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£SUDAN: @TORTURE AND DETENTION OF GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS  
DESPITE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS

Torture and detention of government opponents take place daily in Sudan, said Amnesty International in a report released today.

"Torture, brutal beatings and short term detention in secret detention centres, known as 'ghost houses', are the Sudan government's standard reaction to dissent," said Amnesty International. "The Minister of Justice recently denied the government holds political prisoners - in reality at any one time it holds hundreds.

"Torture is a normal part of the interrogation of government opponents at the security headquarters in Khartoum. Prisoners have been shackled and suspended from their cell walls, sometimes upside down, others have had their testicles crushed with pliers or been subjected to mock executions. On arrival at 'ghost houses' prisoners immediately face 'reception committees' who beat them mercilessly, leaving many unconscious."

Amnesty International's latest report on human rights in Sudan documents a new pattern of gross human rights abuse since April 1991, when the government announced it was releasing all political prisoners. The following month 299 political prisoners were freed, but others, including prisoners of conscience, remained in detention without trial. Since then the authorities have apparently switched the emphasis of repression of dissent from long-term detention in civil prisons to short-term secret detention and torture in 'ghost houses'.

Those few prisoners who have been taken to courts and charged did not get fair trials. Alleged coup plotters arrested in August 1991, for example, were subjected to unfair military trials which led to 46 people being imprisoned.

Far from the capital, in the war zones of western and southern Sudan where the government has been fighting the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) since 1983, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions of alleged SPLA supporters are common. In late 1991 in Darfur in the far west, the security services also held at least 120 prisoners, described by government sources as "armed bandits". At least one of them has since been executed and 10 others sentenced to be hanged and then crucified under the government's interpretation of Shari'a (Islamic) law, which also provides for judicial hand-and-foot amputations and public floggings.

The SPLA has also detained its own dissidents. In January 1992 it released 56 prisoners but still holds at least 14, some of whom it alleges were involved in attempts to overthrow the SPLA leadership. A breakaway faction of the SPLA has been responsible for gross human rights abuses, including the massacre of over 2,000 villagers near the town of Bor in the south in late November 1991 .

Despite its claim to have implemented a general amnesty of all political prisoners in April 1991, the Sudanese authorities did not release around 60 long-term political prisoners. Many southerners have remained in detention, including Deng Mesham Angai, a trade unionist, detained without charge since January 1990.

For others the experience of freedom was short-lived. Yacoub al-Fil,

a member of the banned Sudan National Party, was thrown back in prison within days of his release. Adnan Zahir Surur, a lawyer, was re-detained in June 1991 for two weeks, was tortured and detained again in August for four months, and has been back in prison since February 1992.

President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and other government officials have branded critics of its human rights record "colonialists" who are compiling "fake" lists of prisoners. The government claims that detention now only takes place under judicial supervision and that after three months every case is reviewed by the Security Council.

"These supposed safeguards still fall far short of international standards for protection from arbitrary detention", said Amnesty International. "Furthermore, not a single former prisoner that Amnesty International has spoken to was aware of any judicial supervision of his case and none was aware that his case was reviewed. The government is systematically violating basic human rights. Its denials of torture and arbitrary detention of opponents do not have credibility."

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