

SUDAN

Women's human rights: an action report

Amnesty International is asking you to make an effort on behalf of the human rights of women in Sudan.

Women in Sudan face human rights abuses by both the government and armed opposition groups. In southern Sudan and the Nuba mountains -- ravaged by civil war for over a decade -- thousands of women have been massacred in attacks on villages. There are reports of widespread rape. Women have been abducted and taken into domestic slavery.

At least three million people are displaced because of the war.

Women are not just the targets of abuse in the war zones alone. Since June 1989 a military government in northern Sudan has set about attempting to build a society based on its own interpretation of Islam. Both political and personal freedoms have been destroyed: women political opponents have been detained and ill-treated. And women have been subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading

punishments such as flogging for wearing garments not considered decent or for brewing alcohol.

On 9 March 1995, the United Nations Human Rights Commission passed a highly critical resolution on the human rights situation in Sudan. Among other things, the Commission urgently appealed to the Sudan Government to put an end to practices that violate the human rights of women.

This action report describes some of the human rights issues affecting women in Sudan and makes suggestions on what you or your organization can do to help.

It is based on an action by the Netherlands Section of Amnesty International.

Women's human rights are protected by a wide array of international laws. One of the instruments acceded to by Sudan is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which establishes the important principle that governments must ensure that women and men enjoy human rights in equal measure.

Amnesty International is calling on the government of Sudan:

- *to honour its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;*
- *to ensure that reports to the body monitoring this treaty include detailed information on the situation of women and girl-children.*

Discrimination against women is prohibited under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Sudan has not signed.

Amnesty International calls on the Sudan Government to ratify and implement without reservation the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Human rights are women's right

In recent decades women's organizations have sprung up all around the world. Women are campaigning for justice, for equal treatment at work and against torture and domestic violence.

This wave of courage, creativity and commitment all too often comes up against a wall of government indifference. Sometimes governments react with repression of the cruelest order. The work of women's human rights organizations is a legitimate expression of fundamental political rights. Too few governments recognize this fact.

Since 1989 women in Sudan have become the victims of a host of restrictions and state introduced regulations governing their behaviour. Thousands of women have been dismissed from government employment. A woman wanting to travel abroad requires -- in addition to an exit visa -- permission from an (all-male) committee. Even this permission is no guarantee. Sometimes women are stopped at the last moment at the airport. A car containing a man and a woman may be stopped in order to establish whether the occupants are related.

While these restrictions may just affect those members of society able to afford a car to travel, others affect all women. In some Sudanese states it is forbidden for a woman to visit a man who is not a close relative. In northern Sudan, women who do not dress in opaque garments that fall loosely to cover the shape of the body

Freedom of speech

Khartoum: 25 February 1995

In Sudan's capital a group of women demonstrators assemble, dressed in the rough, unbleached cotton of mourning.

From the Presidential Palace, they walk the few hundred metres to the university, chanting the names of their husbands, brothers, and sons -

all executed five years earlier. The women, accompanied by their children, hand out printed poems and photos of the army officers.

At the university, security and riot police are waiting for them. The women are beaten. Wadid Hassan Ali Karrar has to be

admitted to hospital. It is alleged that a member of the security forces grabbed Wadid by the hair and beat her head against a wall.

The security forces arrest 11 women and take them away to their offices in Khartoum. There they hit the women again before taking them to the security forces' headquarters. Here, the women are threatened with rape. They are forced to stand on the roof of the building - all day long in the searing heat. A severe ordeal, made worse by the all-day fasting for Ramadan.

They are eventually sent home with orders to report next day to the offices of the security forces...

Every year these women demonstrate in the memory of

the execution of their husbands, sons and brothers.

In April 1990 the Sudanese authorities arrested 28 army officers and an unknown number of other soldiers and charged them with an attempted coup.

Twenty four hours later, after an unfair trial, they were summarily executed. The authorities refused to release their bodies or to tell their families where the men were buried.

The women's protests are peaceful. Nevertheless, each year they are intimidated anew by the security forces; their gatherings are broken up, and they are subjected to repeated interrogation.

In 1992 the authorities detained 11 of the women for three weeks without charge or "It said that we must not insult the June Revolution, that we would not engage in activities directed against the government and that we were not to leave Khartoum without permission. We ignored the statement."

The women did not report.

