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Sudan: Students beaten and detained -- reportedly tortured in 'ghost houses'

Amnesty International has learned that on Saturday, 11 February 2006, at approximately 12.00 pm, armed police and security forces arrived in 15 cars at Juba University in Bahri, Khartoum at the request of university officials. Without warning, they began beating, with batons, a group of students that were gathered peacefully in front of the Administration building.

During the ensuing scuffle, students set fire to five vehicles (most of which belonged to the school administration), burned three cafeterias, and part of the school library.

A large number of young men and women were arrested. Those who were not arrested fled into the surrounding areas of Bahri. Police followed and over the next few hours rounded up people they assumed to be students taking part in the protest and took them to Um Deriyo Station, in North Bahri, Khartoum. The total number arrested was 200 -- 149 women and 51 men. After an appeal by a representative of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the young women were released at 5 pm the same day without charges. Representatives of the UN mission in Sudan (UNMIS) are being denied access to all those detained.

According to a credible source, the detainees have been taken at night to unofficial National Security detention sites known as "ghost houses", where they have been tortured. The detainees have reportedly also been deprived of food and denied access to legal counsel and their families.

Reasons given for the continuing detention of the remaining 51 male students include destruction of public property, arson, public disturbance, and crimes against the state -- which potentially carries the death penalty. They have not yet been brought before a judge to have the lawfulness of their detention reviewed.

"We condemn the use of excessive force by the police and security forces and call on the Sudanese authorities to respect the right of fair trial of those arrested and detained, including the right to be brought promptly before a judge and the right to legal counsel, access to family and to a doctor," said Amnesty International.

The organization urged the Sudanese government to ensure that those detained are not subjected to torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and that those suspected of human rights violations are brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fair trial.

The organization also called on Sudanese authorities to allow access to the detainees by human rights monitors of the UN mission in Sudan.

Background

In the late 1980s the Sudanese government moved Juba University to the north of Sudan, due to the insecurities brought about by the war in the south. Since January 2006 students of Juba University, mainly southerners, have been promised that the university would be relocated to back to Juba, in south Sudan, where it was originally based. It is now based on the land of an institute that belongs to the University of Sudan.

Delays in the relocation to Juba have been explained by the lack of facilities and buildings in Juba, although some buildings do exist. On Thursday, students sent a letter to university administrators with several requests -- including that the university halt the building of new facilities in Khartoum and build them instead in Juba. Students believed that building new facilities in Khartoum indicated they would not be relocated to Juba. On Saturday morning they gathered in front of the Administration Building waiting for a response to their letter. They were told the administration had no power to address their demands, and after three hours university officials called the police to disperse the until then peaceful crowd.

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