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Sudan: End Violence Against Peaceful Protesters ^[1]

Promptly Charge or Release Political Detainees

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(New York) – Sudanese security forces should stop using excessive force to disperse peaceful student protests, Human Rights Watch said today. Authorities should also immediately release detained activists, opposition members, and others arrested because of their political opinions, or charge them with appropriate crimes.

“Students have a right to hold peaceful protests without being attacked with batons and teargas,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Security forces should uphold fundamental freedoms of speech and assembly and only use force when absolutely necessary.”

Since mid-December 2011, security forces have used unnecessary or excessive force to break up protests at universities across Sudan, said Human Rights Watch. On December 22, police and internal security forces wielding batons and teargas violently dispersed peaceful student demonstrations at Khartoum University in support of a community that had been displaced by dam construction in River Nile state. Authorities arrested scores of students, inflicting injuries that required many to seek medical treatment.

One student told Human Rights Watch how police entered his dorm room on the night of December 22 while students were asleep. “The police raided our room and smashed the door and beat us,” he said. One of his roommates sustained a head injury and another a broken hand. Police took 16 students into police custody for the night.

Arrests of activists and opposition figures have also increased in recent weeks, said Human Rights Watch. Security forces arrested more than 250 people at demonstrations, news conferences, political party meetings, and private homes between September and December 2011.

On December 26, seven plainclothes security officials arrested Mohammed Hassan Alim Boshi, a recent university graduate and outspoken member of the opposition Baath party, from his home in Khartoum and are detaining him in an unknown location. He is believed to have been arrested in connection with his widely publicized speech at Khartoum University last month criticizing Sudan’s ruling National Congress Party and its top security adviser, Nafi Ali Nafi.

Dozens of other opposition members and outspoken activists have also been arrested. In one recent example, Ali Zein al-Abdin Ali Omer, a prominent pro-democracy blogger, was arrested on December 22 when plainclothes security officials stopped a car in which he was riding in Khartoum. He was held in solitary confinement for eight days and interrogated about his links to the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-North), the Sudanese opposition party that grew out of the SPLM following South Sudan’s secession on July 9, 2011.

Ibrahim Sanousi, the 70-year-old secretary general of the opposition Popular Congress Party, was arrested upon his arrival from South Sudan at Khartoum’s airport on December 19 and is being held in an unknown location. Authorities then arrested fellow party members trying to publicize his case with a news conference in Gedarif state on December 22.

“Using violence and arrests to repress political speech and silence activists is both illegal and counterproductive,” Bekele said. “Instead of stifling dissent, Sudanese authorities should be promoting dialogue as the best way to work out differences.”

Sudan also continues to arbitrarily detain large numbers of people with suspected links to the SPLM-North in [Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states](#) ^[4]. The arrests were part of a crackdown on the party that began when fighting broke out between the armed group and government armed forces in Southern Kordofan in June and Blue Nile in July.

Crackdown on Student Protests

The recent wave of repression coincides with increased public outcry over a range of social grievances, largely brought on by deteriorating economic conditions and political uncertainty following South Sudan’s secession from Sudan on July 9, 2011.

At Khartoum University, following the crackdown on student protests on December 22, government security forces again entered the campus on December 25, injuring and arresting more students who had gathered for a sit-in to protest the earlier violence. Authorities arrested more than 70 students, again injuring many.

Students have continued the sit-in despite the university’s closure on December 29. On December 31 and January 1, three student leaders were arrested in connection with the sit-in. Initially, the students had gathered in solidarity with the Manaseer, a riverine ethnic group whose members were forcibly displaced from land in Sudan’s River Nile state by the construction of the Merowe dam, completed in 2008.

Security officials have also violently broken up demonstrations at universities in Khartoum, Port Sudan, River Nile State, Gedarif, and Kassala, in eastern Sudan in recent weeks. The student demonstrations focused on the Manaseer grievances; the killing of a Darfur rebel leader, Dr. Khalil Ibrahim, by government forces on December 23; and the perceived political rigging of student union elections.

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials provide that security forces, in carrying out their duty, shall as far as possible apply nonviolent means before resorting to the use of force. Whenever the lawful use of force is unavoidable, the authorities are to use restraint and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offense.

Crackdown on Banned Opposition Party

The government continues to arbitrarily detain people with presumed links to SPLM-North. The crackdown on the party intensified following the outbreak of fighting between its forces and

government forces in June in Southern Kordofan and in September in Blue Nile. These states are north of the Sudan-South Sudan border but are historically aligned with the south.

Sudan banned SPLM-North in September and shut down newspapers, including the opposition *Ajras al-Huriya*, citing their “southern” links. Sudan has restricted all access to the restive border states and tightly controls information about the human rights situation there.

Although Human Rights Watch could not confirm the claim by SPLM-North’s leaders that more than 180 members and supporters are missing or detained since the outbreak of conflict in Blue Nile, credible sources confirmed that 14 people who were arrested in the first week of September are detained in Sennar prison without charge.

Two prominent human rights activists from the contested border region have been detained without being charged for months. Bushra Gammar, an ethnic Nuba human rights activist who was arrested in Kadugli on June 25, is in Kober prison under national security custody. Abdelmonim Rahama, a poet and former adviser in the Blue Nile state government, was arrested by national security officials in Damazin on September 2 and is detained incommunicado in an unknown location.

Human Rights Watch and other groups have repeatedly raised concerns about the risk of ill-treatment and torture of detainees in national security custody. Sudan’s National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) routinely uses its broad powers of arrest and detention to target government opponents and is known for ill-treatment and torture of detainees. In 2011, Human Rights Watch documented [a pattern of torture of student protesters](#) [5] by the NISS following a crackdown on mass pro-democracy demonstrations.

“Sudan’s armed conflict is no excuse to deny any detainee their basic rights,” Bekele said. “The government should end incommunicado detention and release those not lawfully charged with a crime.”

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[1] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/01/03/sudan-end-violence-against-peaceful-protesters>

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[4] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/09/21/sudan-political-repression-intensifies>

[5] <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/03/sudan-violent-response-peaceful-protests>

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