One day later, on the morning of 27 February, two members of the security forces came to Samira Hassan Ali Karrar's home and told her that the commemorative gathering planned that evening in the home of one of the women had been banned. Samira replied that it would go ahead.

trial. The women were forced to sign a statement:

When the women arrived at the home where the meeting was to be held the hostess told them that she had been threatened by security men. The women decided to call off the commemoration -- but they stayed in the house.

The security forces arrived and asked Samira Hassan Ali Karrar

and her sister Alia to accompany them. They refused.

Then the agents threatened the hostess: she must send Samira and Alia out, otherwise they would not be answerable for the consequences.

Samira and Alia left the house, not wishing to put their hostess in a yet more

difficult position. The agents made no move to approach them. The women drove off. The agents followed them in two cars all the way through Khartoum. Samira took Alia home and then drove on alone to her own home, still followed by the security cars.

Should the women be detained again, it is feared they will suffer further ill-treatment.

The authorities appear to regard Samira Hassan Ali Karrar as the leader of the group, which makes her particularly at risk. The women want an official explanation of what happened to their husbands, their sons, their brothers and they are determined to carry on with their protest until they achieve justice.

Their open opposition is unusual in Sudan.

Unfortunately, there is nothing unusual about the treatment they have received.

Sudanese women who openly oppose the government run enormous risks. Living in a culture where women are less active in formal politics than men makes them all the more conspicuous whenever they do enter the public arena.

Sara Abdallah Abdelrahman Nugdallah is a university lecturer. In late May 1995 she was arrested for the fifth time in the past six years. As of early July 1995 she remained in detention, she had not been charged with any crime.

Very few women occupy positions of authority within the outlawed political parties; those who do run the risk of being detained without charge or trial. Women opponents of the government have been made to report day in day out for weeks at a time to security offices where they are kept waiting around all day.

She is a member of the executive of the women's committee of the outlawed Umma Party. In 1989 she was arrested for the first time, together with two other women political activists. Sara Nugdallah refused to sign a statement promising to stop

opposing the Sudanese government.

Every time Sara has been arrested, it has been purely and simply because of her peaceful opposition to the government. On each occasion family and friends have feared for her safety.

Freedom of speech is protected under Articles 18, 19, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Sudan has ratified.

Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Sudan to:

- *release Sara Abdallah Abdelrahman Nugdallah and all other prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally;*
 - *release all detainees and prisoners held because of their sex, ethnic origins, sexual orientation, language or religion.*
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Torture

Torture or ill treatment of people held in the custody of the security forces is an everyday occurrence in Sudan. Prisoners are frequently beaten or subjected to arduous physical drilling, methods of punishment that are evidently regarded as normal. Women -- like the families of the 28 men executed in April 1990 -- as well as men have been made to stand all day in the sun without water. In a country as hot as Sudan this is severe treatment. Especially notorious are the secret detention centres known as 'ghost houses'. The cruel regime

in these 'ghost houses' and in the offices of the security forces has resulted in the death of prisoners.

Some ex-prisoners have reported that their torture included threatened or actual sexual abuse.

The authorities claim that they take action against security officials who torture. Indeed, torture is banned in the Sudan Penal Code 1991. Section 115 (2) lays out the penalty for torture in order to extract information: up to three months in gaol or a fine. On the other hand, assisting a prisoner to escape is liable to punishment by

up to seven years' imprisonment.

Despite claims of action -- for example, in July 1995 the authorities announced that a security official had been hanged the previous month for killing a merchant -- the authorities have never revealed full details of alleged offences, or the investigations they say have followed or reported action in response.

It is not clear if the security official executed in June was hanged for an offence committed in the course of his duty. But whatever the nature of his offence, Amnesty International condemns his execution as the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment -- the denial of his right to life.

Women have been sentenced to death too. In June nine women

were sentenced to hang after they were convicted of selling drugs. The authorities claim they were selling hashish to "Sudanese youth". It is not yet known if the sentences have been carried out.

Other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments -- such as flogging and amputation -- are laid down in the Sudan

Penal Code 1991. The punishment of flogging affects women in particular.

Hundreds of women have been arrested and flogged for brewing -- often after conviction in summary trials in Public Order Courts. Women in southern Sudan have long supplemented their income by brewing alcohol, a practice illegal in the north. The civil war has forced many women to flee to the north where they continue to brew in order to support themselves and their families in the shanty towns where they now live.

Women have also been flogged for wearing clothing that is considered by the law to be "obscene or contrary to public decency". Women are often victims of this section of the law, men rarely.

In December 1993 a student at the university of Khartoum was stopped by a guard. He ordered her to put on other clothes. She refused and received 25 lashes.

