



Role of Gender Focal Points in the ATT in Reducing Access of Weapons to RSF in Sudan

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Introduction

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), under Article 7(4), requires that when States Parties assess export operations of arms, they must consider potential risks that the arms or related material may be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious violence against women and children. In the Eleventh Conference of States Parties (CSP11) to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), held in August 2025, States Parties adopted Gender Focal Points, voluntary posts held by one or more States Parties, to support the Treaty's implementation with respect to the gender perspective, particularly through risk assessments and international cooperation.

Gender Focal Points work toward a number of objectives, most notably: establishing a dedicated information centre for ATT to serve as a central platform for collecting and disseminating all documents, tools, and resources related to the gender perspective and gender-based violence, thereby facilitating access to relevant information; preventing, identifying, and addressing any instances of harassment or discrimination that may occur during Treaty meetings through a specific code of conduct for those meetings; enhancing guidance and standards related to the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) to promote a gender-responsive approach; and systematically integrating the gender perspective and the prevention of gender-based violence into all official Treaty processes, including plenary sessions, working groups, preparatory meetings, and the Conference of States Parties. In addition, Gender Focal Points help strengthen the Treaty's universality through cooperation that supports women's political participation and relevant civil society organizations concerned with gender issues; promote the exchange of good national, regional, and international practices among States; and strengthen the Treaty's reporting mechanisms by exploring the addition of a voluntary section to national reports. This voluntary section allows States Parties to explain their processes for assessing risks of gender-based violence without adding any new obligations, while encouraging the voluntary use of this mechanism. It also supports coordination and partnerships within the framework of the Treaty and across the agendas of disarmament, human rights, youth, and peace and security.



In this context, Sudan has been experiencing an ongoing violent armed conflict since April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In this conflict, the RSF use sexual violence as a weapon of war to terrorize civilians, particularly in Darfur, where multiple ethnic groups have been targeted. The inflow of advanced weapons and ammunition from States Parties to ATT, such as China, Serbia, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, into the RSF has significantly enhanced their military capabilities. This has enabled and facilitated the commission of mass rape and gender-based violence as a means of controlling populations and terrorizing them. This clearly contravenes the Treaty's obligations under Article 7(4), which requires States Parties to assess the risks of weapons being used to commit serious acts of gender-based violence before approving exports. However, ongoing transfers have in practice contributed to an increase in both the scale and frequency of gender-based violence crimes during the conflict.

This paper seeks to present ideas for strengthening the role of Gender Focal Points in reducing the access of the RSF in Sudan to arms, and thereby lowering the rates of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by women and girls in Sudan. It addresses the following sections: the roles of Gender Focal Points within ATT context; the sexual and gender-based violence crimes committed by the RSF in Sudan; and the arms and military equipment that these forces received from States Parties to the Treaty. Finally, the brief highlights the role of these mechanisms in limiting the flow of arms to the RSF in Sudan.

Roles of Gender Focal Points in the Context of ATT

Gender Focal Points are voluntary positions held by one or more States Parties to ATT. They were officially endorsed at the 11th Conference of States Parties in August 2025 under a decision based on a proposal from Mexico, and later, Mexico, Spain, and Togo were designated as the first Gender Focal Points on January 9, 2026.

These Focal Points are intended to support coordination without creating new institutional structures, while strengthening the systematic integration of the gender perspective across all Treaty processes, and supporting effective implementation through a human-rights-based approach, particularly in implementing Article 7(4), which requires States Parties to assess the risk that arms may be used to commit serious acts of gender-based violence, or serious violence against women and children. It is assumed that they carry out eight key tasks, namely:

- **Task One:** Gender Focal Points establish a dedicated information center for ATT, functioning as a central platform on the Secretariat's website or a specialized electronic platform to compile and publish all documents, tools, and resources



related to the gender perspective and gender-based violence. This includes a risk-assessment guide, examples of successful national practices, and statistical data on the impact of arms on women and children. The center aims to facilitate fast and organized access by States Parties and relevant stakeholders, thereby enhancing transparency and practical cooperation in implementing Article 7(4), and serving as a practical step to support States facing challenges in integrating the gender perspective.

