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Republic of the Sudan

Head of state and government: Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir

Freedoms of expression, association and assembly were severely curtailed, with crackdowns on the media, public dialogue and demonstrations. The armed conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states continued to cause mass displacement and civilian casualties; human rights abuses were perpetrated by all parties to the conflicts. The government armed forces were responsible for the destruction of civilian buildings including schools, hospitals and clinics in the conflict areas, and hindered humanitarian access to civilians displaced and otherwise affected by the ongoing hostilities.

Background

In January, President Omar al-Bashir announced plans to achieve peace in Sudan and protect constitutional rights through a “national dialogue”, open to participation by all parties and even armed movements. He followed this up in April with a promise to release all political detainees. Despite this announcement, restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly prevailed, hindering meaningful attempts at a national dialogue. The national dialogue ceased following the arrest of Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi, leader of the National Umma Party, over his statements about the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) pro-government militia, whom he accused of committing crimes against civilians.

In August, the National Umma Party and the Sudan Revolutionary Front signed the Paris Declaration, a joint statement calling for widespread reform in Sudan. The two parties declared that they would boycott future general elections unless a transitional government was first put in place to “provide public freedoms” and end the ongoing conflicts in Sudan’s Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan states. The ruling National Congress Party refused to recognize the Paris Declaration.

The conflicts in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states continued unabated. Violations of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated by government forces and pro-government militias against civilians continued throughout the year in these three areas, and spread to Northern Kordofan. In Darfur, the government continued in its failure to protect civilians from abuses during a surge in fighting between predominantly ethnic Arab groups over land and other natural resources, in which pro-government militia participated.

The government was preparing for national elections in 2015.

Freedom of expression

The authorities increased restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly throughout the country, in what appeared to be a concerted effort to shut down independent dialogue. The government continued to use the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and other security forces to arbitrarily detain perceived opponents of the ruling National Congress Party, to censor media and to shut down public forums and protests. The arbitrary detention of activists, human rights defenders and political opposition figures continued unabated. These restrictions severely undermined the activities of civil society and prevented meaningful public consultation on Sudan's new Constitution, which the government declared would be based on Shari'a law.

Newspapers continued to be subject to closure and censorship for printing material perceived as being critical of the ruling National Congress Party. Journalists received threats from the NISS, which also seized entire print runs, causing large financial losses for newspapers. Eighteen newspapers repeatedly had their editions confiscated between January and September. By the end of the year, the authorities had confiscated newspapers 52 times. *Al Jazeera* newspaper, an independent daily publication, was arbitrarily confiscated by the NISS on 24 September. *Al Jazeera* had been suspended by the NISS 11 times by the end of the year. *Al Siha*, another newspaper, was suspended indefinitely by the NISS on 6 June.

The government also lifted the ban on three newspapers. On 29 January, the government lifted a two-year ban on *Ray al-Shaab* newspaper, affiliated to the Popular Congress Party. A two-year suspension against *Al Tayar* newspaper was lifted on 5 March. The suspension of *Al Midan* newspaper imposed on 3 May 2012 was lifted on 6 March. *Al Midan* is affiliated to the Sudanese Communist Party.

Taj Aldeen Arjaa, a 23-year-old Darfuri activist and blogger, was released from prison on 11 May. He was arrested by the NISS in Khartoum on 26 December 2013 after he verbally criticized President Omar al-Bashir and the President of Chad, Idriss Deby, at a joint press conference. He was reportedly tortured while in prison.

Armed conflict

Darfur

Widespread human rights abuses continued throughout Darfur. Civilians were displaced in large numbers as a result of violence between warring communities and attacks by government-allied militias and armed opposition groups.

In late February the government deployed the RSF in Darfur. The RSF drew many of its recruits from the former Janjaweed militias that in previous years were responsible for serious human rights violations, including unlawful killings and rape. The RSF destroyed scores of villages, causing a significant increase in displacement and civilian deaths.

Between January and July an estimated 388,000 people were displaced in Darfur, in addition to the 2

million displaced since the conflict in Darfur began in 2003. Many of those internally displaced were in remote areas where they received little or no humanitarian assistance and were vulnerable to attacks, abduction and sexual violence. On 22 March, the Khor Abeche camp for internally displaced persons in South Darfur was attacked by a group of armed men who looted and burned the camp to the ground.

