

**Final Draft, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2025**

**HRDD Phase 2 Partner Assessment Report: Sudan**

**Submitted to the Executive Board by the Human Rights Advisory Committee (HRAC)**

**Section 1. Introduction**

The HRAC phase 1 HRDD report on Sudan concluded that there are serious indications that international crimes and serious human rights violations are being committed in and by Sudan. This phase 2 report sets out our assessment of Maastricht University's partner in Sudan and provides advice on this partner to the Executive Board. Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 provide general recommendations.

**Section 2. Partnership with Ahfad University for Women**

**1. General introduction**

Maastricht University's only institutional partnership in Sudan is with Ahfad University for Women, a private women's college formally located in Khartoum, Sudan. While the college has been operating since the 1960s, it was formally recognized by the Sudanese government in 1995 and received full university status.

Due to the ongoing conflict, the university campus is not in use. Fighting in Khartoum has forced education to shift online, operated by staff members who were able to flee Khartoum. Additionally, Ahfad University for Women has been able to rely on its regional partnerships, operating the obligatory practical components of medical training in Cairo to allow students to continue and complete their studies.

Necessity has turned Ahfad University for Women into a key driver of the development of online education across Africa. Being a front-runner in the adoption of PBL-based simulations in medical training, the staff at Ahfad University for Women have turned to cutting-edge technology such as the use of Virtual Reality to offer medical practitioner training while cut off from their own campus.

While Ahfad University for Women is formally a Sudanese university, it currently does not operate inside Sudan and is entirely out of the reach of all conflict parties.

## 2. Partnership under consideration

The links between Maastricht University and Ahfad University for Women date back to the 1980s when current staff at Ahfad obtained medical and didactic education at Maastricht University and transferred their findings to the Sudanese context. There are long-running personal links between the two universities, exemplified in joint teaching (cf. below) as well as ongoing shared publications.<sup>1 2</sup> The decade-long connection is also visible in a shared didactic vision that has given rise to the concrete partnership under review.

The partnership in question is the joint-degree program MSc. Global Health developed and offered in a consortium of nine universities (next to UM and Ahfad: Universidad del Rosario, Colombia; Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India; McMaster University, Canada; University of Alabama at Birmingham, US; Thammasat University, Thailand; Bangladesh University of Professionals, Bangladesh; University of South-Eastern Norway, Norway). At Ahfad University for Women, our partner faculties are the School of Medicine, the School of Health Sciences and the School of Psychology and Pre-School Education.

While the Global Health consortium covers a broad range of shared activities, the components under review by the Human Rights Advisory Committee are the tangible obligations, which include:

1. Joint teaching of courses, including core classes such as Foundations of Global Health I & II — this involves colleagues of Ahfad University for Women teaching students at Maastricht University and vice versa
2. A student exchange between all nine partners

The student exchange with Ahfad is dormant as the Khartoum campus is deserted, Ahfad students have dispersed and safe travel to Sudan is not possible. The shared education and research work continues.

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<sup>1</sup> Badri, A., Crutzen, R., & Van den Borne, H. W. (2012). Exposures to war-related traumatic events and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms among displaced Darfuri female university students: An exploratory study. *BMC Public Health*, 12(1), 603. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-603>

<sup>2</sup> Badri, A., Eltayeb, S., Mohamed, M., & Verdeli, H. (2020). Mental health and resilience status of Eritrean unaccompanied refugee minors in Sudan. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 116, 105088. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105088>

### **3. Potentially problematic aspects, in terms of serious human rights violations, and/or international crimes.**

Ahfad University for Women continues to provide education under severe circumstances, without access to their own campus and in times of extreme peril to both staff and students.

The Human Rights Advisory Committee has reviewed media reporting, social media from or about Ahfad University for Women and consulted with UM staff involved in the Global Health consortium. (A call for consultation by the wider UM community remained unanswered.)

In reviewing the evidence, and considering the fact that staff and students were forced to flee the campus and often the country, it is abundantly clear that there is no indication that Ahfad University for Women is in any way involved in violations of human rights or international crimes. On the contrary, staff at Ahfad University for Women are actively engaged ameliorating actions such as:

1. Supporting pro-democracy attitudes and structures<sup>3 4</sup>
2. Providing human rights education<sup>5 6</sup>
3. Expressing opposition to human rights abuses and supporting peaceful resistance<sup>3 4</sup>
4. Women's rights advocacy<sup>7</sup>
5. Functions that heal rifts in the social fabric<sup>5 6</sup>

