement

24. Access Facilitation: Humanitarian Actors will coordinate with all relevant stakeholders, including parties to the conflict (state and non-state), to secure and maintain access to populations in need and access for populations to receive assistance. Engagement does not imply political legitimization.
25. HCT Leadership: Humanitarian organizations, under the direction of the HCT, will ensure a coordinated and transparent engagement approach at all levels, without precluding bilateral negotiations.
26. Bilateral Engagement: Humanitarian Actors will adhere to humanitarian guiding principles and JOP details during bilateral engagements.
27. Information Sharing: By default, outcomes and lessons learned from engagements with parties to the conflict will be shared with the Humanitarian Access Working Group, the CMCoord Cell, and the Security Cell, unless exceptional circumstances apply.

IV. Transparency and Information Sharing

28. Confidentiality: Humanitarian Actors will respect the confidentiality of non-programmatic information, complying with IASC guidance on data responsibility and relevant laws.
29. Data Confidentiality: Strict adherence to data protection protocols, legal perspectives, and informed consent is required before sharing personal and sensitive information. Activities of a sensitive nature, especially protection activities, require special consideration regarding information sharing.

30. Systematic Information Sharing: Humanitarian Actors will adopt systematic, proactive, and coordinated approaches to information sharing amongst themselves, without compromising operational capacity.
31. Transparent Reporting: Humanitarian Actors will support each other and ensure transparent reporting on access challenges through the Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework (AMRF), including lessons learned, while protecting personnel, information sources, and assisted populations.

V. Compliance

32. National Laws and Regulations: Humanitarian Actors will operate in compliance with Sudanese laws and regulations governing humanitarian work. Engagement with relevant authorities will aim to facilitate operations, advocate for streamlined procedures, and maintain neutrality, rejecting association with any party.
33. Information Sharing with Stakeholders: Humanitarian Actors will only provide information on planned activities and publicly available organizational information to relevant stakeholders, adhering to global data management standards and within JOP parameters.
34. Financial Independence: Humanitarian Actors will refuse demands for payments or fees beyond those stipulated by law and agreed upon by the HCT. Payment guidance will be developed by the Access Working Group when necessary. Payments to authorities (including de-facto) will be conducted according to organizational policies.

VI. Enforcement and Accountability

35. Reporting Mechanisms: Violations or challenges to JOPs will be reported immediately through the AMRF tool to the OCHA access team and discussed within the Humanitarian Access Working Group (HAWG) monthly to alert and seek solutions from the HCT.
36. Monitoring: Implementation of JOPs will be monitored through existing mechanisms (i.e. country access snapshot) to support adherence, encourage transparent discussions, understand the impact of non-adherence, and prevent incidents.
37. Accountability: Organizations considered non-compliant with JOPs may be required to explain their actions to the HCT and face potential sanctions, including financial or exclusion from the humanitarian space, with full transparency towards donors. Self-reporting and proactive approaches to flagging challenges are encouraged.

H. Revision of JOP

38. The JOPs shall be regularly reviewed to reflect changes within the context and challenges and to address aspects that may have emerged or become irrelevant. At minimum, these JOPs will be **reviewed by the HCT three months after adoption** and at least **six months thereafter**.