

Across social media, color blue goes viral in solidarity with Sudan

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The blue wave started in honor of Mohamed Mattar, a victim of Sudan's brutal military crackdown whose favorite color was blue. Photo courtesy of: Al Jazeera Twitter

Social media users are changing their profile pictures to blue to show support for protesters in Sudan. The protesters faced a violent military crackdown on June 3. More than 100 people were killed in Sudan's capital city Khartoum. And hundreds more were injured.

The blue wave has spread across various platforms via the #BlueForSudan hashtag. Twitter and Instagram users are using the hashtag to honor the memory of one of the victims. His name was Mohamed Mattar and his favorite color was reportedly blue.

The 26-year-old engineer was fatally shot during the June 3 crackdown blamed by protesters on Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF is a military group led by a senior member of Sudan's ruling Transitional Military Council. However, it is not Sudan's official military.

Hero Shot While Protecting Others

Mattar was reportedly shot while trying to protect two women during the bloody crackdown. The RSF was reportedly trying to get people to leave the protest camp outside the military headquarters.

Shahd Khidir is a friend of Mattar's and a beauty influencer on Instagram. "Once he was murdered, his friends and family changed their profile picture to match his, and eventually other people began to join in," she said. Khidir asked her followers to change their profile pictures to blue, like the image on Mattar's Instagram account.

Now the color represents "all of the Sudanese people who have fallen in the uprising," Khidir said.

Demands For A Government Led By The People

The protest began on April 6. It was the result of months of other protests against Sudan's longtime ruler Omar al-Bashir. He was forced out of office on April 11, but protesters remained at the site until the June crackdown. The protesters have been demanding a government led by the people of Sudan. As it stands, the military has taken over the country.

Since then, the country's military rulers have reduced Internet access. It led to what rights groups have described as a near-total shutdown on June 10, leaving protesters more detached from the outside world.

In a country where the state tightly monitors traditional media outlets, the Internet provided a space for Sudanese to communicate with those inside and outside the country. Protesters and self-styled citizen journalists used social media to organize demonstrations. They also used it to share updates from the uprising with the rest of the world.

Some images from the country went viral, including a striking photo of a young woman standing on top of a car addressing fellow protesters.

Internet Shutdown Poses Significant Challenge

The shutdown has presented a significant challenge to Sudanese living in other countries. Until now they have played a key role in spreading information from the protest movement internationally. Those outside Sudan have been forced to rely on phone calls or word of mouth to receive information from the ground, without any visual footage, which they, in turn, share on social media.

"Sudan is literally in the dark right now," said 25-year-old Aza Elnimah, a young Sudanese professional based in Qatar. "We don't know what's happening. So if something happens, how are we gonna be able to get that footage out? The only way we can reach our families now is through telephone, but that still isn't enough."

Hashtag Spearheads Months-Long Protests

In the days after the attack on the protesters, the #IamTheSudanRevolution hashtag was backed by the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), the group that has spearheaded the months-long protests. Sudanese living in other countries heard the call and the hashtag trended in a number of countries. Since then, stories about Sudan have gained attention online, particularly since the color blue began to go viral.

"People didn't pick it up right away, but the rest of the Sudan population adopted that color because it was working in a way that was gaining attention," Elnimah said. "People kept asking questions like, why is everyone changing their profile picture to that color?"

Elnimah said it has allowed Sudanese to control the story again by telling people what's happening and answering their questions.

Instagram user Lucrezia Brunetti said, "People are unified by this color. It's something so simple, but it symbolizes so much, it symbolizes that people care."

For some in the wider Sudanese community, the #BlueForSudan campaign has brought hope.

"In the beginning, it felt like no one cared," said Elnimah. "Now, it's refreshing to know that Sudan is on people's radars."

Quiz

- 1 Is there more than one central idea of the article? How do you know?
- (A) Yes; one main idea is that Sudanese protesters are protesting their government, and another main idea is that social media users are showing support for protesters with blue profile pictures.
 - (B) Yes; one main idea is that social media users are showing support for protesters with blue profile pictures, and another main idea is that Omar al-Bashir was forced from power on April 11.
 - (C) No; the main idea is that Sudanese protesters are protesting their government, and all the other information in the article provides details about that main idea.
 - (D) No; the main idea is that Omar al-Bashir was forced from power on April 11, and all other information in the article provides details about that main idea.

- 2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) Lucrezia Brunetti is an Instagram user who thinks that colors can help to unify social media users.
 - (B) People in Sudan have been protesting for months to demand a government led by the people.
 - (C) A photo of a young woman standing on top of a car talking to fellow protesters has gone viral.
 - (D) 25-year-old Aza Elnimah, a young Sudanese professional based in Qatar, was interviewed.

- 3 Read the following claim.

The #BlueForSudan campaign has brought hope for people in the Sudanese community.

How would Aza Elnimah MOST likely respond to this claim?

- (A) No, the #BlueForSudan campaign is causing more problems for protesters and should stop.
 - (B) No, the #BlueForSudan campaign is too little too late and will not help the violence happening in Sudan.
 - (C) Yes, the #BlueForSudan campaign has been a positive step toward awareness about Sudan's protests.
 - (D) Yes, the #BlueForSudan campaign has already made Sudan a safer and more open place to live.
- 4 Based on the article, what is the MOST likely reason the author includes the perspective of Shahd Khidir?
- (A) to provide the perspective of someone who was present at the protests
 - (B) to provide the perspective of someone who helped the blue wave to get started
 - (C) to provide the perspective of someone who is a beauty influencer in Sudan
 - (D) to provide the perspective of someone who supports the actions taken by the RSF