



News Service 100/95

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 5 JUNE 1995  
AI INDEX : AFR 54/19/95

**SUDAN: WAVES OF ARRESTS MARK NEW CLAMPDOWN ON GOVERNMENT CRITICS**

The arrest of leading political opponents in Sudan marks a new clampdown on critics of the military government, Amnesty International reported today.

"The arrest of Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the *Ansar* order of Islam and of the banned Umma Party, underlines the way the authorities are deeply sensitive to opposition from advocates of other interpretations of Islam," the human rights organization said.

At least 11 other leading figures from the *Ansar* and the Umma Party have been detained in Khartoum, Sudan's capital, following the 16 May arrest of Sadiq al-Mahdi, Sudan's Prime Minister ousted in the 1989 coup which brought the current government to power. They include former members of parliament, a former governor of Sudan's westernmost region, Darfur, and the women's activist Sara Nugdallah. There are unconfirmed reports of further arrests of Umma Party members in the central towns of Kosti and Gedaref. In late May, 15 trade unionists were picked up in Port Sudan.

The Umma Party members arrested in Khartoum are being held in Kober Prison, the main prison complex in the city, in a wing which since March has apparently been under the supervision of the security services -- a body notorious for the torture of detainees. Amnesty International is concerned that the detainees may be at risk of ill-treatment or torture and there are reports that the detainees are being held without access to relatives or lawyers.

Amnesty International has been pursuing a worldwide campaign on the situation of human rights in Sudan since the publication of a major report in January. The authorities responded by banning the human rights organization from visiting the country and by accusing it of insulting Islam.

"There is nothing Islamic about arbitrary detention and torture," Amnesty International said. "The majority of those arrested in the past few weeks are members of the *Ansar* order of Islam --- this makes clear that human rights violations in Sudan remain fundamentally a product of a repressive government hostile to criticism."

The authorities have accused Sadiq al-Mahdi and other Umma Party leaders of cooperating with the armed opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), a charge which arises from the signing in December 1994 of an agreement between exiled Umma Party leaders and the SPLA. However, given that the agreement has been public knowledge for five months, a more

immediate reason for the detentions appears to be an outspoken speech by Sadiq al-Mahdi attacking the Sudanese authorities made at a mosque on 10 May, during celebrations marking the Muslim feast of 'Eid al-Addha.

In recent months the government has been seeking to improve its image by trying to deflect human rights criticisms, claiming they are mistaken or motivated by hostility to Islam. In March 1995, the authorities are reported to have closed a "ghosthouse" or secret detention centre - one which was no longer secret -- and in early May produced an official list of 80 detainees, not all of them political, implying that there are no other political detainees in Sudan.

However, the government's list of detainees does not include individuals known to have been in detention when it was issued. For example, neither Yousif Hussein, a leading member of the banned Sudan Communist Party detained since June 1993, nor Mohamed Babiker Mokhtar, a former leader of the banned Federation of Sudanese Employees and Professionals, figure on the list. They and other detainees were transferred to the wing of Kober Prison taken over by the security authorities when the "ghosthouse" was closed.

Furthermore, short periods of detention sometimes lasting a few days or a few weeks, often repeated, and involving ill-treatment and brutality have become normal ways of dealing with political opponents. Such prisoners do not appear in official lists of detainees.

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