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Darfur, Sudan: Government should stop intimidation and arrests of civilians speaking to foreigners

The Sudanese government must immediately and unconditionally release all those arrested in North, South and West Darfur detained simply for expressing their opinions about the situation in Darfur, Amnesty International urged today.

Scores of people have been arrested since the end of June 2004 in various parts of Darfur for talking to foreign government leaders, including US Secretary of State Colin Powell and French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, members of the African Union (AU) Ceasefire Commission and independent journalists or for speaking out on the crisis in Darfur.

"The Sudanese government should give assurances that none of those arrested will be tortured or ill-treated while in detention and that Sudanese people can speak freely about Darfur without fear of reprisals," the organization said.

Recent cases of intimidation and arrests of civilians and displaced persons in various parts of Darfur include:

In North Darfur

At least 47 persons reportedly arrested between 26 June and 3 August by the security services or the Sudanese army mostly after speaking to members of foreign delegations. Amongst them are:

Fifteen men from Abu Shawq camp near al-Fasher who were arrested by national security officers after US Secretary of State Colin Powell's visit to the camp on 30 June.

Five men from the same camp were also arrested on 27 July after a visit by the French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier.

Six men, including the *omda* (mayor) of Abu Jereda were arrested between 15 and 17 July in Abu Jereda, a village near Al Fasher, allegedly after talking to members of the AU Ceasefire Commission.

Two other people, said to be *omdas* in Kabkabiya, were reportedly arrested by the *Janjawid* militias in Kabkabiya and are said to be held by them. Others, including a woman, were reportedly arrested on 3 August in Mellit apparently after talking to the AU Ceasefire Commission.

The African Union ceasefire monitors have reportedly asked but have not been able to visit detainees.

In South Darfur

Abazer Ahmad Abu al-Bashir, a human rights lawyer, was arrested by the National Security and Intelligence Agency in the town of Nyala on 24 July after submitting a petition supported by a number of leaders of ethnic groups urging an end to the conflict to the South Darfur State Governor. He has not yet been charged, but has access to lawyers.

Buthayna Mohamed Ahmed, a female member of the Sudanese Women's Union was also arrested by national security officers on 29 July and is detained incommunicado in Nyala Prison, apparently because she was carrying on activities for peace and the disarmament of the *Janjawid* militias.

In West Darfur

Four leaders from the Masalit ethnic group were reportedly arrested on 17 July in Ardamata camp, a suburb of Al-Jeneina for warning their displaced communities not to return to their villages until it was safe and for having talked to "foreigners". The four were later released, on 3 August.

After a summit of the Arab League on Darfur on 9 August, the Sudanese government promised again to make progress on human rights. Amnesty International urges the government to stop arresting those who speak out on human rights abuses in Darfur.

The need for human rights access, monitoring and reporting remains ever more crucial in Darfur. Amnesty International calls for an immediate and unimpeded access to all areas and people of Darfur, including detention centres, for lawyers, ceasefire observers, human rights monitors, humanitarian workers and journalists.

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