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RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières

Sudan still awaits its press freedom revolution

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls on Sudan’s new authorities to encourage the emergence of independent journalism, which is essential if the country’s transition to democracy is to succeed. Eight months after Omar al-Bashir’s removal by the military in a popular uprising and four months after the installation of a government headed by a civilian, journalists are no longer being arrested and newspapers are no longer being confiscated. But the Sudanese media are still largely controlled or under the influence of the forces that supported Bashir, one of the world’s biggest press freedom predators.

Around 300 journalists demonstrated outside the culture and information ministry in the capital, Khartoum, yesterday to demand changes at the top of the public broadcaster *SRTC* and the removal of the intelligence agents who were infiltrated into many news organizations.

The National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) has ended the most visible and repressive aspects of the censorship it enforced for the old regime for three decades. The confiscations of newspaper issues and arrests of journalists – of which RSF registered around 100 cases during the popular uprising from December 2018 to April 2019 – have stopped. Abdallah Hamdok, the new prime minister installed in August, has pledged (<https://khartoumstar.com/en/2019/09/26/hamdok-signs-global-pledge-to-defend-media-freedom/>) not to jail a single journalist and Sudan is one of the countries that have signed the Global Pledge to #DefendMediaFreedom, launched in July at the initiative of Britain and Canada.

“What with the decline in arrests of journalists, the end to newspaper confiscations and the greater freedom of expression, the firsts signs of a policy more favourable to press freedom are encouraging but they are still not enough,” said Arnaud Froger, the head of RSF’s Africa desk. *“A very big part of the media landscape is still under the influence and in some cases control of the old regime’s forces. The emergence of independent journalism will not be possible without an overhaul of the security apparatus, the draconian press laws and a media system still dominated by those who think journalists should be kept under close surveillance.”*

Security agents still on the prowl

The NISS may be less visible on the ground but it is still very active online. Several journalists have told RSF that the “Cyber Jihadist Unit (<https://www.apc.org/en/blog/online-surveillance-and-censorship-sudan>)” – a troll army created in the wake of the Arab springs to monitor online content – continues to infiltrate WhatsApp discussion groups and to spread false information attacking the

transitional government on social networks. Propaganda, surveillance (<https://citizenlab.org/2014/02/mapping-hacking-teams-untraceable-spyware/>) and censorship are all still part of the methods used by the NISS.

The Rapid Support Forces – a paramilitary group blamed for a massacre of protesters on 3 June that left at least 128 dead and many wounded, including journalists – have brought a lawsuit against **Hanadi Al Siddig**, a journalist with Al Jazeera, a newspaper that was repeatedly targeted by the former regime. They have also bought the daily newspaper Al Shaia.

None of Sudan’s repressive laws have been overhauled. The 2008 Cybercrime Act, the 2009 Press and Publications Act and the 2010 National Security Forces Act are all still in effect and continue to pose serious threats to journalism in Sudan.

Sudan is ranked 175th out of 180 countries in RSF’s 2019 World Press Freedom Index (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking>).

ecoi.net summary:

Article on independent journalism since the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 and continued propaganda and surveillance carried out by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)



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Sudan

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