



[The International Criminal Court Begins Its First Trial Addressing the Atrocities in Darfur](#)

The first trial for war crimes committed in Darfur opened at the International Criminal Court (ICC) earlier this week. Former Sudanese militia chief Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, commonly known as Ali Kushayb, faces more than 30 charges of crimes against humanity for heinous atrocities against civilians. He played a major role in the 2003 government-led campaign under former despot Omar al-Bashir to suppress a rebellion in Darfur, the subsequent conflict of which saw over 300,000 people killed and 2.5 million forced to flee their homes. The militia forces under his command took part in an array of atrocities, including mass killings, pillaging, and torture. Kushayb surrendered to the ICC back in 2020 after 13 years on the run. Human rights and social justice activists have commended the ICC trial for shedding light on the disturbing abuses, and are hopeful that it will provide a token of accountability.

The trial against Kushayb comes at a time of renewed violence in the Darfur region, as at least 138 people were killed in a recent clash in December of last year. “Abuses continue to this day in Darfur, no doubt because there is no accountability,” says Elise Keppler, an associate director at Human Rights Watch. Darfur is no stranger to violence. The events under question took place during a government crackdown on rebels in 2003 under former dictator Omar al-Bashir. Darfur had been neglected by the government in Khartoum and was extremely underdeveloped. Following an attack on a Sudanese Air Force base, militia forces led by Kushayb responded with respiratory attacks on villages in Darfur, indiscriminately killing men, women, and children. Kushayb himself is believed to have directly participated in many of the crimes. If convicted, he would face life in prison. His lawyer is ridiculously claiming that this is a case of mistaken identity, and that Kushayb is not educated enough to understand the orders he carried out were egregious human rights violations.

The case does however also highlight some of the shortcomings of the ICC. The court, founded in 2002, is tasked with investigating and prosecuting individuals accused of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. It only has jurisdiction though in countries that have signed the Rome Statute. 120 nations have done so, but Sudan is not one of them. The United Nations Security Council originally asked the ICC to investigate the war crimes in Sudan, but gave them little funding. They also have to depend on cooperation from other countries as they have no police force of their own. The despot of Sudan at the time, Omar al-Bashir, is also facing ICC charges for masterminding the genocide in Darfur. He is currently in prison in Khartoum. Though this case outlines some of the drawbacks of the ICC, it is justifiably being lauded as a significant win for human rights advocates, as it is the first trial holding someone accountable for the crimes in Darfur.

The people of Sudan are currently being repressed by the military-led government as they protest for the democratic process to be restored. Some rights advocates hope that this trial will show that the government can and, if possible, will be held responsible for any crimes against humanity that they commit.