



The Network
for Religious
& Traditional
Peacemakers



SUMMARY PAPER

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE MAPPING

SUDAN

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Prepared for The Finn Church Aid (FCA) and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. Supported by The United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

Citation: Musa, Osman Mobarak. Religious Landscape Mapping, Sudan. The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. 2025.

Abstract

This paper provides a summary of an in-depth analysis of Sudan's evolving religious landscape in the context of the conflict that erupted on April 15, 2023. It examines the roles played by religious and traditional actors in both exacerbating and resolving the conflict, offering a nuanced perspective on their social, political, and geographic influence. The study maps key religious groups, assesses their impact on communities, and highlights their potential as peacebuilders amidst ongoing national turmoil. The paper also examines the religious institutions in Sudan, their roles, constraints faced, and potential.

Drawing on field data, interviews, and historical context; the paper summarizes how religious narratives and networks are used either to mobilize communities toward division or to foster reconciliation and healing. It also identifies challenges such as limited access to affected regions, political manipulation of religious discourse, and the fragmentation of traditional authority.

The paper concludes with actionable recommendations for international and local stakeholders to engage religious actors more effectively in peacebuilding efforts. Emphasis is placed on inclusive dialogue, supporting grassroots religious initiatives, and building sustainable partnerships between religious institutions and peace organizations.

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Executive Summary

Sudan's ongoing war, which erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has deepened ethnic and regional divides, displacing millions and straining humanitarian capacities.

Against this backdrop, religious actors in Sudan—often overlooked—hold untapped potential for fostering peace and reconciliation. This study maps Sudan's diverse religious landscape, including institutions, identifying key stakeholders, examining their affiliations and levels of influence, and evaluating their peacebuilding efforts and capacities.

Building upon earlier dialogues and initiatives—including the 2024 joint peace initiative by Sudanese and South Sudanese religious leaders—this research seeks to support international actors, civil society, and religious communities in leveraging spiritual leadership for conflict resolution.

Using qualitative research grounded in USIP's conflict-sensitive methodology, the study draws from a robust desk review, 37 semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. Key religious groups assessed include Islamic traditions (Sufi orders, Salafi movements, Muslim Brotherhood, and Shia minorities), Christian denominations (Coptic, Catholic, Protestant), and indigenous faith communities. Their geographic distribution, socio-political influence, and roles in peacebuilding are thoroughly explored.

Findings highlight that:

- Sufi orders possess significant grassroots legitimacy and experience in community reconciliation.
- Political Islamic movements like the Islamic Movement and Ansar al-Sunna wield variable influence—ranging from military alignment to ideological mobilization.
- Christian groups, though marginalized, contribute substantially to education, health, and social cohesion.
- Indigenous religious leaders retain local authority, especially in rural governance and dispute resolution.

Religious groups have often stepped into peacebuilding roles—mediating tribal conflicts, offering humanitarian relief, and fostering community solidarity. However, their influence over major warring parties is limited by political affiliations, internal fragmentation, and restricted mobility. Some leaders have also contributed to polarization through selective religious discourse or alignment with militarized factions.

Key challenges include:

- Political co-optation and instrumentalization of religious discourse.
- Limited capacity and training in formal peace processes.
- Security risks inhibiting engagement across frontlines.

Nevertheless, some initiatives—such as Sheikh Al-Yaqout's mediation, Sheikh Abu Qurun's prisoner release, and interfaith prayers for peace—demonstrate the power of religious legitimacy in bridging divides.

The study concludes with actionable recommendations:

- Support unified religious platforms promoting peace and tolerance.
- Provide training in conflict mediation and nonviolent communication to religious leaders.
- Engage religious leaders in formal negotiation frameworks and backchannel diplomacy.
- Counter misuse of religious narratives by promoting inclusive theological interpretations.

Sudan's religious landscape is not merely a backdrop but a potential driver of peace. To harness this, sustained international cooperation, local empowerment, and protection of religious diversity are essential.

