

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Please pass this Urgent Action to all journalist associations.

UA 84/94 Fear of Torture / Legal concern

3 March 1994

SUDAN Mutasim Mahmoud, journalist

Amnesty International is concerned at the arrest of Mutasim Mahmoud, news editor of the independent Sudanese daily newspaper *Al-Sudani al-Doulia*, on 24 February 1994. The organization fears he may be subjected to torture or ill-treatment in custody, and is concerned that he may be a prisoner of conscience. His place of detention is unknown.

On 24 February, security officials raided the newspaper's Khartoum offices and arrested Mutasim Mahmoud, ordering all staff to leave the premises and seizing documents which the authorities claimed related to the newspaper's financial accounts. The exact reason for the arrest of Mutasim Mahmoud is not known although it is likely to be connected to articles published by the newspaper criticizing the government. The authorities apparently have claimed he was engaged in anti-state activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Independent newspapers were banned in Sudan following the seizure of power by the military government in June 1989. At the beginning of 1994 there was a relaxation in the media laws, allowing selected newspapers to start operating.

Al-Sudani al-Doulia, which was previously based in Beirut, was granted a license to operate in Khartoum in January 1994. The newspaper has recently published articles criticizing government policies and performance.

Prisoners are held without charge or trial in Sudan on the basis of Decree Two of the emergency laws issued by the government immediately after the 30 June 1989 coup. Section Seven of the decree bans the "*showing of any political opposition by any means to the regime of the Revolution for National Salvation*" and allows the authorities to arrest and detain anyone "*suspected of being a danger to political or economic security*".

Detainees in Khartoum are normally held at the security headquarters or in "*ghost houses*". Detainees are commonly beaten on arrival at "*ghost houses*" and torture during interrogation of prisoners is systematic.

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

- expressing concern at the arrest on 24 February 1994 of Mutasim Mahmoud who appears to Amnesty International to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for exercising his internationally recognised right to freedom of expression;
- expressing concern at his continuing incommunicado detention without charge or trial;
- seeking assurances that he is not being subjected to torture or ill-treatment and urging that his whereabouts in custody be made public and that he is granted immediate and regular access to his family, legal counsel and any necessary medical attention;
- urging that, if as it appears, he has been imprisoned solely for exercising

his right to freedom of expression, he be immediately and unconditionally released.

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

Telexes: 22385 PEPLC SD or 22411 KAID SD

Salutation: Your Excellency

2) Brigadier-Engineer 'Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Husayn
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior
People's Palace
PO Box 281
Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Brig-Engineer 'Abd al-Rahim Muhammed Husayn, Khartoum, Sudan

Telexes: 22842 WZARA SD or 22604 IPOL SD

Salutation: Dear Deputy Prime Minister

3) Mr 'Abd al-Aziz Shiddu
Minister of Justice and Attorney-General
Ministry of Justice
Khartoum, Sudan

Telegrams: Mr 'Abd al-Aziz Shiddu, Khartoum, Sudan

Telexes: 22459 KHRJA SD or 22461 KHRJA SD (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr Jalal Ali Lutfi
Chief Justice
Law Courts
Khartoum, Sudan

Mr Hussein Suleiman Abu Salih
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
PO Box 873
Khartoum, Sudan

Dr A. al-Mufti
Secretary of Human Rights Commission*
Khartoum, Sudan

* The Human Rights Commission is a government-backed body, nominally independent, but apparently created to counter what the government perceives as hostile human rights propaganda.

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 14 April 1994.