- **Task Two:** Gender Focal Points implement a code of conduct for meetings under the Treaty to prevent, identify, and address any incidents of harassment or discrimination that may occur during sessions or side events. This must be paired with secure, confidential, and effective reporting channels consistent with international standards, such as those adopted within the United Nations system. The code includes clear investigation and follow-up mechanisms, contributing to a safe and inclusive working environment for all participants, particularly women and youth, and strengthening confidence in the Treaty's international forums.
- **Task Three:** Gender Focal Points strengthen guidance and standards related to the VTF to reinforce a gender-responsive approach, ensuring that international assistance effectively contributes to integrating the gender perspective and preventing gender-based violence within capacity-building and training programs. This includes reviewing funding criteria to prioritize projects focused on risk assessment, making financial support more effective for countries that need to enhance their national capacities.
- **Task Four:** Gender Focal Points systematically integrate the gender perspective and the prevention of gender-based violence into all official Treaty processes, including plenary sessions, working groups, the preparatory meeting, and the Conference of States Parties, so that these priorities become a core component of implementation and annual review. This is done by submitting inputs, working papers, and recommendations during discussions, ensuring that violence against women and girls stemming from the use of arms is treated as an integral part of risk assessment under Articles 6 and 7.
- **Task Five:** Gender Focal Points promote the universality of the Treaty through close cooperation with women parliamentarians and civil society organizations working on gender issues, to strengthen political participation, legislative alignment, and national ownership by States not yet party to the Treaty. This includes organizing joint workshops and awareness initiatives that connect arms trade issues with gendered



impacts, contributing to increasing the number of States joining the Treaty with an explicit gender perspective.

- **Task Six:** Gender Focal Points facilitate implementation of the Treaty by providing practical guidance and organizing peer exchanges, enabling States Parties to share best practices at the national, regional, and international levels in areas such as gender-sensitive risk assessment and capacity building. These exchanges help transfer practical experience on the ground, such as how to integrate gender-based violence into national export mechanisms.
- **Task Seven:** Gender Focal Points strengthen the Treaty's reporting mechanisms by exploring the addition of a voluntary section to annual national reports regarding processes for assessing risks of gender-based violence, without adding any new mandatory obligations, while encouraging the voluntary use of this mechanism to enhance transparency. This section allows States to describe the measures taken in gender-risk assessments, supporting the measurement of collective progress.
- **Task Eight:** Gender Focal Points enhance coordination and partnerships within the Treaty framework and across the agendas of disarmament, human rights, youth, peace, and security, to leverage existing expertise, strengthen political coherence, and broaden efforts to integrate both gender and youth perspectives into international work. This includes cooperation with relevant mechanisms such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and youth-focused disarmament programs, reinforcing the integration between the Treaty and related agendas.

Sexual Violence Crimes Committed by RSF in Sudan

Since the outbreak of the violent armed conflict in Sudan on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF, sexual violence has become a systematic, widely and deliberately used method of warfare employed by the RSF and its affiliated militias to terrorize civilians, humiliate communities, and force populations into displacement, particularly in Darfur, Khartoum, and Al Gezira. In these areas, where the RSF gained control over substantial territories, thousands of sexual crimes have been committed, as documented by UN estimates and assessments by civil society organizations, including Maat. The evidence collected and documented by the Institute through testimony from survivors of the war in Sudan who are residing in Egypt, as well as from some Sudanese officials, indicates that these acts constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, and may also be an indication of genocidal intent in some areas, such as Al-Fashir.

Through analysis of the various testimonies obtained by Maat, the RSF has been found to commit numerous forms of sexual violations, including individual rape, gang rape, sexual



slavery, sexual-purpose forcible detention, rape in front of family members, sexual torture, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and kidnapping for sexual enslavement. In many cases, fighters target women and girls aged 12 to 70, and in some instances also children and men. These violations frequently occur during attacks on homes and camps, during attempts to flee, or in areas under full RSF control. In many cases, the rapes were carried out under direct threat of weapons.

By way of example, in Darfur, the most heavily affected region, particularly in West, North, and South Darfur (including Nyala, Zalingei, Al-Fashir, and the Zamzam camp), RSF attacks in April 2025 on the Zam Zam displacement camp resulted in more than 104 officially documented cases of sexual violence by the United Nations, involving 75 women, 26 girls, and 3 boys, most of them from the Zaghawa group. According to a report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released in December 2025, fighters committed gang rape and sexual slavery in front of families. The same report indicated that sexual violence has become part of daily life in many areas of Sudan. Additionally, Maat's estimates during January 2026, based on interviews with victims, documented patterns of gang rape against some survivors even away from frontline areas.

In Al-Fashir, the capital of North Darfur, RSF control in October and November 2025 was accompanied by large-scale attacks that included gang rapes of dozens of women and girls during attempts to flee or inside homes, hospitals, and universities. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Sudan, in its report issued in February 2026, documented some of these violations and described them as systematic, deliberately targeting non-Arab communities such as the Zaghawa and the Fur. These acts were described as part of an ethnic-destruction campaign bearing characteristics of genocidal violence. Civil society estimates during that period also reported cases of women detained for days, described as sexual slavery, accompanied by torture, and forced to treat RSF wounded.

