

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	203
Land:	Sudan
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom of the press – Sudan (2010)
Udgivet:	8. oktober 2010
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	12. august 2011



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Freedom Of The Press - Sudan (2010)

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 26

Political Environment: 28

Economic Environment: 22

Total Score: 76

- Press freedom remained restricted in 2009 as Sudan prepared for scheduled 2010 elections that would be the first held since 1986 and were set to include ballots for representatives at the local, regional, and national levels. An unresolved insurgency in the Darfur region and tensions surrounding the possible secession of autonomous Southern Sudan also continued to make reporting problematic for both foreign and local journalists.
- Article 29 of the 2005 Interim National Constitution, adopted in connection with that year's peace agreement between the Khartoum government and rebel forces representing Southern Sudan, nominally protects freedom of the press and citizen expression.
- In June 2009 the government replaced the highly restrictive 2004 Press and Printed Press Materials Law. However, media freedom organizations have criticized the new law for falling short of international standards. It states that "no restrictions will be placed on freedom of the press except on issues pertaining to safeguarding national security and public order and health," and contains loosely defined provisions related to the encouragement of ethnic and religious disturbances and incitement of violence. The law also gives the National Press and Publication Council the authority to shut down newspapers for three days without a court order. However, some of the most criticized components of earlier drafts—including fines of more than US\$20,000 for violators of the law—were removed from the final version.
- Would-be journalists who are not supporters of the government have difficulty joining the profession, and all journalists must pass a challenging Arabic language exam regardless of the language they intend to use in their work.
- State-imposed prepublication censorship was a common occurrence for much of 2009. Officials from the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) were employed

at each newspaper to review articles prior to printing. Authorities forced the newspaper *Al-Maidan* to remove dozens of articles, leaving it without enough material to publish on several occasions. The newspapers *Ajras al-Hurriya* and *Al-Sudani* also occasionally faced direct censorship during the year. In September, President Omar al-Bashir eliminated the direct formal censorship of newspapers by the NISS, but the decree did not apply to television or radio broadcasts. The decision had been encouraged both by internal pressure from media owners and unions and by the increasing presence of international organizations ahead of the elections scheduled for April 2010. Nonetheless, government officials continued to caution the media against coverage of certain topics and directly interfered with advertisers.

- Journalists faced harassment, attacks, and intimidation by both state and nonstate forces. Those who criticized the government publicly or privately risked arrest.
- Foreign journalists in Sudan have occasionally experienced difficulties in their reporting and are generally viewed with suspicion by the authorities. In addition to denying visas, the Sudanese government expelled two foreign correspondents from the country in 2009. Egyptian-Canadian journalist Heba Aly was deported in February in response to her research on the manufacturing of Sudanese weapons. In March, Zouhir Latif, a Tunisian freelance journalist working for France 24 and *Al-Hayat*, was expelled after being arrested by intelligence agents and having his videos and computer confiscated. Latif's arrest is believed to be linked to his work in Darfur.
- Press freedom conditions in Southern Sudan tended to be somewhat better than in areas controlled directly by Khartoum. However, in the run-up to the 2010 elections there were numerous reports of journalists being harassed and beaten by security forces and members of political organizations. In January 2009, *Juba Post* editor Isaac Billy Gideon was detained for nine hours after publishing a piece in 2008 that accused a senior Southern general of improperly selling land to Somali businessmen. In May, Southern military police detained and questioned journalists Abdulgadir Mohammed and Adil Badir, seizing their mobile telephones. In October, after false rumors that Southern Sudanese president Salva Kiir had died, Southern police entered the compound of the United Nations Mission in Sudan and demanded that the UN-affiliated Radio Miraya FM be temporarily shut down.
- There are several private daily and weekly newspapers that cover local and national news, but most operate in

the north. Experts have argued that there is little difference between the private and state-run media, as all are subject to serious government interference. Newspapers are generally too expensive for most Sudanese. The government runs one Arabic and one English-language newspaper.

- The state dominates the broadcast media, which are the main source of information for much of Sudan's population. Television programming continues to be formally censored, and radio content must reflect the government's views. International broadcasters are quite popular in the country. The British Broadcasting Corporation is relayed in Khartoum and other parts of the north, and in Juba in the south. Some opposition and clandestine stations can also be received in the country.
- Authorities reportedly put pressure on advertisers, prohibiting them from placing ads in newspapers that are deemed critical of the government.
- Internet penetration in Sudan is relatively high for sub-Saharan Africa, with almost 10 percent of the population able to access the medium in 2009. The government is believed to monitor the internet, reading private e-mail and correspondence. It also blocks websites, especially those with explicit sexual content, ostensibly to preserve ethical standards. The Sudanese blogosphere is quite active, and despite the country's multiple conflicts, online debates are less adversarial than in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea.