

# @Hiding behind Islam

## The Sudan Government and human rights criticism

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Over the past five years the international community has repeatedly condemned the gross abuse of human rights by the Sudan Government and both factions of the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The Sudan Government has dismissed criticism as undue, unfair and arising from a Western conspiracy against it.

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The government has accused the world of being "soft" on abuses by the SPLA. It has drawn attention to human rights violations in other countries and argued that these are "worse" than anything that is happening in Sudan.

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Neither gross human rights abuses by the SPLA nor the fact that human rights are being violated in other countries constitutes a justification nor can be allowed to divert attention away from violations by the Sudan Government. The present government has been responsible for arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, extrajudicial executions, and "disappearances" on a massive scale.

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The government has asserted that Sudan is being "singled out" for criticism because of its declared Islamic political agenda. The government's official response to a comprehensive report in February 1994 by the Special Rapporteur on human rights in Sudan claimed that "the noble issue of human rights has been manipulated to wage war on Islam".

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It has claimed that the UN Commission on Human Rights only started to consider Sudan at its 1991 session, which coincided with the government's introduction of a Penal Code based on its interpretation of *shari'a* (Islamic) law. The Penal Code contains provisions providing for cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments such as flogging and amputation. As the government would have it, "the attack on the Sudan Government in the field of human rights started with the application of *shari'a*".

This is factually incorrect. For the Sudan to be considered at the UN Commission on Human Rights' in 1991, it was procedurally necessary for complaints against the government to have been made before July 1990. This was well before the government introduced its new Penal Code. In addition other mechanisms within the UN human rights system were taking action in relation to human rights violations in Sudan as early as 1989.



The government is manipulating the issue of religion to divert attention from its human rights violations. One way it is doing this is by attempting to narrow discussion of human rights in Sudan onto issues surrounding cruel, inhuman and degrading penalties which may be imposed under its 1991 Penal Code.<sup>i</sup>

These penalties do merit significant attention, because they violate internationally recognised human rights.

However the issue of punishments provided by law is merely one of many serious human rights problems in Sudan.

It should not be allowed to deflect attention from the thousands of political killings, arbitrary detentions and cases of torture which take place each year in the context of the government crushing its perceived opponents and for which there can be no possible justification under both Sudanese and international law.

Torture and extrajudicial execution, for example, are banned in Sudanese law. Yet among reports of many other human rights violations, Amnesty International continues to receive reports of systematic torture and extrajudicial executions from

Sudan. There is no evidence that the authorities are taking remedial action.

Amnesty International takes no position on Islam or any other religion. Neither does it take a position on the ideological motivation of the Sudan Government – nor on the motivation of its critics. The organization's concern is solely with the consistent and gross abuse of human rights by the Sudan Government and each faction of the SPLA.

If the government wishes to put an end to criticism of its human rights record, all it has to do is put an end to the violation of human rights.

**Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, President of Sudan**

## **What can you do?**

**Join our campaign.**

**Contact the Amnesty International office in your country and ask how you can help.**

**For more information about Sudan, see Amnesty International's report, "Sudan: The tears of orphans - no future without human rights" (AI Index AFR 54/02/95), published in January 1995.**



**Amnesty International briefing leaflet**

- i. See the Amnesty International leaflet *The Penal Code: human rights violations enshrined in law* (AFR 54/54/94).