



## PROTECTION CLUSTER ALERT

### Escalating Hostilities and Humanitarian Access Constraints

Sudan 2 September 2026

**Affected Areas: Blue Nile**

**Issued by: Protection Cluster**

The Protection Cluster is issuing this alert in response to escalating hostilities in Blue Nile, including reported changes in territorial control in Geissan and Al Kurmuk localities, and the resulting risks to civilians, including refugees, humanitarian access and continuity of essential services, particularly in and around Wad Al Mahi locality. Over 23,000 people are reported displaced from Geissan and Al Kurmuk localities since 11 August 2026, with displacement continuing.

All parties to the conflict must place the protection of civilians at the center of military planning and operations, fully comply with their obligations under International Humanitarian Law, take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and ensure safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access and civilian movement.

#### WHAT HAPPENED

On 28 August 2026, available reports indicated that RSF and allied SPLM-N Al-Hilu forces launched simultaneous attacks against Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) positions in Bikori/Bakori, Geissan locality, and Surkum, Al Kurmuk locality.

IOM DTM Sudan reported that, between 28 and 30 August 2026, a further 11,000 individuals (2,200 households) were displaced from Amurdello, Abu Sheneina, Al Madinah 11 and Raba villages in Geissan locality. DTM records this caseload as additional to displacement reported between 11 and 18 August 2026, when some 12,470 people fled Geissan town and 12 surrounding villages. Successive DTM flash alerts therefore indicate a cumulative caseload of over 23,000 people displaced from Geissan and Al Kurmuk localities since 11 August 2026. To avoid inconsistency across overlapping reporting periods, all displacement figures in this alert are drawn from IOM DTM.

These developments follow a broader escalation of hostilities in Blue Nile during August, including fighting around Geissan and Al Kurmuk and subsequent displacement toward Ed Damazin and Wad Al Mahi. The reported change of territorial control in Bikori/Bakori and Surkum has prompted heightened security concern and movement restrictions affecting humanitarian actors. Access has not been uniformly suspended for partners, but it is increasingly constrained: security assessments are now determining whether staff can travel, and some activities have already been disrupted. Further ground engagements, possible counteroffensives and UAV/drone activity remain possible, increasing risks to civilians and humanitarian operations.

The significance of the current escalation extends beyond new displacement. Blue Nile is simultaneously hosting approximately 209,773 Sudanese returnees from South Sudan, some 19,765 newly arrived South Sudanese refugees and an established refugee population, including approximately 12,000 Ethiopian refugees in Camp 6 in Wad Al Mahi. These populations are being accommodated in an already strained protection and service environment. A joint Protection and Site Management Cluster assessment in May 2026 identified severe overcrowding, inadequate shelter and WASH, lack of lighting, weak site-management arrangements and protection risks in several displacement locations. Renewed hostilities, further population movements and seasonal flooding risk exacerbating these pre-existing vulnerabilities and placing additional pressure on already stretched services.

#### PROTECTION CONCERNS

- **Reduced protection presence and monitoring capacity:** Movement restrictions are limiting direct protection presence, monitoring and oversight of life-saving activities for both IDPs and refugees, delivered through humanitarian actors and community structures. If prolonged, they may weaken timely identification and follow-up of protection incidents, individual cases, referrals, service gaps and community feedback, and place added pressure on remaining partner staff and community structures, with implications for service quality, staff safety and accountability to affected people. Where community-based mechanisms carry protection monitoring and referrals, overstretched structures may have limited capacity to identify and safely respond to sensitive concerns, including GBV. Reduced humanitarian presence may also affect the timely identification, referral and follow-up of children at heightened risk, including unaccompanied and separated children and children requiring specialized protection services.
- **Protection risks associated with new, repeated and secondary displacement:** Rapid and repeated displacement may increase family separation, unaccompanied and separated children, children's exposure to violence, abuse and neglect, exposure to GBV and sexual violence, exposure to explosive ordnance (EO) hazards, trafficking and exploitation, arbitrary

arrest or detention, extortion at checkpoints, loss or destruction of civil documentation, and housing, land and property concerns.