1. Overview of the Study Structure

This study explores Sudan's complex and evolving religious landscape, particularly in relation to the conflict that began on April 15, 2023. It focuses on the roles religious actors play—both as contributors to conflict and as agents of peace—while mapping religious groups, their geographic distribution, and their socio-political impact.

The structure of the study is as follows:

- **Chapter 1** (this chapter) outlines the study's structure.
- **Chapter 2** introduces the study's rationale and underscores the importance of understanding religious dynamics in addressing Sudan's ongoing crisis.
- **Chapter 3** details the methodology, including data sources, research approach, scope, and limitations such as access challenges and potential bias.
- **Chapter 4** examines the historical background of religion in Sudan and its relationship with politics.

- **Chapter 5** offers a comprehensive profile of Sudan's main religious groups—Sufi orders, Salafi movements, the Muslim Brotherhood, Christian denominations, and indigenous beliefs—highlighting their historical and contemporary roles.
- **Chapter 6** examines the peacebuilding roles of religious actors, the relationships among them, and how their beliefs and actions contribute to or hinder reconciliation.
- **Chapter 7** explores the political and social influence of religious leaders, including their impact on armed groups like the SAF and RSF, and the role of official religious institutions.
- **Chapter 8** examines Sudan's official religious institutions—the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, the Fiqh Council, and the Sudan Scholars Association.
- **Chapter 9** provides recommendations for leveraging religious actors in peacebuilding and national reconciliation efforts.
- **Chapter 10** conclude with an overall remark about the role of religion in Sudan and its potential to play a constructive role.
- **Chapter 11** provides annexes for methodology used and references.

2. Introduction – Why Map Religious Actors?

The armed conflict that erupted in Sudan on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), is rooted in longstanding military and political rivalries. Originally allies in toppling President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and again during the Oct 2021 coup, disagreements over the RSF's integration into the national military and the path to civilian governance led to open war. The RSF, which emerged from the Janjaweed militias known for atrocities in Darfur, has since clashed with the SAF for control over the country.

This war has caused a major humanitarian crisis, resulting in mass civilian displacement, widespread rights violations, and a heavy burden on neighbouring countries such as Chad, Egypt, and South Sudan. National and international efforts—including by the African Union, the United Nations, and regional blocs—have thus far failed to broker a lasting ceasefire, leaving Sudan at risk of further fragmentation along ethnic and regional lines.

The need to map religious actors in Sudan emerged during a January 2024 convening organized in Nairobi by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Inclusive Peace, and the African Council for Religious Leaders. The event brought together religious leaders from Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. Discussions highlighted the findings of a recent study on the role of religious actors in formal peace processes and stressed the importance of engaging them in Sudan's conflict resolution.

Two core priorities were identified:

- Leveraging religious leaders' potentials to restart stalled negotiations—particularly the Jeddah process and IGAD efforts.
- To positively influence the civilian coalition Taqaddum, led by former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

These discussions led to a joint peace initiative involving Sudanese and South Sudanese religious leaders, who met in Juba on March 18–19, 2024. Their action plan reaffirmed the critical role of religious actors in ending the war.

This mapping study builds on that foundation by analysing Sudan's religious stakeholders—their affiliations, geographic reach, and influence on warring factions. The findings aim to guide the international community, especially those working with religious leaders, in supporting conflict resolution and building sustainable peace.

3. Methodology

This study applied a qualitative research methodology tailored to conflict-affected environments and adapted from a USIP-developed framework for mapping religious sectors in peace and conflict contexts.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

Desk Review An in-depth desk review was conducted to build a foundational understanding of Sudan's religious landscape. Sources included academic research, policy reports, government records, constitutional provisions, and materials from religious institutions and international organizations. The review identified key religious actors, their legal context, and historical roles in peace and conflict.

