

UA 20/97 Fear of torture / Possible prisoners of conscience 21 January 1997

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 Baba Shaafi - all members of the banned *Umma* Party

Amnesty International has received reports that a further eight members of the banned opposition *Umma* Party have been detained without charge or trial in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, since the beginning of January 1997. It is not known where they are being held but some may be in a security service-run section of Kober Prison. Amnesty International fears that the eight men are at risk of torture and ill-treatment and is concerned that they may be prisoners of conscience.

Their detention is part of a continuing wave of arrests by the Sudanese authorities of members of the *Umma* Party and other alleged political opponents. It is thought that the eight men are being held as punishment for the political activities in exile of Sadiq al-Mahdi, a former Prime Minister of Sudan and leader of the *Umma* Party, who escaped from Sudan in mid-December 1996.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least 17 other members of the *Umma* Party, many of them senior figures in the party, have been arrested in January 1997 and remain in detention (see UA 08/97, AFR 54/01/97 10 January 1997 and UA 13/97, AFR 54/02/97, 15 January). The political atmosphere in Sudan has become increasingly tense since armed forces belonging to the Eritrea-based opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA), of which the *Umma* Party is a member, cooperated with the primarily southern armed opposition group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, to capture the northern Sudanese border town of Kurmuk on 12 January 1997. The Sudanese government has accused the Eritrean and Ethiopian governments of supporting the rebel offensive. Both have denied that they are doing so. Fighting is reported to be continuing.

On 14 January 1997, Gaspàr Birò, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Sudan, was expelled from the country by the government on the pretext that it could not guarantee his safety.

Anyone detained by the Sudanese security authorities is at risk of ill-treatment and torture, in particular during interrogation in security offices. In the past the authorities have blamed torture and ill-treatment on undisciplined security officials. Amnesty International's information, however, is that torture and ill-treatment in security force custody are systematic.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern at the detention without charge of the above men, who may be prisoners of conscience imprisoned for their opposition to the Sudan Government;
- seeking assurances that the detainees are not being tortured or ill-treated;

- urging that they be given immediate and regular access to their families, legal representatives and any necessary medical attention;
- appealing for them to be released if they are not to be charged with recognizably criminal offences and brought promptly to a fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

1) His Excellency Lieutenant General Omar Hassan al-Bashir
President of the Republic of the Sudan
People's Palace
PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: Lt Gen Omar Hassan al-Bashir, Khartoum, Sudan
Salutation: Your Excellency

2) Mr 'Abd al-Basit Sabdarat
Minister of Justice and Attorney General
Ministry of Justice
Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: Minister of Justice 'Abd al-Basit Sabdarat, Khartoum, Sudan
Telexes: c/o 22411 KAID SD or 22604 IPOL SD
Salutation: Dear Minister

3) Mr Ali Osman Mohamed Taha
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan
Telegrams: Foreign Minister Ali Osman Mohamed Taha, Khartoum, Sudan
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

1) Mr Obeid Haj Ali
Chief Justice
Supreme Court
Khartoum, Sudan

2) Mr Ahmad al-Mufti
Secretary
Advisory Council for Human Rights
PO Box 302
Khartoum, Sudan

and to diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 March 1997.