In Khartoum, Omdurman, and Bahri, estimates by media and human-rights actors documented widespread gang rape and sexual slavery within residential neighborhoods under RSF control, including the detention of women in hotels and homes for weeks. These sources indicate that the RSF uses sexual violence to control and terrorize populations, targeting women from specific ethnic groups such as the Massalit and Zaghawa, and in Gezira State after the RSF took control in December 2023.

The number of sexual violence cases officially documented is more than 330, according to UN experts in May 2025. However, the true number is estimated to be in the thousands, due to fear of social stigma and lack of access to medical and security services. As



Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF/Doctors Without Borders) emphasized, gang rapes and sexual torture occur publicly and repeatedly, leading to severe physical injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and severe psychological trauma, further worsening the humanitarian crisis, with displacement affecting more than 11 million people and health services collapsing.

Arms and Military Equipment Supplied by States Parties to ATT to RSF in Sudan

Since the outbreak of the violent armed conflict in Sudan on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF, fighting has escalated sharply. The RSF has gained control over broad areas in Darfur, Khartoum, and Al Gezira, while committing war crimes and crimes against humanity against civilians in full view of the international community. In this context, investigations conducted by Maat, together with legal/human-rights assessments, UN estimates, media reporting, and documentary evidence shared through social media, indicate that the inflow of arms, military equipment, and ammunition from States Parties to ATT has directly strengthened the RSF's military capabilities. This, in turn, enabled the RSF to carry out large-scale attacks on camps and civilians, and to commit thousands of crimes, including systematic sexual violence used as a weapon of war.

Investigations by media and UN-related reporting indicate that UK-manufactured military technologies and equipment, integrated into RSF military mechanisms, have appeared on Sudan's battlefields since April 2023. Maat's review of available evidence suggests that UK-manufactured equipment has been found in fighting areas used by the RSF, specifically small-arms targeting systems manufactured by Milltek, and UK-made engines for armored troop carriers produced by Cummins. These systems, according to the investigations, helped facilitate rapid movement and control over civilian areas, thereby increasing the RSF's ability to commit gender-based violence and field executions.

Regarding Chinese weapons, media reports and photos/videos circulated on social media documented the presence, among RSF forces, of a Chinese-made lightweight 155mm AH-4 howitzer, as well as an FK-2000 surface-to-air missile and the associated FK-2000 air-defense system, alongside GB50 guided bombs. Such advanced weapons enabled the RSF to conduct precise, long-range artillery strikes on displacement camps such as Zamzam and Al-Fashir. This facilitated raids, including gang rape and sexual slavery committed by its affiliated militias.

As for Serbian weapons, field investigations, supported by evidence attributed to the Sudanese Armed Forces, including images, showed that government forces found



ammunition boxes containing 120mm thermobaric mortar rounds made in Serbia at the headquarters of the state broadcasting authority in Omdurman, after recovering them from RSF forces. These munitions, delivered in significant quantities since mid-2023, allowed the RSF to launch intense attacks on residential neighborhoods. This created a climate of security chaos that encouraged the spread of rape and sexual torture in front of families.

For Bulgarian weapons, visual evidence, through videos filmed by members of the Sudanese Armed Forces, documented the seizure of 81mm HE mortar shells, made in Bulgaria, that were reportedly en route to RSF forces. These munitions, which reached the RSF in practice from late 2023 onward, were used to shell civilian sites and camps, causing civilian deaths and injuries and enabling looting and systematic sexual violence in areas controlled by RSF.

With regard to French equipment, reports by rights-based organizations and analyses of field images indicate RSF use of the French “Gallix” system, manufactured by Lacroix Défense in partnership with Nexter. This system, used to launch smoke grenades and signals, helped cover RSF assault operations across both day and night. As a result, it facilitated commission of war crimes such as gang rape and sexual enslavement without effective resistance.

Media investigations relied upon by Maat also indicate that G36C assault rifles, manufactured by Heckler & Koch in Germany, were in the hands of RSF fighters. These accurate and lightweight weapons enhanced small units’ ability to conduct rapid raids on villages and camps, contributing to an increase in documented cases of kidnapping and sexual violence in Darfur and Khartoum.

Without the continued, largely unobstructed flow of these arms and military equipment to the RSF, the scale of destruction, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, including sexual violence as a weapon of war, would not have been possible in this form.