Semi-Structured Interviews Thirty-seven key informant interviews were conducted with religious leaders, scholars, civil society actors, and individuals affected by the war. Questions were grouped into four thematic areas:

- Religious groups
- Religious leaders
- Formal religious institutions
- Religious values and their use/misuse in conflict

Interviews were conducted in person, online, or by phone, depending on availability and security. A flexible design allowed participants to choose which questions to answer, increasing the richness of responses. Notes were taken during all interviews and transcribed immediately after.

Sampling Strategy A mix of purposive and snowball sampling was used to ensure that interviewees were knowledgeable and directly involved with the religious landscape or peacebuilding. This approach prioritized diversity of perspectives while accounting for the constraints of working in an active conflict zone.

3.2 Analytical Framework

Thematic framework analysis was used to code and interpret the data. This method organized information into matrices based on the four thematic pillars above. It allowed for side-by-side comparison of views and patterns across participants. Findings were cross validated with secondary sources to ensure reliability.

3.3 Limitations

Access and Security Field: Access was limited, especially in RSF-controlled areas. Security risks, internet blackouts, and fear of retaliation made some participants hesitant to engage or speak freely.

Participant Engagement: Some respondents declined to answer certain questions—particularly those involving embedded quantitative elements—due to perceived sensitivity or lack of relevance to their experiences.

Potential Biases: The use of purposive and snowball sampling introduced potential selection bias, and responses were often shaped by personal affiliations or perceived safety. Cross-referencing and triangulation were used to mitigate this.

Geographic Limitations: Marginalized and minority religious voices—especially from high-risk areas—were underrepresented due to lack of access. Indirect sources, including displaced individuals, were used to address this gap.

3.4 Validation

Validation of findings will occur during a planned forthcoming stakeholder workshop, where data and recommendations will be reviewed by participating religious leaders and partners.

4. Religion and Politics in Sudan – Historical Context

Sudan's political evolution has been deeply intertwined with religious ideologies and institutions, dating back to ancient times. The Kingdom of Kush blended spiritual authority with governance, a pattern continued through Christian Nubian kingdoms and Islamic sultanates.

With the spread of Islam through the Funj and Darfur Sultanates, religion became a primary pillar of law and legitimacy. During British colonial rule (1899–1956), indirect governance through tribal and religious leaders reinforced these dynamics. Post-independence, Sudan oscillated between secular and religious governance models, with rising influence from political Islam.

Key constitutional and legal shifts include:

- The 1956 Constitution reduced religious institutions' power, limiting them to Sharia courts.
- The 1973 secular constitution was reversed by the 1983 introduction of Islamic laws under Jaafar Nimeiri.

- The 2005 Interim Constitution briefly enshrined citizenship over religion but was undermined after South Sudan's secession.
- The 2019 revolution led to renewed calls for civil governance, but ongoing instability limited implementation.

Throughout these transitions, groups such as the Khatmiyya and Ansar, and later the National Islamic Front and its offshoots, shaped legislation and identity. Meanwhile, Christian communities and indigenous traditions were often marginalized.

This historical backdrop is essential to understanding the contemporary religious landscape—and the competing visions of governance, identity, and inclusion that influence today's conflict.

5. Major Religious Groups and Their Influence in Sudan

Sudan's religious landscape is shaped by diverse faith traditions, each with unique historical roots, geographic reach, and socio-political influence. This chapter categorizes the major groups into Islamic sects and movements, Christian denominations, and indigenous religious traditions. It explores their spiritual practices, institutional strength, political affiliations, and roles in shaping Sudanese identity and conflict dynamics.

5.1 Islamic Groups

SUFI ORDERS

Sufism in Sudan is characterized by spiritual devotion, ritual music, poetry, and communal ceremonies. Despite doctrinal critiques from more conservative factions, Sufi orders are deeply embedded in Sudanese society and revered for their inclusive teachings and local mediation efforts.

