Sudanese cabinet votes to back International Criminal Court

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By AFP

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Sudan's cabinet voted Tuesday to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said, one step further towards ex-president Omar al-Bashir potentially facing trial for genocide.

"Today, in our cabinet meeting, we have unanimously passed a bill to join the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court," Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said on Twitter.

Since August 2019, Sudan has been led by a transitional civilian-military administration, which vowed to bring justice to victims of crimes committed under Bashir.

Sudan is yet to appoint a legislative body, but the decision still needs the approval of Sudan's sovereign council.

Hamdok said they would hold a joint council meeting "to pass it into law".

Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades, was deposed in April 2019 following months of protests in Sudan.

He is wanted by the ICC to face trial on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"Justice and accountability are a solid foundation of the new, rule of law-based Sudan we're striving to build," Hamdok added.

But Hamdok gave no further details as to what joining the ICC might mean in terms of putting Bashir and other Sudanese wanted by the court on trial, either in Sudan or in The Hague.

Sudan's transitional administration is in talks with the ICC about options for trying Bashir and his former aides.

One stumbling block was that Sudan was not party to the ICC's founding Rome Statute.

Bashir is being held in the high security Kober prison in Khartoum, along with former aides also wanted by the ICC.

The former president was convicted in December 2019 for corruption, and has been on trial in Khartoum since July 2020 for the Islamist-backed 1989 coup which brought him to power.

The United Nations says 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million were displaced in the Darfur conflict.

War broke out in 2003 when African minority rebels, complaining of systematic discrimination, took up arms against Bashir's Arab-dominated government.

Khartoum responded by unleashing a notorious militia known as the Janjaweed, recruited from among the region's nomadic peoples.

Human rights groups have long accused Bashir and his former aides of using a scorched earth policy, raping, killing, looting and burning villages.

In late May, former ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda visited Darfur, and pressed Sudanese officials to hand over Bashir and other wanted leaders.

Last year, alleged senior Janjaweed militia leader Ali Kushayb, who was wanted by the ICC, surrendered to the court.

ICC judges said in July he will the first suspect to be tried over the Darfur conflict on multiple counts of rape, murder, and torture.