Enhancing the Role of Gender Focal Points to Limit Access of Weapons to RSF in Sudan

Maat proposes many ideas aimed at strengthening the role of gender focal points to limit the access of weapons of State Parties under ATT to the RSF in Sudan. These can be summarized as follows:

- Establishing an information hub: Gender focal points will work to create a dedicated information center for the ATT, functioning as a centralized platform on the Secretariat’s website or a specialized electronic platform to compile and publish all documents, tools, and resources related to a gender perspective and gender-based



violence. This center would be able to collect all reports of sexual violence crimes committed by the RSF in Sudan, as well as gather information indicating the transfer of weapons and military equipment from ATT State Parties to the RSF. This would enable State Parties to conduct a rapid, evidence-based risk assessment under Article 7(4), which could lead to the denial of arms deals that may reach the RSF, many of which reportedly arrive through diversion operations to the United Arab Emirates. The center would also enable Sudanese civil society organizations to submit documented testimonies from survivors, along with verified photos and videos, thereby enhancing transparency and preventing the flow of weapons into Sudan.

- Integrating gender and preventing gender-based violence across the ATT work: Another key task for gender focal points is to systematically incorporate gender perspectives and the prevention of gender-based violence into the official processes of all parts of the Treaty, including plenary sessions, working groups, and preparatory meetings. Accordingly, they may integrate discussions on the risks of gender-based violence into agenda items related to working groups, especially the Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Treaty on a continuing basis. They can also exchange information regarding arms export activities by States involved in supporting armed groups participating in armed conflicts, as well as mechanisms to limit arms deals that may be diverted to the RSF by ATT State Parties.
- Engaging women parliamentarians and gender-focused civil society organizations: Gender focal points will focus on engaging women parliamentarians and civil society organizations working on gender issues to strengthen the universality of the Treaty. In this context, there are several countries to which weapons have reportedly been diverted through unlawful trafficking to the RSF in Sudan, such as Libya, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. These are non-Treaty States Parties. There are also Treaty States Parties, such as Chad and the Central African Republic. Therefore, outreach should target civil society organizations to advocate for Libya, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Sudan to join the ATT to increase the prospects of preventing the flow of illicit weapons into Sudan. Although this step may take a long time, it is highly important to ensure regional security and prevent arms flows to armed groups in that region.
- Sharing information on gender-based risk assessments: Gender focal points will exchange information among ATT State Parties regarding gender-based risk assessments resulting from irresponsible arms transfers. Information may be shared among States with advanced experience in integrating gender-based violence risk assessments into export control systems. This would help prevent arms transfers that



could contribute to increased sexual violence in future conflict areas, with Sudan highlighted as a case study. They could also discuss the possibility of integrating reports from civil society organizations into risk assessment processes under export control systems.

- **Strengthening Treaty reporting through a voluntary section:** One of the most prominent responsibilities of gender focal points is to explore adding a voluntary section to annual national reports. Through this option, States Parties may add a voluntary section to the national reports they submit under the ATT, enabling them to explain how they assess risks related to gender-based violence, without creating new legal obligations or additional burdens. States should be encouraged to use this mechanism voluntarily. Currently, States Parties provide annual national reports on implementation of the Treaty; therefore, they can be encouraged to include specific or methodological details on how gender-based violence risk assessments are integrated into licensing, authorization, oversight, and transfer-control processes. Such details should include the procedures used for risk assessment, practical examples of arms deals that were denied, suspended, or had their conditions modified due to risks of gender-based violence, and the national mechanisms used to track illegal diversions that lead to crimes of sexual violence. This approach can be applied to help prevent weapons from reaching the RSF in the future.
- **Coordination and partnerships within and beyond the ATT framework:** Coordination and partnerships within ATT framework, and through broader agendas such as disarmament, human rights, youth, peace, and security, are among the key tasks of coordination focal points. Accordingly, these mechanisms can be used to understand the direct relationship between the flow of arms and the spread of sexual violations in Sudan. This can be done by exchanging information with various UN entities by reviewing joint reports on this matter and organizing joint meetings to discuss it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this working paper highlights that gender focal points represent an effective and immediately implementable strategic tool for strengthening the implementation of ATT, particularly in the context of the ongoing Sudanese conflict that has continued since April 2023. During this period, the inflow of advanced weapons from States Parties to the Treaty (such as China, Serbia, Bulgaria, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) through indirect routes has enhanced the capabilities of the RSF to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. This has included the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war against women and girls in Darfur, Khartoum, and the Al-Jazira region.



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Through the tasks identified for gender focal points, ranging from establishing a centralized information hub and integrating a gender perspective into the Treaty's official processes, to strengthening voluntary reporting, building international partnerships, and exchanging practical experience, States can transform Article 7(4) obligations from purely legal commitments into genuine preventive mechanisms. These mechanisms would help prevent arms from reaching the RSF, thereby reducing both the scale and frequency of sexual violence crimes. Moreover, this approach can be replicated in the future in other contexts where sexual violence is repeatedly used as a tool against civilians through weapons originating from States Parties to the Treaty.