While Ahfad University for Women is formally regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR),<sup>8</sup> it does not have any financial ties to conflict parties. Ahfad is a private university and funding is provided by the governments of Italy and the United States and private foundations such as the Haggar Foundation, the Chr. Michelsen Institute.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGa3YVKdRjM>, accessed Jul. 8, 2025

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_WrkogrJA0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_WrkogrJA0), accessed Jul. 8, 2025

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DB9lgRRHl2M>, accessed Jul. 8, 2025

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XaLreisaQQ>, accessed Jul. 8, 2025

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFd6S5iLVuI>, accessed Jul. 8, 2025<sup>5 6</sup>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ahfad.edu.sd/index.php/how-to-apply>, accessed Sep. 12, 2025 through <https://web.archive.org/web/20230331031410/https://www.ahfad.edu.sd/index.php/how-to-apply> in the version of March 31, 2023

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/ahfad-university-women-conducts-local-and-regional-activities-promote-gender>, accessed Sep. 12, 2025; archive available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20250912144133/https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/ahfad-university-women-conducts-local-and-regional-activities-promote-gender>

#### **4. Advice for the Executive Board**

Ahfad University for Women is clearly not engaged in any activities that would draw concern under the Human Rights Due Diligence framework.

Beyond this, Ahfad University for Women goes well beyond reasonable expectations for a university that is located in the middle of conflict and housed in direct vicinity to government forces involved in the conflict. Ahfad staff not only work to keep education running under the most difficult circumstances, but also actively speak out and acts in defence of actual and potential victims and should be considered a force for good in this conflict.

For consideration of the Executive Board and Faculty Board of FHML: as part of our commitment to Human Rights, Ahfad University for Women represents an opportunity to support actors who are a force for good. We can take positive actions to support a long-running partner of Maastricht University:

- We recommend highlighting Ahfad University for Women's work as a role model and publicly showcasing them as a desirable partner.
- We recommend supporting the work at Ahfad University for Women within the context of the Global Health Consortium, for example through:
  - Offering staff mobility scholarships, access to equipment or resources to Ahfad staff to work at UM while they are displaced by the violence,
  - Offering opportunities for students of Ahfad University for Women who may be able to come to Maastricht to pursue their studies even though the exchange is presently dormant, voiding the need for reciprocity and offering safe harbour to those affected by the violence in Sudan;
- We recommend studying the work of Ahfad University for Women, especially their innovative use of technologies in compensation to the conflict, as a cases of didactic advancements.

## **Appendix 1: Recommendations regarding the Blocklist and the Brightlist**

The Human Rights Advisory Committee recommends that after the initial pilot phase of the Human Rights Due Diligence process, the Executive Board consider creating and formally publishing on the UM website two lists: one, a “**blocklist**” of partner institutions with whom we do not want to be associated because of their involvement in serious human rights violations, war crimes and/or international crimes; and a “**brightlist**” of partner institutions with whom we are proud to be in a partnership, because of their positive action against serious human rights violations, war crimes and/or international crimes, in countries where such violations occur.

### (a) The Blocklist

The goal of the blocklist is to: a) motivate partner institutes to change their behaviour insofar as they are involved in international crimes; b) send a strong signal regarding the minimum expectations UM holds towards partner institutions (i.e. not to be involved in international crimes); c) provide information for individuals at UM considering partnership with these partners.

For institutions on the blocklist, this means that UM does not engage in any strategic partnerships with such institutions, unless they cease all involvement in serious human rights violations, war crimes and/or international crimes.

In cases where the partner institution is involved in serious human rights violations, war crimes and/or international crimes, so that they are on the blocklist, yet (some of) the activities resulting from the partnership contribute positively to the realisation of human rights, these activities could be exempted from the overall block of shared activities.

### (b) The Brightlist

The goal of the brightlist is to: a) motivate and support partner institutes to take a positive and constructive role in the realisation of human rights, in particular in situations where this is challenging because of local circumstances that entail serious human rights violations and/or international crimes; b) encourage individuals and leaders at UM to engage in partnerships with such institutions.

For institutions on the brightlist, this means that UM commits to actively supporting and upholding these partnerships, for example by showcasing positive outcomes of such partnerships, and/or providing financial support to initiatives with these partners. As mentioned in the HRDD framework, the consequences of strategic partners being listed either on the block- or brightlist does not apply to individual collaborations or non-strategic partnerships.

## **Appendix 2: Recommendation regarding university communication**

The Human Rights Advisory Committee also recommends that the Executive Board creates a policy regarding setting out how the university communicates in terms of new developments internationally regarding of serious human rights violations, war crimes or international crimes. In our view, such a policy should include outreach to UM community members with personal and/or professional ties to countries or peoples involved.