- **Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya** orders are influential in western and central Sudan. Their legacies include education, social cohesion, and reconciliation in regions affected by conflict.
- **Khatmiyya**, based in eastern Sudan, blends religious leadership with political mobilization and maintains a historical alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party.
- **Sammaniyya, Burhaniyya**, and others are prominent in central and northern areas, often serving as moral authorities and providers of social services.

SALAFI MOVEMENTS

Salafi groups in Sudan promote a return to early Islamic practices. They reject Sufi traditions like saint veneration and musical rituals. The most prominent group, Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya, focuses on religious education, social outreach, and occasionally aligns with state institutions. Their influence is strongest in urban centers and among youth. While mainstream Salafis avoid political confrontation, their rigid interpretations sometimes echo narratives exploited by extremist actors. Inter-faith dialogue and inclusive Islamic scholarship are recommended to balance their influence.

JIHADISHT SALAFISM

Although not a dominant actor in current conflict, Sudan's past ties to groups like Al-Qaeda under Hassan al-Turabi have left lingering extremist networks. These movements operate covertly, especially in areas of weak state control, posing long-term risks if not countered by inclusive religious discourse.

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

Hassan al-Turabi's Islamic Movement and the conservative Muslim Brotherhood shaped decades of Sudanese governance. Turabi's faction, instrumental in the 1989 military coup, embedded political Islam into state structures and aligned with transnational jihadist groups. The traditional Brotherhood, led by Sadiq Abdallah Abdel Majid, focused on gradual Islamization through education and advocacy. Since the 2019 revolution, both factions have experienced decline, though remnants of their networks persist in religious and political institutions.

AL-ANSAR (MAHDIST TRADITION)

Tracing back to the 19th-century Mahdist revolution, the Ansar movement remains a religious-political force aligned with the Umma Party. It emphasizes Islamic reform, nationalism, and democratic values. Despite internal divisions and state repression, the Ansar retain grassroots support, particularly in western and central Sudan.

REPUBLICAN BROTHERHOOD

Founded by Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, this progressive Islamic movement emphasized social justice, gender equality, and reinterpretation of Islamic law. Though suppressed—Taha was executed in 1985—its intellectual legacy endures among reformist scholars.

SHIA MINORITY

Shia Islam has limited presence in Sudan, mainly among intellectuals and students exposed to Iranian theological education. Diplomatic shifts—particularly Sudan's 2016 alignment with Saudi Arabia—led to repression of Shia institutions and widespread societal discrimination. Today, Shia practice remains mostly underground.

5.2 Christianity in Sudan

Christians make up approximately 5.4% of Sudan's population. Despite being a minority, Christian institutions have played vital roles in health, education, and interfaith dialogue, especially in marginalized regions.

COPTIC ORTHODOX

Historically rooted in Nubian Christianity, Coptic communities remain active in urban areas like Khartoum and Wad Madani. Although politically marginalized, they operate schools and clinics, contributing to civil society.

PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS

Including Anglican, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches, Protestant groups have strongholds in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. Post-2011 secession reduced their numbers, but they remain active through humanitarian efforts and community-based programming.

CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Roman Catholic Church is prominent in conflict zones, especially South Kordofan and Darfur. Its influence is tied to faith-based relief services, though it struggles with limited resources and rising hostility. Christian communities face restrictions on religious freedom, including limitations on property, worship, and evangelism. However, they remain influential in civil society and peace advocacy.

5.3 Indigenous Religions

Indigenous religious traditions represent around 1% of the population but hold significant cultural and spiritual influence in regions like the Nuba Mountains, South Kordofan, and parts of Darfur. These faiths centre around ancestor worship, nature rituals, and community mediation. Religious leaders such as rainmakers, diviners, and spiritual elders serve as custodians of law, ritual, and local governance. Despite pressure from Islamization and Christian missionary efforts, indigenous religions persist—especially in rural areas—due to their deep cultural integration and role in local dispute resolution.