- Displacement and insecurity may also disrupt children's access to education and other protective routines and services, particularly where families are displaced multiple times or arrive in locations with already limited service capacity.
- Women and girls face heightened risks during displacement journeys, particularly when travelling through insecure areas, crossing checkpoints or becoming separated from family and community support networks. Renewed fighting in areas that already generated significant displacement earlier in 2026 raises the risk of repeated or secondary displacement, and any further deterioration in Geissan, Al Kurmuk or surrounding areas could generate additional movements toward Ed Damazin, Wad Al Mahi and other receiving locations, further straining services and host-community coping capacity. Access restrictions compound these risks by limiting access to protection services, assistance and referral pathways, while delays in food, cash, health and nutrition support could erode household coping capacity and increase malnutrition risks, particularly among children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, older people and persons with specific needs.
- **Conditions in displacement sites:** The May 2026 joint assessment identified overcrowding, inadequate shelter, poor sanitation, insufficient lighting and weak site-management arrangements as significant protection concerns in displacement locations in Blue Nile, with women and girls facing particular safety risks when accessing latrines, bathing facilities and water points. Continued arrivals, reduced humanitarian presence and seasonal flooding risk further aggravating these conditions and the associated GBV, child-protection and public-health risks.
- **Explosive ordnance contamination:** Blue Nile remains heavily contaminated with EO, including from previous conflicts, and no survey or clearance activities have resumed since April 2023 due to access constraints. Ongoing hostilities are likely increasing risks to displaced and host populations, including children while the disruption of established movement routes may force civilians onto unfamiliar paths, increasing exposure to contamination and the risk of casualties.
- **Disrupted access routes and essential services:** The destruction of the Khor Tamat bridge on 18 August, on the route connecting Amoura, Bakori and the wider Geissan area with Ed Damazin (100–120 km to the east), matters for civilian movement as well as militarily, particularly during the rainy season. Different sources reported that its loss disrupted access to markets, hospitals, humanitarian assistance and ambulance services for communities including Bakori and Amoura. Combined with heavy seasonal rains, flooding and EO contamination, this is further constraining road access, communications and the ability of affected communities to reach services safely. Delays in reaching health facilities carry particular implications for women and girls requiring urgent sexual and reproductive health or GBV-related care.

## IHL OBLIGATIONS

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- Parties to the conflict must distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants, and between civilian objects and military objectives. Civilians, refugee settlements and civilian infrastructure must not be the object of attack.
- Parties must take all feasible precautions in the planning and conduct of military operations to avoid, and in any event minimize, incidental civilian harm, including in areas hosting refugees and displaced populations.
- Humanitarian and medical personnel, assets, facilities, relief supplies and operations must be respected and protected at all times and must not be attacked, impeded or used for military purposes.
- Parties must allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian relief for civilians in need and enable civilians to safely access healthcare, food, water, protection and other essential services.

## CALLS TO ACTION

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### To Parties to the conflict

- Ensure that civilians are able to move safely and voluntarily away from areas affected by hostilities, and that they are not obstructed, extorted or subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention at checkpoints.
- Allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access to displacement sites, refugee locations and other affected areas, and ensure the safe movement of humanitarian and medical personnel.
- Avoid, to the extent feasible, locating military objectives, personnel or assets within or near refugee settlements, displacement sites, schools, health facilities, water infrastructure and other civilian locations,

### To the Humanitarian Country Team and Humanitarian Leadership

- Maintain collective engagement aimed at preserving humanitarian access and promoting appropriate security assurances for humanitarian operations and affected populations, including IDPs and refugee sites, while supporting contingency planning for further deterioration in the Blue Nile security environment.
- Support collective efforts to sustain critical, and time-sensitive humanitarian assistance and services including protection, education, health, WASH, food, NFI and cash assistance, through coordinated access engagement and feasible alternative delivery modalities where required.

### To Humanitarian and Protection Actors

- Maintain regular joint access and protection monitoring and promptly share changes in humanitarian access, population movements, service disruptions and protection incidents through agreed coordination channels in line with applicable data-protection and information-sharing protocols.
- Review and, where necessary and feasible, activate business-continuity arrangements where needed, including strengthened support to community committees and community-based service providers, pre-positioning of minimum health and essential supplies where feasible, and clear remote supervision and accountability arrangements.



- Maintain regular partner coordination through appropriate physical and remote modalities, subject to security, connectivity and information-security considerations.
- Coordinate with Mine Action actors as appropriate to assess and mitigate explosive ordnance risks affecting civilians, humanitarian workers and aid operations.
- Scale up protection preparedness for newly displaced people in Geissan and likely receiving areas, including protection monitoring, GBV and child-protection referral capacity, family tracing and reunification, legal/civil-documentation and HLP support, disability- and age-inclusive services, psychological first aid/PSS, and targeted individual protection assistance and case management. As part of this, assess whether women and girls can safely access water points, latrines, bathing facilities and health services in receiving locations, and identify measures to mitigate associated GBV risks.
- Maintain contingency arrangements for possible further deterioration in humanitarian access and potential interruption of activities, with particular attention to continuity of critical services and assistance for individuals and households facing heightened protection risks.