



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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South Sudan: Release six media staff detained in relation to circulated video of President Salva Kiir urinating in public

Joval Tombe, Joseph Oliver, Mustafa Osman, Victor Lado, Cherbek Ruben, and Jacob Benjamin, six staff members of the South Sudan Broadcasting Cooperation (SSBC), are arbitrarily detained at the National Security Service (NSS) headquarters, known as ‘Blue House’,¹ without access to their family and lawyer(s).²

According to media reports, five of the media professionals were detained following their arbitrary arrest by the NSS in Juba on 3 January 2023, and one was detained after being arbitrarily arrested in Yambio on 4 January 2023. The NSS arrested the six media professionals in relation to a leaked video that circulated on social media and allegedly showed President Salva Kiir urinating on himself during an official ceremony.³ It is unclear whether they have been informed of any charges against them.

Amnesty International calls on the South Sudanese authorities to:

¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, “South Sudan security forces detain 6 state media employees”, 6 January 2023, [South Sudan security forces detain 6 state media employees - Committee to Protect Journalists \(cpj.org\)](https://www.cpj.org/2023/01/06/south-sudan-security-forces-detain-6-state-media-employees/)

² Amnesty International interview held with media professional (name withheld for security reasons), 7 January 2023, remote; Amnesty International interview held with media professional (name withheld for security reasons), 9 January 2023, remote.

³ Radio Tamazuj, “National Security arrests 6 SSBC staff”, 5 January 2023, [National Security arrests 6 SSBC staff | Radio Tamazuj](https://www.radio-tamazuj.com/en/news/national-security-arrests-6-ssbc-staff/); Union of Journalists of South Sudan, “UJOSS calls for speedy conclusion to investigation of detained SSBC staff”, 6 January 2023, on file with Amnesty International; The Guardian, “Six journalists arrested over footage of South Sudan president wetting himself”, 6 January 2023, [Six journalists arrested over footage of South Sudan president wetting himself | South Sudan | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/06/south-sudan-journalists-arrested-over-footage-of-president-wetting-himself/); BBC, “South Sudan: Journalists held over film of president appearing to wet himself”, 8 January 2023, [South Sudan: Journalists held over film of president appearing to wet himself - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-67111111)

- Immediately release the six, or charge them with a criminal offence recognizable under international law;
- Ensure that the six are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in detention;
- Ensure that the six are granted regular access to their family, any healthcare they may require from a qualified medical practitioner and a lawyer of their choice.

Background

Amnesty International has documented numerous arbitrary detentions by the NSS in multiple facilities where detainees are often subjected to torture and other ill-treatment – some held incommunicado without access to a lawyer, or family members.⁴

South Sudan's political environment has remained intolerant of criticism of government actions and policies, leading to intimidation, harassment and detention of civil society activists, human rights defenders and independent journalists. This has led to an environment of self-censorship for media and human rights workers where, with the pervasive state surveillance, people no longer feel safe to speak freely and openly about the conflict and human rights situation.⁵

The Government of South Sudan, primarily through the NSS, conducts communications surveillance with equipment bought in Israel, and likely with support from the telecommunication companies. The NSS also conducts physical surveillance through a widespread, cross-border network of informants and agents, penetrating all levels of society and daily life, by monitoring media and social media, and requiring event organizers to seek permission before holding any form of gathering. The NSS has used these forms of surveillance illegally, in breach of the right to privacy, to arbitrarily arrest and illegally detain individuals, and infringe on press freedoms, the freedom of opinion and expression, and the freedom of assembly.⁶

⁴ Amnesty International, *Broken Promises: Arbitrary detention by South Sudan's intelligence agencies continues* (Index: AFR 65/8823/2018), September 2018, [South Sudan: Broken promises: Arbitrary detention by South Sudan's intelligence agencies continues - Amnesty International](#)

⁵ Amnesty International, *"These walls have ears": The chilling effect of surveillance in South Sudan* (Index: AFR 65/3577/2021), 2 February 2021, [South Sudan: "These walls have ears": The chilling effect of surveillance in South Sudan - Amnesty International](#)

⁶ Amnesty International, *"These walls have ears": The chilling effect of surveillance in South Sudan* (Index: AFR 65/3577/2021), 2 February 2021, [South Sudan: "These walls have ears": The chilling effect of surveillance in South Sudan - Amnesty International](#)

Public Document

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