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Sudan: End Arbitrary Detention of Activists

Investigate Allegations of Torture, Abuse

June 25, 2014

(Nairobi) – The Sudanese government should immediately charge or release recently detained political activists, and investigate all allegations that they have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, the African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and REDRESS said today.

Against a general background of restrictions on free speech and political organizing, the Sudanese authorities have clamped down in recent months on political opposition figures for criticizing [Sudan's](#) abuses in conflict zones. President Omar al-Bashir promised in April 2014 to release all “political detainees.” But Sudan’s National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) continues to arbitrarily detain political activists and opposition party members, as recently as mid-June, the organizations said.

“Sudan needs to end its repressive and brutal tactics to silence criticism,” said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “President al-Bashir has promised to free political detainees but he needs to rein in his intelligence agents and police.”

Sudan should end arbitrary arrests of opponents and investigate all allegations of torture in accordance with international law, the groups said.

Three detained youth activists who may have been tortured are of immediate concern. On May 12, NISS officials arrested Mohammed Salah, 25, Taj Elsir Jaafar, 26, and Moammer Musa Mohammed, 27, near the University of Khartoum. The three were known activists who had participated in campaigns protesting the killing of a Darfuri student, Ali Abaker Musa Idris, by government security forces at Khartoum University on March 11

“There are strong grounds for concern about the well-being of all three young men,” said Sarah Jackson, deputy regional director for Eastern Africa at Amnesty International. “Sudanese authorities must guarantee the safety of all those detained and ensure that anyone in detention is either charged with a recognized criminal offense or released without delay.”

Authorities detained the youths without charge at a NISS facility in the suburb of Bahri, where former detainees have reported being subjected [to beatings and extremely cold temperatures as punishment](#).

Salah’s family, who were allowed to see him for the first time a month after his arrest, reported that Salah appeared to have severe injuries from beatings all over his body, including his right eye. Jaffar’s family also reported that he appeared to have been beaten. They said his face and hands were swollen, that he seemed to have trouble standing up and that his hands were trembling.

"The NISS has a track record of arbitrarily arresting and torturing human rights and political activists with complete impunity, and this practice must end," said Carla Ferstman, director of REDRESS. "Sudan ratified the African Charter and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which outlaw torture, and it is high time for it to show that these are more than just paper commitments."

Sudan has arrested a number of other political opposition figures in recent weeks. On May 17, authorities arrested Sadiq Al Mahdi, leader of the National Umma Party, after he publicly accused the government militia, known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), of human rights abuses against civilians in Darfur, including rape and looting. He was charged with undermining the Constitution but was released after a month.

On June 8, Ibrahim al-Sheikh, head of the opposition Sudanese Congress Party, was arrested after he made similar statements about RSF abuses in conflict zones at a seminar in al-Nuhood, Western Kordofan, according to credible reports. Al-Sheikh is facing six charges, including incitement and acting against the constitutional regime. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

In the following days, authorities in al-Nuhood raided the offices of the Congress Party and arrested at least five student members, a journalist, and another young activist in town. One of the detainees, released after one week, said security officials beat him so badly he needed medical treatment.

Sudanese organizations have documented additional cases of the prolonged detention without charge of activists because of their real or perceived political opinions, some have been in detention for over five months.

Dr. Sidig Noreen Ali Abdalla, a university professor arrested on January 16, has been detained without charge in NISS custody in El Obeid town, North Kordofan state, well in excess of the legal period of up to four-and-a-half months permitted even under the country's National Security Act of 2010. Although formal charges have not been brought, he is thought to have been detained on account of his advocacy on the situation in Darfur.

"These detentions of political activists are part of a wider human rights crisis in Sudan, where the space for freedom of expression, association, and assembly is severely restricted and dissenting political activists are censored with brute force," said Katherine Perks, program director at ACJPS.

Torture is prohibited in all circumstances under international law as well as Sudanese law. If Sudan is to comply with its own obligations then it must adopt a zero tolerance to torture and ill-treatment by any government official or agent, the groups said. Sudan should enforce this absolute prohibition, investigate all allegations of torture and hold abusive officials to account, whether from within the police, military or NISS. Sudan should also ratify the UN Convention Against Torture, the groups said.

"Sudan continues to crack down severely on dissenting voices with complete impunity. The international community must take a strong stand against the current wave of detentions of political opponents and the security organ's continued acts of torture against activists," said Sheila Muwanga Nabachwa, vice president at FIDH. "The African Union and the United Nations must not only request that Sudan fully abides by its human rights obligations, but they must also envisage concerted actions to ensure it does."