Torture is forbidden under Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Sudan to put an end to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of all prisoners, without exception, and specifically to:

- stop rape, sexual abuse and other torture and ill-treatment by government agents and paramilitary auxiliaries;*
 - take effective measures to prevent rape, sexual abuse and other torture and ill-treatment during custody;*
 - conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all reports of torture or ill-treatment. Any law enforcement agent responsible for such acts, or for encouraging or condoning them, should be brought to justice;*
 - to remove cruel, inhuman and degrading penalties -- including the death penalty -- from law.*
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Abuses against women in the war zones

In the war zones in southern Sudan, the Nuba mountains and the south Blue Nile area, women have been the victims of appalling human rights violations. There are many reports of killings, rape and torture by both the government troops and the armed opposition groups, the Sudan People's

Liberation Army (SPLA) and the South Sudan Independence Army (SSIA).

The true scale of the extent of rape remains unknown. Such is the shame and humiliation attached to rape in Sudan that

few women are willing to talk about it. But reports from the Nuba mountains and parts of the southern Sudan suggest that soldiers from all sides have been responsible.

Thousands of unarmed women have been killed by Sudan Government forces during attacks on villages in the Nuba mountains and in southern Sudan.

Along the sole railway line linking north and south Sudan, the Popular Defence Force, a government militia, has kidnapped women and children and sold them into slavery as domestic servants. The authorities have done precious little to put an end to such activities.

In March 1993 soldiers from the SPLA attacked the village of Pagau, one of several villages destroyed during an incursion into territory controlled by the SSIA.. They killed 32 women and locked children in a hut which was then put to the torch.

From 1991 to 1993 there was heavy

fighting between the two armed opposition groups in the Upper Nile area, during which thousands of unarmed women were killed.

In October and November 1991, for example, SSIA troops attacked areas under the control of the SPLA. Killing and looting, they moved from village to village. Many women were killed, raped and abducted.

The villagers were killed simply because of their ethnic origin.

The civil war has destroyed the rural population's means of livelihood. Millions of women and children have fled to camps in other parts of Sudan or in

neighbouring countries. Almost a million southern Sudanese, mostly women and children, have fled to Khartoum. There a new agony awaited them; the authorities are deporting them from the shanty towns to shoddily built camps well outside the city.

International humanitarian law lays down minimum standards for humane conduct during armed conflicts. All parties -- government and opposition -- are bound by this law.

Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions requires that all people who are not actively engaged in fighting must at all times be treated humanely by all

Amnesty International is calling on the Government of Sudan to safeguard women's human rights in areas of armed conflict as well as other parts of the country, and specifically to:

- *stop torture, including rape, 'disappearances' and extrajudicial executions;*

- *take steps to prevent rape during armed conflict, often the context for violent sexual abuse of women and girl-children, and to bring government agents responsible for rape to justice.*

Amnesty International is also calling on the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the South Sudan Independence Army (SSIA) to safeguard women's human rights, and specifically to:

- *take steps to prevent abuses by their members such as hostage-taking, torture and ill-treatment, including rape, and deliberate and arbitrary killings and to remove those responsible from any positions in which they may exert control over others.*
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Action -- what you can do!

You can help make a difference.

Amnesty International asks you to send one or more letters on behalf of yourself or your organization to the authorities in Sudan and/or the armed opposition groups on the basis of the suggestions outlined below which relate to each of the areas described in this short report.

A possible opening sentence might be: *As an individual/human rights/women's organization I am/we are concerned about the human rights of women all over the world".*

Letter about the human rights situation of women in Sudan

Please write a polite airmail letter to the *President of the Sudan*:

Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan *function:* President and
Commander in Chief Ahmad al-Bashir
of the Armed Forces

People's Palace *salutation:* Your Excellency
PO Box 281
Khartoum
Sudan

- *I am/we are gravely concerned about human rights violations against women across Sudan;*
- *I/we remind you of the obligations of your government to respect the provisions of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which the Sudan acceded in 1986;*
- *I am/we are calling on the Government of Sudan to ensure that reports to the Human Rights Committee, which monitors the ICCPR, include detailed information on the situation of women and the girl-child;*

- *I/we urge the government to ratify and implement without reservations the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;*
- *I/we call on the government to implement immediately safeguards guaranteeing the protection of women during military operations.*

Letter about freedom of speech

Please write a polite airmail letter to the *Minister of Justice* of the Sudan:

Mr 'Abd al-Aziz Shiddo *function:* Minister of Justice and
Attorney-General
Ministry of Justice *salutation:* Dear Minister
Khartoum
Sudan