5.4 Summary of Influence

Religious influence in Sudan is determined not only by doctrinal reach but also by geographic concentration, financial backing, media presence, and alignment with political powers.

- **Sufi orders:** High social legitimacy, strong local roots, moderate political engagement.
- **Salafi and Islamic movements:** More ideologically assertive, aligned with segments of the military and state.
- **Christian groups:** Marginalized but vital to civil society and humanitarian services.
- **Indigenous faiths:** Locally powerful, especially in traditional justice and community cohesion.

6. The Role of Religious Groups in Peacebuilding

Religious groups in Sudan have historically played central roles in community cohesion, conflict mediation, and humanitarian support. In recent years—particularly during and after the 2019 revolution and amid the current conflict—they have shown both potential and limitations in influencing national peace efforts. This chapter synthesizes findings from semi-structured interviews and desk reviews to analyse their contributions, relationships, challenges, and influence on warring parties.

6.1 Interfaith and Intra-Faith Relations

At the community level, interreligious relations among followers of Islam, Christianity, and indigenous faiths are generally peaceful and free from open hostility. However, intra-faith tensions—particularly within Islamic sects—are more pronounced.

- **Sufi and Salafi** groups often clash ideologically, with Salafis criticizing Sufi practices as heretical. This sometimes escalates into verbal and physical confrontations, especially during public celebrations.
- **Political rivalry** exists between the Ansar, Khatmiyya, and politically active Islamic movements. These rivalries stem from differing political agendas and affiliations.
- **Shia Muslims** face systemic discrimination, reinforced by state-sanctioned legal frameworks—such as criminalizing Shiism under the Bashir regime.

Despite these divisions, cooperation among Sufi orders remains relatively strong, especially during crises, where they unite around shared spiritual values and social responsibilities.

6.2 Key Challenges

Religious groups face several internal and external challenges:

- **Modernization and globalization** are distancing youth from traditional religious structures, reducing their influence and legitimacy.
- **Internal fragmentation**, particularly disputes over leadership succession and political alignment, weaken unity.
- **Resource scarcity** limits outreach, especially in conflict-affected regions.
- **Political pressure and co-optation** force some groups to adopt partisan positions, undermining neutrality.
- **Security risks**, including restricted mobility and targeted violence, hinder direct engagement with communities.

6.3 Peace and Reconciliation Roles

Religious leaders have a strong track record of mediating local disputes and promoting social harmony:

- **Sufi sheikhs** have led community-based reconciliation in Darfur, Kordofan, and other conflict-prone areas.
- Following Oct 2021's coup, initiatives such as *The Call of Sudan's People* by Sheikh Al-Tayeb Al-Jed sought broader political reconciliation, though with limited success.
- In 2023, **Sheikh Idris Abu Qurun** facilitated the release of prisoners held by the RSF, showing the potential for high-level humanitarian mediation.

While these interventions are valuable, most remain localized and lack coordination with formal peace processes.

6.4 Influence on Warring Parties

The influence of religious groups on the SAF and RSF varies and is often more symbolic than operational:

- **The Islamic Movement** is seen as having ties to the SAF, particularly through figures like Mr. Ali Karti.
- **The Tijaniyya Order** reportedly has influence within the RSF, according to interviewees.
- **The Khatmiyya and Ansar** sects maintain strong connections to political parties (Democratic Unionist and Umma, respectively), which are active in the Taqaddum coalition.

However, influence is often misinterpreted as alignment. Some religious leaders support one side publicly but lack realcapacity to mediate or shape military decisions.

6.5 Conflict Resolution Strategies

Interview participants emphasized the need for:

- **Inclusive dialogue** involving all religious traditions and regions.
- **International support** for training religious leaders in mediation and peacebuilding.
- **Reviving core religious values**—such as tolerance, coexistence, and compassion—central to Sudanese Sufism.
- **Unified religious discourse** to create ethical pressure on armed groups and delegitimize violence.