The government continued to restrict access to areas of Darfur affected by conflict to the AU, the United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and humanitarian organizations. In February, the International Committee of the Red Cross' main activities were suspended, while other organizations, such as the French development organization Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement (ACTED), had their offices shut down.

On 2 July, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced a review of investigations and reviews into UNAMID performance that had been carried out over the previous two years. This review, which was concluded in October, was announced in response to allegations that UNAMID staff had covered up human rights abuses in Darfur. The review did not find any evidence to support the allegations. However, it found that UNAMID had a tendency to under-report and maintained media silence in incidents involving human rights violations.

South Kordofan and Blue Nile

The armed conflict between government forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-North) continued in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, with indiscriminate attacks by both parties. Sudanese forces employed indiscriminate aerial bombardment and shelling on civilian villages. They also employed proxy forces in ground assaults, including the RSF. These proxy forces also perpetrated human rights abuses.

Many of the more than 1 million people displaced in the three-year conflict remained in Sudan. More than 200,000 were living in refugee camps in South Sudan or Ethiopia.

On 14 April, the government publicly launched its "Decisive Summer" military operation to "end all rebellion" in South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Darfur. From the onset of the operation, the Sudanese Armed Forces carried out sustained aerial bombardments in and around Kauda, a major town in Heiban County, as well as aerial bombardments and shelling in Um Dorein and Delami counties, destroying schools, clinics, hospitals and other civilian buildings and forcing people to flee their homes.

Sudan continued to obstruct humanitarian access to areas controlled by the SPLA-North. Both parties to the conflict failed to meet their obligation to facilitate humanitarian access.

Freedom of assembly

Amid the calls for national dialogue and political accommodation, Sudan continued to restrict the

legitimate activities of opposition political parties and civil society. On 8 March, NISS prevented some 30 civil society organizations from celebrating International Women's Day in Khartoum.

On 11 March, economics student Ali Abakar Musa died from gunshot wounds sustained when security services opened fire during a demonstration at the University of Khartoum. The demonstration took place immediately after the conclusion of a public forum organized by the Darfur Students' Association concerning escalating violence in South Darfur. Students marched to the main university gate, where they were met by the police, NISS and student militias. The security services fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition at the students.

On 15 March, the authorities banned the National Consensus Forces – a coalition of 17 opposition political parties – from holding a public event in Khartoum North and deployed hundreds of security agents to cancel the event. On 1 May, the Political Parties Affairs Council – a government body – rejected the Republican Party application for registration; the Republican Party was considered heretical for its progressive views on Islam. The founder of the party, Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, was executed for apostasy in 1985.

On 29 May, 13 June and 17 August, the authorities refused to allow political and civil society activists to submit memorandums highlighting human rights violations by the government to the Sudan National Human Rights Commission office in Khartoum.

On 28 August, security forces forcibly prevented protesters from demanding the release of women political prisoners in front of Omdurman women's prison. The security services arrested 16 women activists and used tear gas and batons to disperse the protesters.

Three high-profile political leaders were arrested either for expressing their political opinion or for participating in peaceful political activities. On 17 May, Al Sadiq al-Mahdi, the former prime minister and leader of the opposition National Umma Party (NUP), was arrested after he accused the RSF of committing violations and abusing civilians. He was released without charge on 15 June. On 8 June, the leader of the Sudanese Congress Party, Ibrahim Al Sheikh Abdel Rahman, was arrested in Nuhud, North Kordofan following his criticism of the RSF. He was released without charge on 15 September. Mariam Al Sadiq al-Mahdi, deputy leader of NUP, was arrested in Khartoum on 11 August after attending talks in Paris, France, between the NUP and the Sudan Revolutionary Front; she was released without charge a month later.

In an attempt to stop a series of events organized to commemorate the deaths of protesters in September 2013, the NISS pre-emptively arrested over 70 political activists between 17 and 23 September, invoking its powers of "preventive detention". Those arrested were released without charge in early October.

Former detainees reported they were tortured and otherwise ill-treated while in detention.

Freedom of association

On 23 June, the Ministry of Justice cancelled the registration licence of the Salmmah Women's Resource Centre, a leading women's rights organization in Sudan, and confiscated their assets.