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## THE ARMED CONFLICT IN SUDAN: GEOPOLITICS, HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

On Thursday 26 March 2026, PSIA hosted an event on “*The Armed Conflict in Sudan: Geopolitics, Humanitarian Crisis and International Law*”, bringing together speakers to examine the crisis from humanitarian, geopolitical and legal perspectives. The discussion was moderated by **Dr David Donat Cattin**, Adjunct Professor of International Law at the NYU Center for Global Affairs and Senior Fellow at Montreal Institute for Global Security (MIGS), and **Jeanne Sulzer**, Faculty Member at Sciences Po Law School and PSIA, founder of Impact Litigation. Both moderators, alongside the speakers, underscored the urgency of addressing the conflict, with particular attention to its geopolitical and legal dimensions.

The first panel focused on the humanitarian situation. **Mathilde Simon**, Advocacy Advisor at Médecins Sans Frontières, described the dire conditions in Darfur, particularly in El Fasher, following attacks at the end of October 2025. She emphasised the extreme difficulty of obtaining reliable data on casualties, noting that humanitarian organisations face severely restricted access to affected areas while the situation continues to evolve rapidly. Despite these constraints, Médecins Sans Frontières has assisted survivors who report a consistent pattern of abuses, including targeted violence based on ethnicity and widespread sexual violence affecting women and children.

Turning to the geopolitical dimension, **Professor Roland Marchal**, CNRS Junior Professor at the Centre for International Studies (CERI) at Sciences Po, characterises the ongoing conflict in Sudan as “not the kind of war we usually witness in the region”, emphasising the use of advanced drones and missiles. In his view, such costly weaponry is extremely difficult to sustain without external support, pointing to logistical participation from third states channelled through neighbouring countries such as Chad and Ethiopia.

**Dr Matthew Hedges**, a specialist in security studies and authoritarianism, echoed this analysis. He explained that the continuation of the conflict is closely tied to foreign involvement, pointing in particular to the United Arab Emirates, which he suggested is pursuing strategic interests in Sudan, including access to natural resources and the development of a gold-based economy.

The second panel addressed the conflict from a legal perspective, focusing on accountability. **Eiman Seifeldin**, Chairperson of International Community Care, noted that the conflict is approaching its third year with no sign of de-escalation, stressing that developments in El Fasher have further exposed the scale of atrocities allegedly committed by the RSF. She questioned why, despite mounting evidence of external involvement, the international community remains reluctant to openly address the alleged role of the United Arab Emirates.

**Rodney Dixon, KC**, Barrister at Temple Garden Chambers, outlined a range of legal avenues for accountability. He underlined that proceedings before the International Criminal Court would contribute to justice in relation to Darfur, as illustrated by the recent sentencing in the Abd-Al-Rahman case. However, he stressed that the ICC cannot be the sole focus, given its jurisdictional and operational limitations. He also highlighted the importance of national prosecutions under the principle of universal jurisdiction, emphasising the essential role of domestic legal systems and law enforcement authorities in investigating international crimes. He further referred to growing calls among victims and legal actors for the establishment of a hybrid tribunal to address the mass atrocities committed in Sudan, citing positive precedents in comparable international contexts. Importantly, he stressed that the entire network of actors involved in the conflict should be subject to investigation, irrespective of their political or international standing, with the aim of contributing to an end to the conflict without delay.

Each panel was followed by a vibrant questions and answers session, with several representatives of the Sudanese diaspora, human rights activists, researchers and students taking the floor.

In the conclusions, **Dr. Donat Cattin** stated, addressing some of the very strong quests for justice and peace from human rights' defenders who intervened in the debate: "*We want justice, but what we have is the law. And the law does not always align with justice. We need to raise the cost of violations.*" In order to do so, as also **Jeanne Sulzer** remarked. "*all avenues of international and domestic accountability must be sought*". **Dr. Donat Cattin** highlighted the essential role of investigative journalism in trying to change the narrative and make atrocity crimes more visible and recognized, indicating how the New York Times had recently revealed that the Egyptian territory was used for drones' attacks against Sudan and how Le Monde and France 24 have been able to document the extremely effective transfers of weapons' system from the UAE to the RSF, in violation of the UN Security Council arms' embargo, even after the start of the most recent armed conflagration in the Persian Gulf. The Co-Moderators invited all participants and panellists not to give up in their efforts to seek for an end to the armed conflict and the protection of the fundamental rights of the peoples of Sudan.