There is strong support for creating a national religious council or platform to advocate collectively for peace.

6.6 The Use and Misuse of Religious Values

Religious texts have been manipulated and selectively interpreted to justify violence. Both SAF and RSF supporters invoke Quranic verses, concepts of jihad, and martyrdom in mobilization efforts. Some clerics have worn military uniforms and issued religious decrees supporting one faction over another.

At the same time, many leaders draw from Sudan's Sufi heritage to promote peace. These include references to forgiveness, reconciliation, and collective supplication. For example:

The Supplication, Charity, and Fasting for Peace initiative led by the former Religious Affairs Minister Mr. Nusreldin Mufarah which sought to unify faith groups across Sudan and diaspora communities in spiritual protest to the war.

The key challenge lies not in the texts themselves, but in their manipulation for political gain. Promoting balanced, inclusive interpretations of religion is essential to counter religious extremism and polarization.

7. The Current War and the Legacy of Religious Leadership

The conflict that erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) is not only a political and military crisis—it is also a test of the relevance and resilience of Sudan's religious leadership. This chapter explores the historical legacy of religious leaders in times of conflict, how they have responded to the current war, and the opportunities and constraints they face in shaping peace efforts.

7.1 Historical Precedents

Sudanese religious leaders have historically played critical roles during national crises:

- **The Mahdist Revolution** of the 1880s mobilized Sudanese identity and resistance to colonial rule under a religious banner.
- During the **post-independence period**, the Khatmiyya and Ansar movements acted as intermediaries in times of political deadlock.
- In the **Darfur conflict**, Sufi sheikhs and tribal religious leaders helped mediate tribal disputes and mobilize humanitarian aid.
- During **South Sudan's secession process**, interfaith leaders supported reconciliation and civic dialogue.

These precedents illustrate a pattern: religious leaders often step into peace-making roles when state institutions falter.

7.2 Responses to the 2023 Conflict

The 2023 war has catalysed a variety of religious responses:

- **Humanitarian action:** Religious institutions have opened their mosques, churches, and schools to shelter displaced families. Many have coordinated food, medical, and spiritual support.
- **Public condemnation of violence:** Several faith leaders have issued statements denouncing the war and urging restraint. The Council of Churches and major Sufi orders have called for ceasefires and national dialogue.
- **Spiritual resistance:** Interfaith initiatives such as "Supplication, Charity, and Fasting for Peace" have created symbolic resistance to the conflict, mobilizing citizens across sectarian lines.

Despite these efforts, most religious actors have not been able to influence military strategy or political negotiations directly.

7.3 Constraints on Religious Leadership

While religious leaders enjoy moral legitimacy, several factors have limited their national-level influence:

- **Polarization:** Some religious groups are perceived as aligned with either SAF or RSF, undermining their credibility as neutral mediators.
- **Restricted access:** Ongoing fighting, checkpoints, and security threats hinder mobility and limit outreach to frontline areas.
- **Institutional fragmentation:** The absence of a unified national religious council or interfaith alliance reduces collective leverage.
- **Marginalization by political actors:** Religious leaders have often been excluded from formal peace talks, particularly those driven by foreign governments or regional blocs.

7.4 Opportunities for Religious Engagement

Despite these limitations, opportunities remain for religious actors to contribute to peacebuilding:

- **Moral authority:** Many Sudanese, particularly in rural areas, still view religious leaders as custodians of justice and wisdom.
- **Trusted community networks:** Religious institutions often have access to remote or insecure areas where state actors cannot operate.
- **Cross-border solidarity:** Sudanese religious leaders have ties to counterparts in South Sudan, Egypt, Chad, and Ethiopia, enabling regional peace diplomacy.
- **Youth and diaspora outreach:** Faith-based organizations are engaging young people and diaspora communities in peace efforts, offering alternative narratives to militarization.