- *I/we call on the Sudan Government to release immediately and unconditionally all detainees and prisoners held because of their peaceful political beliefs or activities, sex, ethnic origin, language or religion;*
- *I/we call on the government to stop arbitrarily detaining, without charge or trial, individuals such as Sara Abdallah Abdelrahman Nugdallah who are suspected of being political opponents;*
- *the repeated arrest and detention of Sara Abdallah Abdelrahman Nugdallah is in violation of Articles 18, 19, 21 en 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Sudan acceded in 1986.*

Letter about torture

Please write a polite airmail letter to the *Minister of the Interior* of the Sudan:

Dr al-Tayib Ibrahim Mohamed Kheir *function:* Minister of the Interior

Ministry of Interior *salutation:* Dear Minister
Khartoum
Sudan

- *I am/we are concerned at reports of systematic torture by military and security personnel;*
- *torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is in violation of Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which the Sudan acceded in 1986;*
- *I am/we are calling on the government to take immediate steps to stop rape, sexual abuse and other torture and ill-treatment by government agents and paramilitary auxiliaries such as the Popular Defence Forces;*
- *I/we urge you to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all reports of torture or ill-treatment;*
- *I am/we are seeking assurances that any law enforcement agents responsible for such acts, or for encouraging or condoning them, will be brought to justice;*

- *I/we call on the government to abolish cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments in law.*

Letters about human rights abuses in the war-zones

A. To the government

Please write a polite airmail letter to the *Vice-President* of Sudan:

Major General al-Zubeir Mohamed Saleh *function:* Vice-President
People's Palace *salutation:* Your Excellency
PO Box 281
Khartoum
Sudan

and/or to the *Minister of Defence*:

Major-General Hassan 'Abd al-Rahman Ali *function:* Minister of
Defence
Ministry of Defence *salutation:* Dear Minister
Khartoum
Sudan

- *I am/we are calling on the government to safeguard women's human rights during armed conflict in the war zones of the south of the Sudan and the Nuba Mountains;*

- *I/we urge you to take immediate steps to stop torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions;*
- *I/we call on you to take special steps to prevent rape by government troops and paramilitary auxiliaries such as the Popular Defence Forces (PDF);*
- *I/we urge you to bring government agents responsible for rape and other human rights violations to justice;*
- *I/we urge you to take immediate steps to stop the abduction of women and children by government forces and to reunite with their families women and children abducted from northern Bahr al-Ghazal and the Nuba mountains;*
- *I/we call on you to issue strict instructions to all soldiers, members of the Popular Defence Force and other militia forbidding abduction and kidnapping which are a violation of the principles of humanitarian law, in particular the Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions.*

B. To the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)

Please write a polite airmail letter to the leader of the SPLA:

Dr John Garang de Mabior
c/o Sudan Relief and
Rehabilitation Association
PO Box 39892
Nairobi

function: Chairman
salutation: Dear Sir

Kenya

- *I/we urge you to ensure that the SPLA safeguards women's human rights;*
- *I/we call on the SPLA to take immediate steps to prevent abuses such as rape, torture, and ill-treatment, and deliberate and arbitrary killings;*
- *I/we call on the SPLA to set up prompt, independent and impartial investigations into all reported incidents of deliberate and arbitrary killings -- for example, into killings committed in Nuer villages in 1993 -- in accordance with UN principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions;*
- *I am/we are seeking assurances that those found responsible for human rights abuses will be removed from positions of power from which they could commit or order further human rights abuses and will be barred from holding such positions in the future.*

C. To the South Sudan Independence Army (SSIA)

Please write a polite airmail letter to the leader of the SSIA:

Dr Riek Machar Teny Dhurgon *function:* Chairman
c/o PO Box 30770 *salutation:* Dear Sir
Nairobi
Kenya

- *I/we urge you to ensure that the SSIA safeguards women's human rights;*
- *I/we call on the SSIA to take immediate steps to prevent abuses such as rape, torture, and ill-treatment, and deliberate and arbitrary killings;*
- *I/we call on the SSIA to set up prompt, independent and impartial investigations into all reported incidents of deliberate and arbitrary killings -- for example, into killings committed in Dinka villages in 1991 and 1992 -- in accordance with UN principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions;*
- *I am/we are seeking assurances that those found responsible for human rights abuses will be removed from positions of power from which they could commit or order further human rights abuses and will be barred from holding such positions in the future.*