

Sudan blocks civil society participation in UN-led human rights review

(31 March 2016) The efforts of the Government of Sudan to obstruct the engagement of civil society activists in a United Nations (UN)-led human rights review of the country is unacceptable and shows blatant contempt not just for human rights defenders in Sudan, but to human rights standards and the UN Human Rights Council, 36 Sudanese and international groups and seven prominent Sudanese individuals said today.

Four representatives of Sudanese civil society were intercepted by security officials at Khartoum International Airport on their way to a high level human rights meeting with diplomats which took place in Geneva today, 31 March. The meeting was organised by the international NGO, UPR Info, in preparation for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Sudan that will take place in May.

The four civil society representatives were travelling via different routes to Geneva between 23 and 28 March. In each case, plain-clothed officers from Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) approached them after they had checked in, and before they proceeded through passport control, and confiscated their passports.

The four representatives – prominent human rights lawyer Mr. Salih Mahmoud Osman, Director of Asmaa Society for Development Ms. Sawsan Hassan Elshowaya, President of the Human Rights and Legal Aid Network (HRLAN) Dr. Muawia Shaddad, and President of the Sudanese Solidarity Committee Mr. Siddig Yousif – have not been informed of any reasons for the travel bans.

“Sudan should immediately return the passports and allow the free participation of civil society in the UPR Process without fear of reprisal or intimidation”, the 36 Sudanese and international groups and seven prominent Sudanese individuals said. “The recent flagrant actions of the NISS are symptomatic of a broader strategy to intimidate and harass human rights defenders and independent civil society actors who may be critical of the human rights situation in the country”.

The signatory organisations also called on the President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Choi Kyonglim, to exercise his responsibility to intervene with the Government of Sudan, ensure that all restrictions are lifted and that Sudanese human rights defenders and civil society organisations can participate in the UPR of Sudan freely and without fear of arrest, detention, harassment or reprisals.

Under Sudan's National Security Act of 2010, Sudanese Security agents are granted broad powers of arrest and can detain individuals for up to four and a half months without judicial review, well in excess of international standards. This and other laws have been used by the authorities to intimidate and silence human rights defenders, journalists, members of political opposition, and others.

Powers of search and seizure granted under the 2010 Act are also routinely used by the NISS to undermine freedoms of association, expression and peaceful assembly, including the obstruction or cancelling of civil society events and public forums, the confiscation of assets belonging to civil society organizations, and censorship through the confiscation of entire print runs of newspapers.

“The Human Rights Council and its Member States should condemn the severe restrictions on human rights defenders and other members of civil society in Sudan, including the reprisals for engaging with UN mechanisms”, the organisations said. “States should call on Sudan to immediately cease arbitrary restrictions on independent civil society, and ensure that human rights defenders can work in a safe and enabling environment, including by making the necessary reforms to the National Security Act of 2010.”

List of signatories

1. African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)
2. Al Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment (KACE)
3. Alkarama Foundation
4. Amnesty International
5. Awn Centre
6. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
7. Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC)
8. The Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organisations
9. Darfur Bar Association
10. East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project
11. Face Past for Future Foundation
12. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
13. Freedom House
14. Human Rights and Development Organisation (HUDO)
15. Human Rights Network
16. Human Rights Watch
17. International Commission of Jurists - Kenya
18. International Justice Project
19. International Service for Human Rights
20. International Refugee Rights Initiative
21. Journalists for Human Rights – Sudan
22. National Human Rights Monitors Organization (NHRMO)
23. People4Sudan
24. Skills for Nuba Mountains
25. Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)
26. Sudan Democracy First Group (SDFG)
27. Sudanese Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms
28. Sudan Consortium
29. Sudanese Human Rights Defenders Network (SHRDN)
30. Sudanese Human Rights Initiative (SHRI)

31. Sudan Social Development Organisation (SUDO)
32. Sudan Unlimited
33. The Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
34. UPR Info
35. Waging Peace
36. West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network
37. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Individuals

1. Ahmed A. Saeed, Senior Humanitarian Advisor, South Kordofan and Blue Nile Coordination Unit
2. Abdelbagi Jibril, Vice President, Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre
3. Elhag Warrag, editor in chief of Hurriyat newsletter
4. Nagla Ahmed, human rights defender
5. Salih Amaar, Deputy Editor in Chief of Al-Taghyeer Newspaper
6. Sawsan Elshowaya, Head of Advisory Board, Asmaa Society for Development
7. Siddig Yousif Alnur, Sudanese Solidarity Committee
8. Suliman Baldo, human rights defender and Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali

Background

The UPR is a mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council whereby the human rights situation in every UN member state is reviewed by other UN member states on a four-and-a-half yearly cycle. The Sudan review is scheduled to take place in May.

Contact

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