7.5 A Legacy in the Balance

The legacy of Sudan's religious leadership in the current conflict will depend on its ability to:

- Reassert independence from political and military factions.
- Build coalitions across sectarian and ethnic lines.
- Advocate consistently for nonviolence, justice, and inclusion.

If empowered and coordinated, religious leaders can become key players in rebuilding a fractured society. However, without support and protection, they risk further marginalization—or co-optation—by partisan forces.

8. Official Religious Institutions

This chapter examines Sudan's official religious institutions—the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments, the Fiqh Council, and the Sudan Scholars Association. These bodies are deeply involved in shaping religious discourse, governance, and social stability. Their influence goes beyond religion, affecting policymaking and peace efforts, but they are vulnerable to political manipulation.

8.1 Ministry of Religious Affairs and Endowments

The Ministry regulates religious life and interfaith relations. Historically, it aligned with state policies, especially during Islamist rule (1989–2019), enforcing Islamic law (Sharia). While it can promote religious coexistence, its politicization risks marginalizing minorities and opposition groups.

8.2 The Fiqh Council and Sudan Scholars Association

These advisory bodies issue religious rulings on legal, social, and economic matters, often reflecting conservative, state-aligned interpretations. While they can support social justice, they sometimes contribute to exclusionary policies, particularly on gender and religious freedoms.

ROLE IN PEACEBUILDING

Official religious institutions can either help peace by promoting dialogue and conflict mediation or harm it by deepening sectarian divides, depending heavily on the political context and their degree of independence.

8.3 Autonomy from State Authority

Interviewees' views on autonomy vary:

- Some see religious institutions as government-dependent due to state funding and political direction.
- Others believe they act independently in religious matters.
- Most, however, view them as at least partially influenced by political regimes.

8.4 Stances on Conflict and Peace-making

There is broad agreement that these institutions have played little to no serious role in resolving Sudan's conflicts, such as the army–RSF war. Their political bias, support for militarization, and limited capacity have prevented them from acting as neutral mediators.

8.5 Influence on Policy and Governance

- Some believe these institutions legitimize government actions, especially during conflicts, by issuing fatwas and supporting military narratives.
- Others argue they merely echo government positions without real influence.

8.6 Public Perceptions

- Many view them as biased and ineffective in promoting peace or justice.
- Some dismiss their relevance altogether, seeing political and economic solutions as more critical.
- A minority appreciate their continued religious and educational activities amid the turmoil.

8.7 Obstacles to a Peacebuilding Role

Key challenges include:

- Political affiliation with warring parties, undermining neutrality.
- Weak institutional capacities and lack of mediation skills.
- Erosion of public trust, making community acceptance difficult.
- Security risks in conflict zones.

Sudan's official religious institutions are important players but remain deeply entangled with political power. Their potential for supporting peace exists but is constrained by political manipulation, limited independence, and institutional weaknesses.

9. Recommendations

This chapter outlines strategic recommendations for national, regional, and international stakeholders to support Sudan's religious actors in contributing to peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and social cohesion. The recommendations are grounded in the findings of this study and shaped by input from key informants and recent collaborative initiatives.

9.1 For International Partners and Donors

- **Invest in religious peacebuilders:** Provide financial and technical support to religious institutions engaged in reconciliation, mediation, and trauma healing—particularly in conflict-affected and hard-to-reach areas.
- **Build capacity for nonviolent engagement:** Offer training for religious leaders in conflict resolution, negotiation, and peace education, with attention to interfaith inclusion and gender sensitivity..

- **Support inclusive theological dialogue:** Promote pluralistic interpretations of religious texts that counteract sectarianism, hate speech, and political manipulation of religion.
- **Integrate religious actors into peace processes:** Ensure representation of religious leaders in national dialogue platforms, ongoing mediation efforts, and backchannel diplomacy.

9.2 For National and Local Authorities

- **Establish a national interfaith council:** Facilitate the creation of a neutral, inclusive body that represents Sudan's religious diversity and can speak with one voice on peace and justice issues.
- **Protect religious freedom:** Repeal discriminatory laws, ensure equal treatment of all faith communities, and guarantee safe spaces for worship and community service.

- **Recognize local mediation efforts:** Integrate traditional and faith-based conflict resolution mechanisms into formal peacebuilding frameworks.
- **Engage youth and women religious leaders:** Promote inclusive leadership within religious institutions and peace platforms.

9.3 For Religious Leaders and Institutions

- **Reaffirm neutrality:** Maintain independence from military or political alliances to preserve credibility and moral authority.
- **Strengthen unity across sects and faiths:** Build coalitions that transcend doctrinal divides and promote common messages of peace, compassion, and justice.
- **Document and share success stories:** Publicize effective local mediation and humanitarian interventions to inspire replication and garner broader support.
- **Foster dialogue with armed actors:** Where possible, engage SAF, RSF, and other armed groups in value-based dialogue on the costs of war and the principles of peaceful coexistence.

9.4 For Regional and Continental Actors

- **Leverage religious diplomacy:** Encourage cross-border collaboration among religious leaders in Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Egypt, and Ethiopia to mediate regional tensions and advocate for peace.
- **Support AU and IGAD integration of faith voices:** Ensure that the African Union and IGAD include faith-based perspectives in their conflict resolution and post-war reconstruction frameworks.

9.5 For Sudanese Civil Society and Media

- **Elevate peace narratives:** Highlight stories of interfaith solidarity, local reconciliation, and faith-driven humanitarianism in media campaigns.
- **Monitor hate speech and incitement:** Collaborate with religious leaders to identify and counter harmful rhetoric using ethical and theological tools.
- **Promote civic-religious partnerships:** Build joint initiatives between faith actors and secular civil society organizations to expand reach and impact.

These recommendations are designed to support an ecosystem in which Sudan's religious communities can contribute meaningfully to peace. Faith leaders are not just spiritual figures—they are frontline responders, community anchors, and moral voices capable of guiding the country through its darkest hours.

10. Conclusion

Sudan's religious landscape is both rich in diversity and deeply embedded in the country's historical, social, and political fabric. In times of peace and conflict alike, religious leaders have shaped community life, mediated disputes, and upheld values of justice, compassion, and resilience. As the nation faces one of its gravest crises in recent memory, this mapping study reaffirms those religious actors—if supported, empowered, and unified—can serve as powerful agents of peace.

Their potential, however, is not automatic. It must be nurtured through strategic investment, inclusive dialogue, and structural reforms that protect religious freedom and independence, and amplify their voices in national and international peace processes.

Whether through grassroots reconciliation, humanitarian response, or moral guidance, religious actors have demonstrated their relevance across Sudan's conflict zones and diaspora communities.

Moving forward, the international community, Sudanese authorities, civil society, and faith institutions must collaborate to ensure that religion is not used as a tool of division—but as a foundation for unity, healing, and hope. In doing so, Sudan's religious leaders can help write a new chapter in the nation's history—one where faith serves peace, not war.

11. Annexes

Annex I: Link to The Full Religious Landscape Mapping Document

- <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Religious-Landscape-Mapping-for-Sudan-Final-Report.pdf>

Annex II: Interview Sample Overview

- Number of Interviews: 37
- Method: In-person (13), remote/phone (24)
- Regions Covered: Khartoum, Kassala, Gezira, South Kordofan, Darfur (Nyala, El Fasher), diaspora inputs (Kenya, Ethiopia)
- Respondent Types:
 - Religious leaders (18)
 - Civil society and peace actors (9)
 - Academics and researchers (6)
 - Conflict-affected community representatives (4)

- Religious Affiliation:
 - Sunni Muslim (majority, across sects)
 - Christian (various denominations)
 - Indigenous faith representatives
 - Religious minorities (Shia, reformists)

Annex III: List of Key References

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